

Social and pragmatic variation in the sequential organization of talk

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1. Introduction

Conversation and other forms of verbal interaction are characterized by the fact that utterances are organized in sequences and are produced and understood according to the sequential context they appear in. This chapter investigates how sequential organization varies according to social and pragmatic parameters, such as speech community, medium of communication and activity type. After an illustrative example of what types of variation may affect sequential organization, the chapter presents and discusses Conversation Analysis (CA) as an approach to socio-pragmatic variation. Some examples of variation in sequential structure are then reviewed in order to show how sequence organization is linked to aspects of the social setting and the activity at hand. The cases in point are third position receipts of answers and the organization of preferred and dispreferred responses. Finally, we present an empirical analysis of gender variation in the use of displays of affection (hugs and declarations of affection) in closing sequences of chat interaction among youths.

2. Variation in opening sequences: *how are you?*

In this section we will address the question of variation in relation to a single type of sequence, namely opening sequences, and more specifically, adjacency pairs introduced by the first pair part *how are you?* This type of sequence has received considerable analytic attention, and may serve as a good example of what sorts of socio-pragmatic variation may relate to the sequential structure of talk.

A place to start looking at variation in sequential organization is the internal context of the talk. A significant point made in Conversation Analytic research is that sequential position is crucial to understanding a linguistic or other semiotic token. So, for instance, Sacks in one of his lectures shows how the question *how are you?* may be used in two different sequential positions (Sacks 1992, I:549ff). It may be used as a proper beginning of a conversation, that is, as a *greeting substitute* and thus not be answered as a question but responded to by a greeting in return. But more typically, it may be used after an initial greeting, in which cases it will be answered by a report such as *fine* or *all right*. Consequently, it is not only that the question is understood differently in the two environments, but also that what counts as a relevant response is different.

Variation may also be addressed according to the medium of communication being used. Sacks probably referred to face-to-face interaction in his lecture (although he does not state it explicitly). Schegloff (1986), however, notes that *how are you*-sequences in telephone openings systematically occur after initial greetings, and are thus not used there as conversational openers. Responses to the question come in three types, positive (*terrific*), negative (*awful*) and neutral (*fine*). Neutral responses are closure relevant and indicate that the speaker's well-being is not relevant at that point and thus that the conversation may move on to the next sequence, such as the initiation of a "first topic":

(1) (from Schegloff 1986:114)

Hyla: Hwaryuhh=
Nancy: = Fi.'ne how'r you,
Hyla: Okay:y,
Nancy: [Goo :d,
(0.4)
Hyla: mkhhh [hhh
Nanc : [What's doin,

Negative and positive responses, on the other hand, engender sequence expansion and serve to topicalize the state of well-being (for instance by the interlocutor asking for an account of the situation).

That the medium of communication is consequential for opening sequences has been additionally demonstrated by Arminen and Leinonen (2006). They show that in Finnish, the standard opening of landline phone calls is self-identification by the receiver (such as *Tiina?*). Receivers of mobile phone calls, by contrast, only use this opening when the caller is

unknown. When the caller is known (and the name appears on the display) they instead answer by greeting the caller (such as *no moi* – ‘hi’).

A main interest in Conversation Analytic research is variation according to the activity engaged in by the participants. In a special type of informal conversation we find yet another pattern. Drew and Chilton (2000) have studied telephone calls where relatives call each other on a regular basis just in order to “keep in touch”. Such conversations are generally made at a weekly scheduled time and the routine character of the call is amongst other things indexed by the fact that it is the called, and not the caller, who initiates the *how are you*-sequences. These calls contrast with ones that are not meant to be recognized as routine *keeping in touch*-conversations – but instead unscheduled or otherwise extraordinary telephone calls – where the caller will instead keep to the “standard” pattern of initiating the *how are you*-sequence. The question of who enquires about the other thus becomes an index of what sort of activity the speakers see themselves as engaged in.

A major focus on sequential variation is found in the research on institutional interaction. The thrust of findings in this vast area of research concerns the differences in organization between different institutional activities and relationships. Openings in institutional encounters between experts or service providers and clients or customers mainly differ from openings in informal conversation in that the exchange of *how are you*'s is absent.

Variation may also be studied according to national culture. As noted, the standard telephone opening in Finnish is self-identification rather than *Hello*. Lindström (1994) shows that this is also the pattern in Swedish (landline) telephone conversation (generally a combination of greeting and self-identification, such as *hej det er Henrik* – ‘Hi this is Henrik’). Furthermore she notes that *how are you*-sequences are infrequent in telephone openings. When they occur, they are seldom reciprocated, as is the norm in American English openings (Schegloff 1986). In Greek telephone openings, by contrast, Sifianou (2002) finds such sequences to be “almost invariably present”. Furthermore, they may occur as what Sacks referred to as a *greeting substitute*, that is, directly after the receiver's *Hello* and without any other greeting. She also notes that, in contrast with American openings, Greek *how are you*-questions are often answered “literally”. The wording of the question may be translated as both ‘how are you doing’ and ‘what are you doing’, thus opening up for an update on the receiver's activities.

The sequential organization of openings is thus different in Swedish, Finnish, Greek and American English telephone conversation. However, the differences do not seem to be total or absolute. Certain basic actions identified for telephone openings are the same, such as

summons-answer, speaker identification, and greetings. This may alert us to an important point about socio-pragmatic distribution and variation, namely that it is crucial to notice also *similarities* between cultures and communities. The identification of similarities may in the long run lead to hypotheses about potentially universal or generic aspects of talk in interaction (Schegloff 2002, 2006).

CA researchers have been less willing to study variation in conversational organization according to macro-sociological variables such as gender, ethnicity, age and socio-economic status. A study on *how are you* in an age perspective can illustrate some of the problems a CA position has with such approaches. Coupland, Coupland and Robinson (1992), working within the framework of interactional sociolinguistics, report on responses to the question *how are you* in interviews with elderly people in a day center. The interviews were presented to the elderly as a survey of experiences of health care. The interviewers were instructed to say *how are you* as the first verbal move – “said smiling and uniformly without any clear primary stress” (Coupland, Coupland and Robinson 1992:220). The researchers found that most interviewees responded with either positive appraisals (such as *alright thank you*) or with hedged or qualified negative appraisals (such as *not too bad* or *well (.) could be better*). They claim that the respondents display an interpretation of the question as *phatic* and an orientation to “a preference for non- or at least hedged negativity” (Coupland Coupland, Coupland and Robinson 1992:225). However, there were also some instances of bluntly negative self-appraisals (such as “I’m a long-standing asthmatic”). These responses are interpreted as related to life stage in that it was consistent with previous findings of the researchers that elderly people had a “propensity to disclose relatively more and more intimate “painful” experiences to first acquaintances” (Coupland Coupland, Coupland and Robinson 1992:220). However, the negative responses do not seem to be produced in a dispreferred format (although the transcription is too rudimentary to ascertain this). These responses thus seem to invalidate the claim about both preference for non-negativity and the orientation to *phaticity*.

An alternative explanation in terms of sequential organization rather than external social characteristics of the participants would explain the response pattern in a non-contradictory way. A CA approach would rather interpret the responses in relation to the types of activity being pursued by the speakers, either as a part of an opening phase – where small talk is routinely exchanged and a phatic response would be appropriate – or as part of the interview proper – in which case a health report would be the relevant response. Crucial to whether the question should be understood as the one or the other would be how and when the

question was produced, for instance whether it was asked while the interlocutors were entering the room or when they were sitting down with a questionnaire in front of them. But information about such aspects of the situation is not presented in the article. It is also worth noting that, in addition to these positively or negatively oriented responses, the researchers found responses that were ambiguous and indeterminate between a phatic and a factual interpretation (such as “I’m alright (.) I do suffer with my nerves though I get injections every month (.) but I (.) I’m going on fine”). This type of response would also be consistent with the hypothesis that the question was ambiguous to many interviewees and that they thus chose answers that would be relevant to both situations. Incidentally, this ambiguity may have been caused by the artificial and constructed character of the talk and by the scripted opening line of the talk. It seems likely that this would disorient many interviewees, who might rather expect some sort of greeting or welcome as the opening of the interview.

3. CA as an approach to variation

The case discussed above illustrates two different perspectives on socio-pragmatic distribution and variation. In contrast to traditional variationist sociolinguistics, which defines social variables beforehand and independently of the discourse being analyzed, CA seeks primarily to describe identities and social relations displayed by the participants in the interaction as manifestly relevant to them. CA thereby disregards external characteristics that cannot be shown to be attended to by the participants in their mode of speaking and interacting. CA does not claim that other contextual factors do not influence talk, but merely that they are not relevant to the ethnomethodological project of CA, which is to explicate the interpretive resources of the participants. If there are such influences they are beyond the participants’ orientation in conversational practices, and beyond what can be studied in the *emic* perspective of CA.

Another important point this case illustrates, is the reflexivity of talk and context. It is not the perspective of CA to look at how aspects of the context “influence” talk in a unilateral sense (cf. Introduction to the volume). Instead, CA treats talk as a major resource through which context is established and modified. Thus, the context cannot be defined in advance as a stable structure, but is partly constructed by the participants through their talk. For instance, by producing a report on their health, the respondents enact an institutional identity (as research interviewees) and not primarily an identity as elderly. So, instead of investigating

how pre-defined phatic questions are responded to or how the *a priori* defined group of elderly people respond in interviews, CA sees responses as partly *constitutive* of the context. This means that a phatic response will display an understanding of the question as an introduction to an opening phase of small talk, whereas a factual response will display an understanding of it as an interview question.

CA has often been criticized for not attending to the socio-cultural context of conversations. For instance, Coupland Coupland, Coupland and Robinson (1992) accuse this tradition of analyzing “decontextualized conversation with its inherent “mechanisms”” (Coupland Coupland, Coupland and Robinson 1992:225). And to a certain extent it seems true that many CA researchers are more interested in generic organizations of practices than in socio-cultural variation. Schegloff (2006:83), for instance, makes the point that the fundamental practices of turn-taking, sequence organization and repair are indeed generic to talk in interaction, and thus should be considered as candidate universals. But he makes an important qualification on just what it is that may be generic:

The import of the claim that these organizations are generic is *not* that the way talk in interaction is done in the United States, or modern industrialized societies, is generic; it is that the organizational issues to which these organizations of practice are addressed are generic. Conversation analysis is not averse to finding, indeed celebrating, what appear to be differences in interaction in other cultures, societies, and languages. (Schegloff 2006:84)

CA may thus be considered an approach which has as its program to identify both general, maybe even universal, principles of organization of talk in interaction and variation in the realization of these principles in different cultures or languages.

Also Heritage (1997) emphasizes the difference between “the social institution *of* interaction” – meaning the generic organizational features of talk in interaction – and “social institutions *in* interaction” – meaning the different patterns of realization of talk in different institutional settings. He furthermore stresses the independence of conversational practices vis-à-vis the sociological or psychological characteristics of the participants:

[...] social interaction is informed by institutionalized structural organizations of practices to which participants are normatively oriented. [...] these organizations of practices [...] are fundamentally independent of the motivational, psychological or

sociological characteristics of the participants. Rather than being dependant on these characteristics, conversational practices are the medium through which these sociological and psychological characteristics manifest themselves. (Heritage 1995:396)

This being said, it is also important to underline that the CA account of sequence structure – in Schegloff’s words – “should not be understood as an inflexible template which mechanically generates “parts” assigned to various participants” (Schegloff 2007:220). Rather it should be understood as an organizational resource which is applied in various ways relative to the activity engaged in by the interlocutors. The bulk of CA research on institutional interaction is just such a description of the special forms and functions such sequential patterns take relative to the specialized activities speakers engage in. Some of these findings will be reviewed in the next section.

Before moving to an account of CA’s contribution to the study of sociopragmatic variation, another question of principle needs to be mentioned. A problem for making claims about variation is that CA studies seldom discuss explicitly the scope of their claims and the potential applicability to different situations or communities. Thereby, it is not always clear whether the mechanisms described in a specific study are meant to be understood as generic rules of conversation, a practice associated with the specific activity engaged in, or a feature associated with the socio-cultural identities of the speakers. It may even be discussed whether some studies commit the ethnocentric fallacy of implicitly claiming universal validity of rules and norms found in one’s own culture, as pointed out by Moerman (1988).

The question of generalizability of results in CA research has been discussed by Peräkylä (1997) in the following terms:

In terms of the traditional “distributional” understanding of generalizability, case studies on institutional interaction cannot offer much. [...] However, the question of generalizability can also be approached from a different direction. The concept of *possibility* is a key to this. *Social practices that are possible*, that is, *possibilities of language use*, are the central objects of all conversation analytic case studies on interaction in particular institutional settings (Peräkylä 1997:215, emphases as in the original).

The citations from Heritage and Peräkylä point to CA as a study of the linguistic and sequential resources or tools available to participants, but seem to deny the possibility of linking them in any systematic way to specific social institutions or identities. The procedures are independent of the institutional context and are merely possibilities of action in various settings.

An approach to the question of generalization and distributional variation is suggested by Drew (2003), who recommends more explicitly contrastive studies between different types of activities or “genres” of interaction. His own analysis concerns the deployment of *formulations* in various institutional activities. Formulations are utterances that summarize the gist or the upshot of a preceding stretch of talk, often introduced by the discourse marker *so* (Heritage and Watson 1979). He compares the results of four previous studies that have identified different functions of formulations related to the institutional activity at hand. In psycho-therapy, formulations are mainly used by the therapist, who by formulating the gist of the patient’s utterance offers an interpretation of some implicit or allusive “message” in it. In radio phone-in programs, hosts have been found to use formulations to make a (tendentious) rephrasing of the caller’s claims, and subsequently use this to challenge and defeat the speaker’s position by a rebuttal. In news interviews, interviewers use formulations of upshot in order to invite the interviewee to assent to a strong or dramatic version of what he or she said. Finally, in industrial negotiations between management and labor unions, formulations are used to summarize the position each side is taking and propose a settlement.

This approach shows that CA is not just interested in “decontextualized conversation” but may address both generic features and variation in a highly precise manner. It also illustrates the difference between the generic organization of practices and the context-dependent realizations of them. Certain conversational practices – such as formulations – have an independent structural organization that is identifiable as common traits across situations and communities. But on the other hand, they may be deployed differently and acquire different activity-specific functions in different situation types. Contrastive analyses of this type have the potential of addressing the problem raised by Peräkylä (1997) as well, namely of ascertaining the distributional generalizability of Conversation Analytic findings.

In order to illustrate what sorts of problems may be involved in ascertaining the distributional validity of a claim we will give an example from a study of repetition in consultations at a job training centre for immigrants in Norway (Svennevig 2004). Here it was observed that answers by the clients, who were non-native speakers of Norwegian, were massively repeated by the clerk. The extract below includes two such instances:

(2) IFF 1

- | | |
|---|--|
| S: hva jobba <u>mannen</u> din med <u>før</u> du- <u>før</u> han ble pensjonist a?
(.) | S: what did you <u>husband</u> do <u>before</u> you-
<u>before</u> he <u>retired</u> ?
(.) |
| A: <Freia.> | A: <Freia.> |
| S: jobba på <u>Freia</u> ja. | S: worked at <u>Freia</u> (yes). |
| A: ja he (h)lage sjokol <u>ade</u> . | A: yeah he (h)make <u>chocolate</u> . |
| S: jaja. | S: right. |
| A: He he he | A: He he he |
| S: det er jo <u>godt</u> det. | S: that sure is <u>good</u> . |
| A: mja he he_ (S SMILES)
(.) | A: myeah he he (S SMILES)
(.) |
| S: men det er kanskje ikke så bra for <u>kroppen</u> . | S: but it's maybe not so good for the <u>body</u> . |
| A: he (h)nei det er <u>færlig</u> .(h) | A: he (h)no it's dangerous.(h) |
| S: det er farlig for <u>kroppen</u> ja. | S: it's dangerous for the <u>body</u> (yes). |
| A: °ja.° | A: °yeah.° |

In the first instance, the client (A) gives a short answer that is somewhat incongruent with the question in that she supplies just a company name rather than a job designation. The clerk (S) repeats this answer but simultaneously expands it by adding a verb phrase that makes the answer more congruent with the question. In the second instance, the non-native speaker's answer is also slightly deviant in that it contains the unidiomatic adjective *farlig* ('dangerous') rather than *usunt* ('unhealthy') or the like.¹ Here again, the native speaker repeats the answer rather than corrects it, but in addition expands it into a more explicit and unambiguous phrase.

After the identification of certain such patterns of repetition in receipts of information (mainly performed by the native clerk), the question arose what types of practices these were and the range of their applicability. At least four different possibilities presented themselves as plausible:

1 Were they general receipt practices that could be found in any type of conversation?

2 Were they related to the specific institutional setting and activity at hand – the clerk gathering information about the client's past experiences?

3 Were they related to the medium involved – the clerk frequently taking notes of the answers that were given?

4 Were they related to the non-native character of the answers given – often involving accent, unidiomatic formulations etc.?

In order to answer the question about distributional range definitively one would need to compare different sets of data. Repetition has been widely studied by other researchers, so a comparison with previous studies is possible. Different studies give some support to all the possibilities. For instance, several studies have noted that repeats are common as a receipt token in informal conversation, such as Schegloff (1997) and Sorjonen (1996), and that they may in these cases perform specific communicative functions over and above marking receipt, such as *confirming allusions* (Schegloff 1996). Other studies have noted the presence of such receipts in institutional interviews. Mazeland and ten Have (1996) found that receipts were especially frequent in information gathering phases after information that was important to retain in an accurate form. Finally, studies of interaction between competent and not-yet-competent speakers (such as children and non-native learners) have shown that adults use repeats as *scaffolding* – partly to display a construal of the previous utterance, partly to expand and correct potentially deviant utterances (cf. Long 1996; Clark 2008). This may speak in favor of seeing these repeats as a practice associated with differences in linguistic competence.

Although these different studies may provide points of comparison and contrast, they do not give sufficient information to explain fully why these receipts are used – and used so massively – in just these conversations. Once again, the answer CA recommends for answering this question is to analyze the instances themselves in depth in order to see what the participants seem to orient to as relevant in using such repeats. In the case above, the expanded form of the repeats shows an orientation by the native speaker towards disambiguating and “normalizing” the non-native’s utterance. Thereby, an orientation to the non-fluent character of the answer seems to be involved. In addition, the repeats were seen to be especially frequent as receipts of precise factual information in the form of names and numbers (such as *Freia* above). This pointed towards interpreting them as displays of what was being recorded as the official answer to the question, and thus as a typically institutional practice. In conclusion, then, questions of distribution and variation cannot be answered merely by noting the presence of various forms in different sets of data. The relevance to the activity at hand as displayed by the normative orientations of the participants has to be the basis for claims about distribution.

4. Variation in types of sequential organization

In this section we will review some of the types of contrastive and variationist CA studies that have been performed until now. We have already considered some examples of how sequential organization differs in different activity types. There is not room here to give an extensive overview of all the types of variation in sequence organization, but we will consider a few more examples which have been shown to involve rather extensive variation and which have been given some attention in the literature. The first is the use of third position receipts and acknowledgements, and the other is preference organization.

4.1. Third position receipts

Adjacency pairs are often expanded with a third move (a *post-expansion*) in the form of a receipt or acknowledgement. Three central types of minimal expansion of adjacency pairs are receipts of information (*oh*), acknowledgements (*okay*) and assessments (Schegloff 2007). These forms of expansion vary a great deal from setting to setting, and reveal interesting insights about the nature of the activities carried out.

An early study of classroom discourse carried out by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) (not within the CA framework) showed that teacher eliciting exchanges had the three part structure illustrated in Table 1:

Initiative:	elicit	Teacher:	How do you use your muscles
Response:	reply	Pupil:	By working
Feedback:	evaluate	Teacher:	by ↑ <u>w</u> orking yes

Table 1: Structure of classroom interaction

Coulthard and Brazil (1981) further specified the form of the third position evaluation by noting that it most often took the form of a *yes* produced with high pitch or a high pitched repetition (or reformulation) of the answer plus an agreeing item (as in the example above). This pattern is clearly related to the activity at hand, namely instruction. It appears in cases where teachers ask questions to which they already know the answer (so-called *test questions*). The evaluating receipt is thus a functionally related to the didactic activity of testing the pupils' knowledge.

When people ask questions they do not know the answer to, they may mark the answer as news to them by producing the receipt token *oh*. According to Heritage (1984) this token indicates a change of state in the speaker from non-knowing to knowing. However, in certain institutional settings this use of *oh* is systematically avoided, such as in news interviews (Heritage 1985). Here, interviewers do not signal their reactions to answers, and the explanation is again revealing about the activity and the setting. Heritage (1985) explains this sequential pattern as being motivated by (and co-constitutive of) the institutional roles and relationships between the participants. By not responding to the interviewee's answers interviewers treat them as being directed not to them personally, but to the broadcast audience. Thereby they take on a role of mediator between interviewee and audience. Furthermore, the lack of response is also functional in embodying a neutralistic stance in relation to the content of the answer. In this way, the lack of receipts to answers (*third position receipts*) is a key characteristic of the institutional role of an objective journalist and of carrying out the activity of speaking for an overhearing audience.

A final example will show yet another activity-specific use of third position receipts. Button (1992) shows that in job interviews, interviewers systematically use third position expansions that do not provide the interviewees the opportunity to elaborate or clarify their answers. One of the practices is to give a receipt in the form of a simple *thank you* and go on to a new and unrelated question. This treats the answer as complete but does not reveal anything about how the interviewer has understood or evaluated the answer. The second practice is to provide an assessment, but move directly on to a new question without providing the candidate the opportunity to return to the answer. What these practices have in common is that they abort any further interactional negotiation or elaboration of the content of the answer. The answers are left as the interviewees' sole responsibility, and the interviewers are thereby distanced from the answers received. This contributes to establishing the interviewer's neutrality and objectivity, not leading the interviewee in one or the other direction.

4.2. Preference organization

Another type of organization which has been shown to vary according to situations and activities is preference organization. The original studies by Sacks (published in 1987) described a general *preference for agreement*, and Pomerantz (1984) substantiated this claim

by showing how second assessments were produced in different formats according to whether they aligned with the first assessment or not. The concept of preference involves two different aspects. The first is the *type of action* that is preferred or dispreferred as a response, such as *agreeing assessment* versus *disagreeing assessment*. The second is the *turn design* of preferred and dispreferred responses. A preferred response format involves responding directly, quickly (“contiguously”) and in a short (minimal) form. A dispreferred response format is characterized by such things as initial pauses and hesitation, delay of the response proper (the declining or disagreeing action) by various types of prefaces, mitigation of the dispreferred action, and expansion of the response by the addition of explanations, accounts and the like (Pomerantz 1984).

Several researchers have investigated situations that involve variation in the applicability of this claim, especially in institutional activity types. Atkinson and Drew (1979) have shown that in court proceedings, accusations are followed by denials in a preferred format. In fact, initial pausing and hesitation can give rise to the inference that the allegations are admitted to a certain extent. Greatbatch (1992) has shown how the turn-taking system in news interviews, with an interviewer acting as a moderator of the discussion between the parties, renders mechanisms such as pausing and delay ineffective as markers of dispreference. But also the other aspects of dispreference differ from ordinary conversation in that disagreements are not systematically delayed or mitigated. Greatbatch explains this as a consequence of the fact that the disagreements are formulated as answers to questions from the interviewer rather than as direct responses to the co-interviewee, and by being addressed to a third party the disagreements are “automatically” mitigated (Greatbatch 1992:279). Sometimes the interviewees violate this turn-taking system and respond directly to each other, and even in these cases the preference features associated with disagreement in ordinary conversation are not observed. Also Clayman and Heritage (2002) show that interviewers may formulate questions and reformulate answers in ways that invite disagreement as the preferred type of response. For instance, reformulations may recast the prior answer in more extreme and provocative terms, and thereby invite the interviewee not just to respond to it, but to *dispute* it (Clayman and Heritage 2002:309).

All these observations seem to portray news interviews and panel debates as conversational activities which seek and encourage opposition and polarization between parties of a discussion. This points to an important principle, namely that preference organization should be considered as associated with the goals of the activity at hand. Consequently, it may be a too strong claim that there is a universal or generic “preference for

agreement” in conversation. Rather, what is generic is the availability (and recognizability) of preferred and dispreferred turn designs. What needs to be further analyzed and specified is which types of responses are preferred and dispreferred in which types of activity.

Also in ordinary conversation there is extensive variation in preference organization related to the types of actions being carried out. Already in Pomerantz’ study (1984), a notable exception was formulated: after self-deprecations the preferred response is disagreement rather than agreement. A type of activity that has been widely discussed concerning the status of preference is *disputes*. Kotthoff (1993) claims that in disputes the preference for agreement is changed to a preference for unmitigated disagreement. In such oppositional contexts, the speakers are expected to defend their position, and they do so without formatting it as a dispreferred action. In this activity type concessions to the opponent are the dispreferred actions and are typically produced in a dispreferred format with extensive hesitation and mitigation. There are some instances of direct or upgraded formulations of agreement (that is, in a preferred format), but they only occur as prefaces to further disagreement (sometimes taking the form of conventional idioms such as *das ist ja schön und gut* or ‘that’s all very well’).

The conclusions drawn by Kotthoff are not consistently confirmed by later studies, however. Kangasharju (2009), for instance, finds that disagreement-oriented phases (in which disagreements are produced in a preferred format) are rather short and alternate with “smoother” phases where the preference for agreement seems to be in operation. She thus concludes that the evidence does not support claiming that a preference for disagreement is a normative principle in disputes as such.

A related type of sequence is responses to complaints. Dersley and Wootton (2000) describe two sorts of responses to complaints. One is the denial of any involvement in the complained-of action (“didn’t do it” denials) and the other – the most frequent of them – is a more partial denial, which admits some involvement in the action but denies culpability (“not at fault” denials). They show that the first type is produced in a preferred format while the other is produced in a dispreferred format. This study shows the importance of being specific in delimiting the actions and sequence types involved when making claims about preference. Maybe the different results concerning preference in disputes are an indication that the category *dispute* is too wide and heterogeneous, and that more specific types of disputing actions or activities have to be studied in order to discern the norms of preference.

5. Displays of affection in chat interaction

A sequence type which shows clear differences according to the relationship between the speakers is closing sequences of chat interaction. In this section we present an empirical study of gender variation in such sequences and argue that this shows that the participants orient to gender as a feature of the context with recognizable consequences for the interaction (so-called *procedural consequentiality*, Schegloff 1992). In addition we make a comparison between the sequential organization of closings in chat and face-to-face conversation. The data comes from a collection of 195 chat exchanges between Norwegian youths aged 14 to 15, using MSN as their chat program. The interactions are social chats which occurred naturally between friends and acquaintances while at home in their free time.² The exchanges are repartitioned according to gender in table 2.³

Participants	Total
Girl-girl	79
Girl-boy	86
Boy-boy	30
Total	195

Table 2: Number of chat exchanges in the corpus

5.1. Closing sequences in chat interaction

Closing sequences in chat interaction are generally initiated by one of the parties announcing some reason for ending the conversation (most often presented as some external requirement obliging them to quit, such as having to go to bed or to do homework). After this the participants may move directly into a final closing exchange in four different ways.

- 1 Goodbye tokens (equivalent to *Bye-bye* etc.)
- 2 Reassurance of future contact (such as *See you tomorrow*, *Let's keep in touch* etc.)
- 3 Hugs and kisses: (*Hug*, *Kisses* etc.)
- 4 Declarations of affection (*Love you*, *You and me forever* etc.)

These possibilities are exemplified in the next four excerpts below:

(3)

Sanderll xD says:

**men stikker jeg, skal "nyte" det fine
været xD**

Sanderll xD says:

Hadebra

Ken Rune says:

hade

Sanderll xD says:

**but I'm off, gonna "savour" the nice
weather xD**

Sanderll xD says:

Goodbye

Ken Rune says:

bye

In (3) the reason for ending is announced in the first line, followed immediately by a goodbye token by the same speaker (writer). The goodbye is reciprocated by the interlocutor and the exchange ends.

(4)

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:

Men jeg stakk nå ;P

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e sier:

hehe ok

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e sier:

Snakk

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e sier:

S

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:

snakkes

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e sier:

=O)

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:

But I'm off now ;P

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e says:

hehe ok

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e says:

Talk to you later

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e says:

S

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:

talk to you later

*help E m i l <3 C a r o l i n e says:

=O)

In (4) Heidi announces the intention to abandon the conversation. Emil acknowledges this and adds the most conventional expression for saying that they will keep in touch: *snakkes* ('talk to you later')⁴. This is reciprocated and the conversation ends with an emoticon in a variant of a smiley.

(5)

Synne says:

vi snakkes på skolen i mårra då

CASINO --> Steinar says:

Yeah!

CASINO --> Steinar says:

stikker du?

Synne says:

straks

CASINO --> Steinar says:

ok, klem<3

Synne says:

we'll talk at school tomorrow

CASINO --> Steinar says:

Yeah!

CASINO --> Steinar says:

are you off?

Synne says:

in a moment

CASINO --> Steinar says:

ok, hug<3

Synne says:
klemmer<3

Synne says:
hugs<3

In (5) the closing is performed by mutual hugs accompanied by heart-emoticons.

(6)

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:
Men du ? jeg må gå å legge meg da ...:/
Anne. Petter <3 sier:
Åja hade bra utrolig glad i deg jenta
mi< 3
Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:
Utrolig glad i deg også jenta mi
Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:
Søta mi <3

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:
But Heidi? I have to be going to bed ...:/
Anne. Petter <3 says:
Okay bye bye care for you incredibly much
my girl< 3
Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:
Care for you incredibly much too my girl
Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:
My sweetie <3

Heidi initiates closing and Anne goes on producing closing components in the form of a goodbye-token and a declaration of affection: *utrolig glad i deg jenta mi< 3* ('care for you incredibly much my girl< 3').⁵ Heidi reciprocates the declaration and then adds another endearment term in a separate turn.

As we see from the examples above, either of these closing sequences may work alone to end the conversation. However, they are often used in combination, either in series of adjacency pairs, as in (7), or in intra-turn series, as in (8):

(7)

Heidi - Per-Terje <3 sier:
Men må gå ;P
Heidi - Per-Terje <3 sier:
Hade bra
- КяіstoFFея©®ӡAaFK№ sier:
ok
- КяіstoFFея©®ӡAaFK№ sier:
hade bra
- КяіstoFFея©®ӡAaFK№ sier:
glad i deg
Heidi - Per-Terje <3 sier:
Glad i deg også ^^

Heidi - Per-Terje <3 says:
But have to go ;P
Heidi - Per-Terje <3 says:
So long
- КяіstoFFея©®ӡAaFK№ says:
ok
- КяіstoFFея©®ӡAaFK№ says:
so long
- КяіstoFFея©®ӡAaFK№ says:
care for you
Heidi - Per-Terje <3 says:
Care for you too ^^

Here there are two adjacency pairs performing the closing of the conversation, first, a goodbye sequence and then an exchange of declarations of affection.

(8)

Lasse sier:
men må dursje ! hade snakkes klem !

Lasse says:
but have to take a shower ! bye talk to you
later hug !

.Kristina sier:
ok hade snakkes klem

.Kristina says:
ok bye talk to you later hug

Here Lasse integrates the reason for closing with three different closing components into one single turn. Kristina responds to each and every one of these components in a second “multi-unit turn”. It is noteworthy that the closing components are produced with the *goodbye*-token first and not last in the series. Also in (7) above we see that the declaration of affection comes after the *goodbye*-tokens rather than before.

5.2. Displays of affection in closings

Some of the displays of affection may be considered conventionalized and thus appear as unmarked or standard ways of expressing affection. This emerges from the data both by their frequency of occurrence and by the minimized and standardized forms they take. The most common expressions are presented in table 3.

Hugs (and kisses)	a) klem	hug
Declarations of affection	b) glad i deg	care for you/love you
	c) elsker deg	love you
	d) (I) love you	
	e) (oss to/du og meg) for alltid	(us two/you and me) for ever

Table 3: Conventional displays of affection

Another sign of conventionalization is the elided subject in the declarations. Of the types of declarations the expression *glad i deg* (‘care for you’) is the absolutely most common. The status as a conventionalized phrase is here further evidenced by the fact that it is often abbreviated in various ways, sometimes by means of another form of ellipsis, namely object ellipsis: *glad i* or *glaii* (‘care for’), sometimes by being written in a single word: *gladideg* or even as an acronym: *gid*.

The very conventionalization of these expressions makes them weaker as displays of affection. Therefore, they may be considered more “safe” and easy to express than more original and idiosyncratic forms. We may thus consider as stronger expressions that either express emotions differently or which upgrade the expressions by various intensifying adverbs or pragmatic markers. Here is an example of such upgrading:

(9)

<p>Kari sier: dusje, nå.</p> <p>Kari sier: elsker deg beste jenta mi <3 for alltid deg og meg ^^</p> <p>Kari sier: så søtt bilde, btw.</p> <p>Heidi sier: beste jenta mi for alltid <3 Du er elsk <3</p> <p>Heidi sier: Så sykt glad i deg</p> <p>Kari. - dusjer sier: syykt glad i deg også ;*</p>	<p>Kari says: shower, now.</p> <p>Kari says: love you my best girl <3 for ever you and me ^^</p> <p>Kari says: cute picture, btw.</p> <p>Heidi says: my best girl for ever <3 You are love <3</p> <p>Heidi says: Care for you so madly</p> <p>Kari. - showering says: care for you so maadly too ;*</p>
--	--

Here the elliptical formulation of the reason for quitting (*take a shower, now*) is immediately followed by an emphatic declaration of affection by the same speaker. It is upgraded in that the declaration (*love you*) is accompanied by a vocative (*my best girl*) and a heart emoticon. Furthermore, it is upgraded by being accompanied by a second declaration (*for ever you and me*). The emphatic declarations are reciprocated in the response, in that Heidi also produces two declarations in a row and varies the wording of them. However, in addition, she upgrades the display of affection further in that she adds yet another declaration in a separate turn (*Care for you so madly*). This is also an upgraded declaration in that it is intensified by the adverb ‘madly’. This declaration is in turn reciprocated by Kari, and even further amplified by an expressive elongation of the vowel in the adverb (*syykt* – ‘maadly’), and also by the addition of a kiss emoticon (;*).

Table 4 presents some examples of upgraded versions of displays of affection found in the data.

Hugs (and kisses)	a) klem&koos&nuss&suss	hug&cuddle&kiss&peck
	b) kjempe klem;)	giant hug;)

	c) mosekos	squeezing hug, bear hug
Declarations of affection	d) Masse glad i deg	Care for you a lot
	e) UTROLIG GLAD I DEG	Care for you incredibly much
	BESTE JENTA MI	my best girl (my sweetheart)
	f) Elsker deg søta	Love you sweetie
	g) Elsker deg for faen <3	Love you dammit <3

Table 4: Upgraded displays of affection

These examples thus all expand or vary the conventional forms of displaying affection and thus give the impression of a stronger or more authentic expression of emotions. Mostly the chatters use conventional lexical intensifying means such as adverbs (*utrolig* ('incredibly') in e) and prefixes (*kjempe-* ('giant') in b). But they also use more creative means such as humorous dysphemism (*Elsker deg for faen <3* ('Love you dammit <3') in g) and polysyndetic coordination (*klem&koos&nuss&suss* ('hug&cuddle&kiss&peck') in a).

Not only the wording, but even graphic elements may contribute to upgrading the affective loading, such as using capitals (as in e) and adding emoticons (as in b) and (g). Especially the heart emoticon very frequently accompanies the closing components. Also non-standard spelling is commonly used most often reduplication of vowels in order to render an emphatic pronunciation of the word (as in spelling the word *kos* ('cuddle') as *koos* in (a), and *sykt* ('madly') as *syykt* in extract (9)).

Another way of amplifying a display of affection is to avoid formulaic expressions and instead using more original, idiosyncratic forms of expression. This may be observed in the next example:

(10)

Jon sier:
men jeg må gå søstra mi skal bruke pc

Jon says:
but I have to go my sister's gonna use the computer

Heidi sier:
Åja ... Hade bra da og ha det koselig i morgen <3

Heidi says:
Okay ... Bye bye and have a nice time tomorrow <3

Jon sier:

Jon says:

jaja

yeah

Jon sier:

Jon says:

du og

you too

Heidi sier:

Heidi says:

Vi snakkes sikkert

Talk to you later for sure

Jon sier:

Jon says:

Jeg er glad i deg jeg vil alltid være det ..	I care for you always will ..
Heidi sier:	Heidi says:
Jeg å	Me too

Jon here uses alternatives to the conventional formulae. Instead of using the elliptical formulation *glad i deg* ('care for you') he uses a full sentence, and even a right dislocated repetition of the subject (*jeg*), which is an intensifying expression in Norwegian. Furthermore, after an unconventional use of repeated blank spaces, he uses a rephrased alternative to the formulaic *for alltid* ('for ever'). Thus, the use of a non-conventional rather than a conventional formulation may itself be considered an intensifying practice.

5.3. Patterns of response

Generally, minimal and conventional declarations are responded to by identical declarations, as can be observed in several examples above:

(5) hug <3 – hugs <3

(7) care for you – care for you too

Declarations that take an upgraded form may be returned in an identical form, as in (11) below, but more often take an even more upgraded form, as in (12) below.

(11)

Catherine. Jonathan sier:	Catherine. Jonathan says:
hade bra da. <3	bye bye <3
Catherine. Jonathan sier:	Catherine. Jonathan says:
er så utrolig glad i deg	care for you so incredibly much
Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:	Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:
Er så utrolig glad i deg også	Care for you so incredibly much too
Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:	Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:
Catherine & Heidi <3	Catherine & Heidi <3
Catherine. Jonathan sier:	Catherine. Jonathan says:
Heidi & Catherine <3	Heidi & Catherine <3

(12)

Jenny <3 sier:	Jenny <3 says:
UTROLIG GLAD I DEG BESTE JENTA	CARE FOR YOU SO INCREDIBLY
MI	MUCH MY BEST GIRL

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 sier:
UTROLIG KJEMPE GLAD I DEG
OGSÅ BESTE JENTA MI

Heidi - Hans Arne<3 says:
CARE FOR YOU SO INCREDIBLY
AWFULLY MUCH TOO MY BEST
GIRL

In example (9) above, we saw that the expression may also be changed from one conventional expression to another, and this sort of variation may also be considered a way of reinforcing the affective loading of the declaration. But changing the formulation is especially associated with responses to non-conventional declarations.

(13)

IdAThailand med ANNBESTER vEnN sier:
men må stikke nå.. kjempe gladii
deg!!<3<3 stor klem til en veldig god
venn

Max...<Prison Break> sier:
Kjempe gladi deg oxo<3, svarer med den
samme store klemmen<3

IdAThailand med ANNBESTER vEnN sier:
hehe

IdAThailand with ANNBESTER fRiEnD says:
but have to go now.. care for you awfully
much!!<3<3 a big hug to a very good
friend

Max...<Prison Break> says:
Care for you awfully much too<3, respond
with the same big hug<3

IdAThailand with ANNBESTER fRiEnD says:
hehe

Here Ida starts with an upgraded, but otherwise conventional expression (*care for you awfully much!!<3<3*) but goes on with the formulation of a hug that less conventionally is addressed to “a very good friend”. The response from Max returns the conventional expression in an identical format, but the hug is returned in a different and idiosyncratic way: *respond with the same big hug<3*. This non-conventional form makes the expression less a parting routine and instead turns it into a “genuine” expression of emotion. In this way, changing the formulation and giving it a personalized form make the closing components stronger as displays of affection.

In cross-gender interactions, non-conventional expressions of affection may be sensitive in that they may be interpreted as courtship. In the previous example, Ida’s laughter tokens in response to Max’s declaration may be oriented to this type of sensitivity. Laughing may be a way of resisting the potential courtship by treating it as non-serious. In example (10) above, there is also a strong, non-conventional declaration from a boy to a girl (*I care for you always will ..*). Here again, the girl may be seen as resisting this potential courtship by treating it as just a closing component: She does not produce an original or idiosyncratic token in return, as could be expected, but instead reciprocates the declaration of affection in the most minimal way possible: *Me too*.

5.4. Gender differences in displays of affection

These practices for closing chat conversations lend themselves to a study of sociopragmatic variation in at least two ways. First, they may be studied according to the identities of the participants, and in this case gender seems to be strikingly relevant. Second, they may be described in order to specify the genre traits of this particular form of interaction by contrasting them with closing practices in other types of interaction, such as face-to-face conversation or personal letters.

The analysis of gender variation focuses on displays of affection. Among the closing components listed above, only the last two (hugs and kisses and declarations of affection) are considered such displays. In addition, heart-emoticons <3 are included. The distribution of these displays of affection according to gender is presented in table 5.

Participants	Declarations of affection	Heart-emoticons <3	Hugs (and kisses)	No displays of affection
Girl-girl	59	42	6	39
Girl-boy	23	20	22	62
Boy-boy	0	0	0	100

Table 5: Percentage of closing sequences involving displays of affection ⁶

The results clearly indicate a gender difference. None of the all-male conversations include displays of affection of any type. The all-female conversations have the most expressions of affection, with 59 percent of the interactions including a declaration of some sort and 42 percent including a heart-emoticon. The mixed-gender conversations lie in-between, with a score of around 20 percent for each of the types.

From these results we may conclude that there seems to be a strong norm for boys not to express affection in closing sections of same-gender conversations, whereas all-female and mixed-gender conversations offer the possibility of doing so, without however requiring it. The difference in frequency between all-female and mixed gender conversations may indicate that it is more legitimate and appropriate – maybe even expectable – for girls to express affection towards each other than it is for youths of opposite gender. It is the declarations and the heart-emoticons that are more frequent among girls. Hugs and kisses, on the contrary, are more frequent in mixed-gender conversations. Since this represents a weaker and more

indirect way of displaying affection than explicit declarations we might suggest that the mixed conversations prefer weaker displays of affection than all-female ones. This assumption is strengthened by a qualitative investigation of the strength of the individual declarations. The numbers do not reflect the difference between conventional and non-conventional declarations or between strong and weak forms (such based on the verb *elske* vs. *glad i*) but the general impression is that the strong and non-conventional ones are more frequently represented in all-female conversations than in mixed-gender ones.

It is worth noting also that the mixed-gender conversations show that both parties adjust to the norms of the other group rather than one group unilaterally imposing their norms. Boys use closing procedures that are characteristic of female conversations whereas girls adjust by using less (and weaker) displays of affection with boys than with other girls.

The results provide evidence that teenagers of this age-group orient to gender as a procedurally consequential aspect of context. With same-gender co-participants boys do not use the same closing procedures as they at least occasionally do with co-participants of the other sex. Thus they heed – and thereby reproduce – the hetero-normative values and norms that exist in society, which make expressions of affection between especially men a sensitive matter due to the taboos associated with homosexuality (Kitzinger 2005). The large differences between male and female groups also show that teenagers confirm and reproduce cultural stereotypes of females as more affectionate than males. However, the results of this study are not generalizable to male and female interaction in general. Most probably, many of these closing conventions are restricted to youths and characteristic of them. Especially the frequent and strong declarations of affection seem typical of a (female) youth style.

5.5. Genre differences in closing sequences

The second type of variation we will consider here is variation according the activity pursued and the medium used. This is not designed as a contrastive study between closings in different media but we can make some interesting observations if we compare with previous research on face-to-face conversation. First, declarations of affection are not conventional components of closings in conversation (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1974, Button 1987) and thus seem to be a distinctive trait of chat closings, possibly in common with certain types of personal correspondence in letters, e-mail or SMS. Second, hugs and kisses play different roles in chat and in conversation. Physical hugging and kissing are clearly widespread

features of greeting and parting in face-to-face situations among youths in many areas in Norway. The written proxy hugs and kisses in chat may thus be considered a ritual to invoke this type of situation and thereby compensate for the limitations of the medium, which prevents physical contact. However, as symbolic rather than physical actions, they also involve clear qualitative differences. For instance, giving someone of the other sex a “big” or “squeezing” hug may be easier to perform in writing than in actual life, and as such serve relation-building functions beyond what hugging does in actual life. In sum then, the declarations of affection, the use of heart-emoticons and the many upgraded displays of affection all contribute to a more emotional style of closing a conversation than what is found in face-to-face conversation.

Another difference with spoken conversation concerns the sequencing of closing components. In spoken conversation the terminal exchange is generally constituted by *goodbye*-tokens of some sort but in chat we see that there is a larger range of components usable as a terminal exchange. Furthermore, *goodbye*-tokens are not restricted to use in terminal exchanges. As we saw in (7) and (8) above, such tokens may be followed by other components, especially hugs and declarations of affection. Indeed, in most cases where the participants use multiple closing sequences, the *goodbye*-sequence precedes the other types of closing sequences. Chat interactions thus seem to have a wider range of closing components and larger variation in their sequential ordering.

Finally, there are some clear differences in closing sequences that seem related to the temporal implications of writing versus speaking. First, exchanges of *okays*, which in conversation serve as pre-closing sequences (Schegloff and Sacks 1974), do not occur in the chat data. Furthermore, chatters occasionally integrate several closing components as first pair parts in a single turn, as in (8) above. In (7) Heidi sends the pre-closing (*have to go*) and the closing component (*bye*) in two separate turns, but without waiting for a response to the first before sending the second. All this contributes to shortening the closing section and making it more unilateral and abrupt. In addition, there are several chat interactions (in fact 32% of the corpus) which do not have closing sections at all but are simply abandoned in the middle of a topical exchange. It may thus be concluded that closings in chat display a less stepwise and fine-tuned collaboration between the participants in coming to agreement about ending the conversation.

In this comparison we have just considered the relationship between chat and conversation. A more systematic investigation between closing sections in different spoken

and written settings would probably reveal interesting relationships with other modes of communication as well, such as letters, SMS and e-mail.

6. Conclusion

Social and pragmatic variation has not been the dominant focus within CA studies of sequential organization. However, a growing number of studies apply an explicitly comparative perspective (see for instance the collections edited by Sidnell (2009) and Haakana, Laakso and Lindström (2009)). Systematic analytic attention to questions of distribution and variation is necessary for CA to become a descriptive science of interaction patterns in society and not just a theory of conversational rules and practices. The increased interest in variation is thus a welcome development and one that needs considerable strengthening in the years to come. However, the study of sequential organization needs to keep two perspectives alive in tandem. The first is seeking to identify and describe the generic conversational resources available to speakers in coordinating their communicative projects with their interlocutors. The other is to investigate in which activities, settings and communities the practices are used normally, occasionally, marginally and not at all.

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¹ In addition, the vowel /a/ is pronounced with a rather deviant quality, closer to the neighboring phoneme /æ/.

² The participants used the MSN software and copied the chats themselves from their computers. Active consent was given by both the teenagers and their parents.

³ An approximately equal number of girls and boys were asked to contribute conversations, but the girls delivered a much larger number, resulting in a relatively large imbalance between the total number of female and male exchanges.

⁴ The literal translation would be something like: ('we'll) talk (to each other'). In this example, this token does not take the standard form. The "S" added on line 4 is a self-repair of a missing letter in line 3. The deviant spelling *Schnakkes*, instead of *Snakkes*, is a playful way of rendering the diction of a drunken person, thus adding a humorous note to the greeting.

⁵ The expression *glad i deg* may literally be translated as 'care for you' or 'fond of you', but is in practice a stronger expression and would in most cases be translated idiomatically as 'love you'. The expression *elsker deg* (literally 'love you') is a very strong expression in Norwegian, and is seldom used outside intimate relationships (although these conversations constitute a clear exception). Because of the distinction between these two conventional forms, we choose to translate the first as 'care for you', although it might seem a bit too weak as an idiomatic phrase in English. Also the endearment term *jenta mi* is difficult to translate. Literally it translates into 'my girl', but it corresponds more idiomatically to 'my sweetheart' or 'my dearest'. Again we choose the more literal translation.

⁶ Many conversations include several types of displays, so the percentages add up to more than 100.