

# **Illustrations of Linguistic Ethnography in Action: Indicative Analyses of a Job Interview**

1. Micro-analysis – Ben Rampton
2. Multi-modal analysis – Jeff Bezemer & Carey Jewitt
3. Trans-contextual analysis – Adam Lefstein
4. On the Talk on Trial project
5. References

## The micro-analysis of interactional discourse in linguistic ethnography: An illustration focused on the job interview

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This text is an attempt to illustrate part of the process of doing micro-analysis in linguistic ethnography, and it focuses on an excerpt from a video-recorded job interview. The analysis here certainly isn't complete, and it hasn't been used in any published study to address specific research questions. But it's sufficient, I hope, to give an idea of how to go about interactional micro-analysis, as well as an indication of the kind of understanding that the analysis produces. The account is divided into the following sections:

1. Micro-analysis and ethnography
2. Situating micro-analysis in the research process
3. Analytic questions, frameworks and procedures
4. Some data: A job interview
5. Some analysis
  - 5.1 Activity type(s)?
  - 5.2 Turn-by-turn micro-analysis
    - 5.2.1 Some (pedagogically slanted) analytic summaries and comments
    - 5.2.2 Annotated transcript produced from a micro-analytic brainstorm

### 1. Micro-analysis and ethnography

The procedures outlined below owe a great deal to Conversation Analysis (e.g. ten Have 1999), and relatively 'unmotivated observation' of the kind illustrated here represents a very important initial stage in the analytic practice of CA. But once conversation analysts have immersed themselves in a piece of data, they generally dedicate themselves to the analysis of interactional structures, and it is about the organisation of talk that they eventually seek to generalise. Linguistic ethnography doesn't restrict itself to this – it's certainly helpful knowing about interaction structures, and CA's commitment to the slow and careful investigation of small-scale phenomenon is invaluable for understanding what's going on. But we can use this understanding to gain purchase on more general cultural, social and political processes.

The analysis below could be called 'micro-ethnography', and it displays a number of ethnographic characteristics:

- it privileges participant perspectives
- it is suspicious of *a priori* theory and takes description very seriously, dwelling on particulars (with transcripts often functioning like vignettes)
- it emphasises open-ended immersion in the situation being investigated; it's very time-consuming; it produces much more description and data than the analyst can eventually use; and in doing so, it makes room for the unpredictable

Obviously, micro-analysis differs from more standard ethnography in focusing on the fine-grain of interaction, rather than just in the details of institutional or community life, and perhaps there's greater emphasis on *defamiliarising* the taken-for-granted than in 'meso'-ethnography, in which there is often a lot of time taken to get familiar with the strange. Still, if you are sympathetic to ethnography, the direction and rhythms of micro-analysis are likely to be intelligible to you, and in fact, our hope is that once you've done some micro-analysis yourself, your general sense of what communication involves will be irreversibly changed, and that there'll be no going back to the shallow interpretation of flat transcripts that our normal reading habits lull us into.

What with institutions, laws, habits, buildings and all sorts of objects and records as well, everyday communicative life often seems drearily fixed and repetitive, but on closer reflection, consciousness, communication, experience and the 'quick of life' actually only reside in a very brief present. Our thoughts, words and deeds are always hurtling into the past at a terrifying rate, and if you want to say that this or that bit of culture or history *matters*, then you're actually concerned with

the way in which these bits of culture or history makes themselves felt in the here-and-now. So if there are concepts, tools and procedures for slowing this down and picking out some of the intricate improvisations with which people actually handle the unrelenting rush of the moment, then maybe this kind of microscopic apparatus can actually tell us something quite significant about the rather big issues that concern us, and it's this that we will dwell on here.

Before moving to some of the key concepts and procedures themselves, it's worth contextualising micro-analysis in the longer process of doing research.

## **2. Situating micro-analysis in the research process**

The analysis illustrated here presupposes that you've collected audio- and/or video data that you can replay again and again. You might conduct this kind of analysis after some pilot data collection, in order to sensitise yourself to the kinds of dynamic potentially operating in the sites you want to investigate; you might carry it out mid-way through field-work, to help you get sharper on issues that you sense are going on and want to pursue further; or you could undertake analysis like this when your fieldwork is (more or less) completed.

Whichever, the analysis requires (a) the identification of an episode or a set of episodes that's relevant to a particular topic or issue you're researching, and then once you've isolated an episode or sequence to start on, (b) you launch into the process of detailed transcription, inhabitation, description & analysis that I'll illustrate below. Your work on a focal episode like this would lead to (c) the formulation of provisional initial claims, and if you're fully embarked on the post-fieldwork data-analysis phase of your project, you might then (d) move to further episodes, repeating the process, also (e) stepping back for 'constant comparison' across episodes, for discrepant case analysis, gradually building up descriptive generalisations about the topic, and initial interpretations of its wider significance. Alternatively, the claims you initially formulate might direct you to the analysis of a different type of data – for example, a document implicated in the interaction, or a process recorded in your fieldnotes. Or you might decide to go back to same data with a different framework. Equally, if you're still in touch with the participants (or people who are similar), it might be worth going back to them, replaying particular episodes to them, trying to clarify what's going on, eliciting their interpretations and perspectives.

Overall, micro-interaction analysis is an enormously productive research process, but it is important to emphasise that linguistic ethnography involves more than this alone, and there will always be research questions where micro-analysis is not appropriate. Indeed, micro-analysis may actually only form a small part of any study. Still, the ability to vary the scope and delicacy of one's analysis is important, and micro-analysis can be an invaluable resource at particular points of an investigation. If, for example, specific pieces of talk from an interview are pivotal in the overall argument of a thesis, it would be wise to subject them to micro-ethnographic scrutiny to ensure that crucial nuances aren't being misrepresented.

## **3. Analytical questions, frameworks and procedures**

Here's an outline of basic analytical questions, frameworks and procedures that have proved useful when it comes to inhabiting, describing, analysing and refining the transcription of an extract of interactional data:

## QUESTIONS AND PROCEDURES FOR INVESTIGATING INTERACTIONAL DATA <sup>1</sup>

### a) **Activity types** (see ELC Day 2)

Activity types can be defined as “culturally recognised units of interaction that are identifiable by constraints on (a) goals/purposes, (b) roles activated in the activity, (c) [sequential] structure/stages, and (to some extent) (d) participants and setting”.<sup>2</sup>

When you first approach a piece of data, it is worth starting relatively ‘macro’ (or at least ‘meso’), asking

- what kinds of event/activity type do we have here? Is there just one, or are there several going on at the same time? And then within each activity type you can see going on:
  - what are the governing goals/purposes?
  - what roles are activated?
  - what’s the sequential structure and the stages (and do the goals and role shift at different stages)?
  - what are participants and setting?
  - what constraints are there on participants and modes of participation?
  - are people doing what’s expected of them, or are they doing something different?
  - how are the activity types related? How do the participants manage the relationship between them?

These questions provide some initial orientation to what’s going on. They generate (provisional) coordinates for the more intensive micro-analysis involved in (b), and they also help to situate the interaction in broader social and institutional processes.

### b) Working slowly through the transcript **turn by turn** (see also Heritage 1997), ask

- exactly what is the speaker doing here? Exactly what wording have they selected for their turn? How else might s/he have formulated the turn?
- how does this turn connect with what the previous speaker(s) has said/done?
- in what ways does this turn influence what the next speaker can say?
- anything else that strikes you about this turn?

These questions are central to conversation analysis as a ‘discovery procedure’, and this is elaborated below.

Right at the start of the micro-analytic process, it is important to ask what **activity type(s)** the data instantiate, in order to get some initial bearings on what’s going on. Then, if there is a particular part of the data that looks relevant to the research topic you’re investigating, it is worth subjecting this interactional sequence to the slow process of **turn-by-turn, moment-by-moment** analysis, prior to drawing the extract directly into whatever argument you are developing. This turn-by-turn analysis is guided by the assumptions and procedures of conversation analysis, which can be summarised as follows:

## CA: THE BASICS

### **Basic assumptions in conversation analysis:**

- \* Social reality, social relations and social order are reproduced and at least partly created anew from moment to moment in interaction.
- \* Our social worlds are jointly constructed, and we achieve this coordination in the tiny details of talk and interaction.
- \* Enjoy the aesthetic of ‘smallness’ and ‘slowness’ (everything counts, nothing’s too trivial to repay close attention, and fast analyses tend to be shallow) (cf Silverman 1999)

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, there are other frameworks that you can bring to bear in fine-grained analysis of interaction. On Day 3, we’ll consider the resources that Goffman provides and on Day 4, we’ll concentrate on multi-modal semiotics. Indeed, in working through an interaction, social network relations often become relevant, and you need to ask: What kinds of knowledge and experience of each other do the participants bring to this interaction? How well do they know each other, and what kind of history is there to their relationship? More than that, it’s possible to focus closely on the complex interplay and negotiation of different kinds of social identity (see e.g. Zimmerman 1998), and one can also trace the dynamics of power – who exerts what kinds of power, when, how, drawing on what resources, how effectively and against what resistance? Still, the questions here about activity-type and turn-by-turn development remain fundamental, and are easily combined with other perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> S. Levinson 1979. Activity types and language. *Linguistics* 17 (5/6):356-399). There are many points of contact with Bakhtin’s account of genre (*Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* Austin: Univ. of Texas Press 1986), as well as with notions of ‘framing’ more generally (e.g. E. Goffman 1974 *Frame Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell)

### Basic principles in the organisation of talk-in-interaction

You can see the on-going, moment-to-moment construction social reality if you follow the ways in which people build up an interactional event turn by turn. As Heritage (1997) says:

- \* when you talk, you address yourself to what's just been said (your utterance is 'context-shaped')
- \* at the same time, when you say something, you're setting up only a limited range of things that the next person can do (your utterance is 'context-creating')
- \* how somebody responds to what you say provides a display of how they've understood you, and you can either go along with their reading of your meaning, or you can contest it
- \* There's a kind of mini-morality inscribed in our expectations about the way an interaction should be built turn-by-turn. Non-conformities and deviations raise all sorts of doubts about the transgressor's moral character, and usually lead to apologies, explanations, repairs etc

So:

### Implications for analysis

- \* Look closely at how people manage to get from one moment to the next:
  - don't be deceived by the display of the text on the page, don't use the end to make sense of the beginning.
  - Follow the *unfolding* of the event over time, work through a transcript slowly, and at each point ask yourself: 'Why that now?' 'What else might have been done here, but wasn't?' 'Why not?' 'What were the options available at just this moment, which was selected, why?'
- \* Attend to sequences of actions, not actions in isolation
- \* Transcribe the detail.

There is an enormous literature now in conversation analysis, describing both a host of different kinds of interactional structure, as well as the multiple ways in which talk gets (re)shaped in different kinds of institutional encounter. However, at the heart of CA, there is a particular 'analytic mentality', guided by just a few very simple but powerful assumptions and procedures of the kind outlined above, and you can develop this through practice, without first having to read extensively in the CA literature.

Once you have identified a strip of interaction as being potentially relevant to the questions and topics that you are investigating, you can start the process of 'micro-analytic brainstorming', starting on the interaction a little bit before, and finishing a little bit after, the particular strips you're interested in so that you've a better sense of the context. At this point, you put the basic principles and procedures of CA to work, going very slowly through the data-recording, replaying short sections again and again, attending to lots of small interactional details, revising the transcript, noting down all your thoughts as you proceed (analytic observations, methodological queries, theoretical connections, further questions etc). This is illustrated in Section 7.2 below. Of course, your thoughts and responses are likely to become richer and more detailed as you learn and read more about the micro-processes of talk, but even then, you should use the theoretical knowledge you acquire in a sensitising rather than definitive way, letting them suggest 'directions along which to look rather than prescriptions of what to see' (Blumer 1969:148).

In principle, micro-analytic brainstorming could go on almost for ever, but time-budgeting will put limits on how long you can spend in this brainstorming, and when you feel you've done enough on it at least for the time being, you must step back, look over the notes and transcript, and start to sift and pull your thoughts and observations together. Relevance to the overall question/topic you're pursuing will be one consideration here – some of your notes will seem highly pertinent, others less so (for the moment), and yet others will strike you as interesting but hard to see as ever really connecting to your thesis overall. The weight of the evidence in support of the different claims and observations you're making is another factor to consider during this sifting. Some patterns and processes will look quite well-attested, but your ideas about others will seem only very speculative, and you may also find that there's actually no real evidence at all for some of the processes you'd initially expected. In pulling together the notes generated during your micro-analytic 'brainstorm', you're engaged in a first step in abstraction, still very close to the data but now looking towards a broader argument, and it is very important to take care with the wording you use to summarise your findings. The record of your data analysis needs to reflect accurately the weight of evidence in support of the different claims you're formulating, and the record must also adequately capture the specific angles on your research

question generated through your immersion in these data. In the end, you'll emerge from this process with an analytical summary containing

- some fairly succinct claims about empirical phenomena, patterns and processes that are potentially relevant to your overall topic, and that have been reasonably well-evidenced
- a note of anomalies that you can't quite yet accommodate within the account you are building, but that you'll need to keep on hand and return to after you've examined more data (cf 'discrepant case analysis')
- comments on negative findings so far – phenomena or processes that you had expected but didn't actually find evidenced in the data
- a plan for where to look next in your data-set in order to elaborate and/or to test the claims you're building up,
- both general and specific theoretical and methodological notes and queries that occurred to you during the data analysis (e.g. potential links with research elsewhere; the analytic affordances of these data compared with other data-types; additional caveats to bear in mind when formulating empirical claims)
- a statement of exactly what you're going to do next (e.g. move to another piece of data, turn to an article that looks directly relevant etc)

It's very important not to skimp or rush this reflective process of pulling together the fruits of your micro-analytic immersion and brainstorming. Immersion and brainstorming produce a lot of notes that can be hard to process later on if you just leave them in their 'raw state'. And it is also important to start turning your nose-to-data observations into more general empirical claims while the data is still fresh in your mind, vivid enough to stop you squashing out the nuances. In Clifford Geertz's words, cultural theory aims to "grow [generality] out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions" (1973:25), and micro-analytic data immersion is an excellent strategy for this.

So let's now apply these frameworks and procedures to some data.

#### 4. Some data: The job interview

Here is a transcript of part of a job interview, and it comes from a study of language, ethnicity and discrimination in job interviews conducted by Celia Roberts and Sarah Campbell,<sup>3</sup> and by the time you read the present text, you will have already spent quite a bit of effort replaying and discussing the recording. Pippa (= C[andidate]) is applying for a delivery driver position in a company which she has already worked in as a temporary agency worker, and in the end she gets the job. The interviewers are Roger (R) and Daniel (D), and they are all seated round a rather large rectangular table in an office, with Pippa at one end (facing/opposite the camera), Roger on Pippa's left and Daniel on her right.

Transcription is itself an important analytic process, and before it's cleaned up for presentation purposes, the transcript serves as a working surface, where all sorts of observations and comments get recorded.<sup>4</sup> We'll come back to this on Day 3, but in the mean-time, here is an initial transcript, loosely following CA conventions:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep344.pdf> for the final project report (*Talk on Trial*, funded by the Department of Work and Pensions), as well as e.g. Campbell and Roberts 2006. Working under time constraints to a policy agenda, Campbell & Roberts' discourse analysis was more broadly focused than the micro-analysis illustrated in Section 5 below, and indeed more generally, it often very important to think carefully about the degree of 'magnification' you're aiming for in any piece of micro-interaction analysis, weighing up e.g. the expectations of the readership, the size of the dataset, the time available etc.

<sup>4</sup> Low inference facts of the situation - actions and events ((stage directions)); speculative interpretations of what's going on; ideas about connections with other parts of your data; methodological memos, reminding yourself of problems with the data, lines of analysis to pursue, segments to look at next etc)

<sup>5</sup> Key transcription conventions:

( . )            brief pause (under one second)  
( 1 )            longer pause (the number indicates length in seconds)  
so              emphasised relative to surrounding talk

## Interview transcript

1 ((c. 6 secs silence while Roger writes. Then he looks up and starts to  
2 speak:))  
3 R: as a business we've gone through quite a bit of change (.)  
4 erm (.) although you come in on the[back end of it ((light laugh on last word))  
5 [(C starts to smile))  
6 C: that's correct I have er-  
7 I've [heard ((smile voice)) heard a few rumours in the [morning ((laughs))  
8 R: [yes (js s) [yeh (just a )  
[(R sitting back ?aimiably Starts moving his left  
hand to his eye))  
9 (.) ((R briefly puts a finger to his left cheek))  
10 R: I'd be curious to know wh-[what sort of things that people d- (.)  
[(C laughs lightly))  
11 no because- (1)  
12 [I mean to an outsider=  
[(C starts to straighten her face))  
13 C: =mhm=  
14 R: =I don't work in a delivery office (.)  
15 getting rid of the second delivery erm  
16 I'm erm- I was asking round (.)  
17 well most of the second >deliveries< weren't happening anyway  
18 because we were forever needin the staff to cover the fi:rst deliveries  
19 C: mhm  
20 (.)  
21 R: erm so in some ways I-I didn't think it was as big a change as I thought it  
22 was  
23 (.)  
24 ehm (.) so I'm curious what so-what sort of issues did people c-  
25 C: I've not actu[ally heard th- you know I'm-  
26 R: [face  
27 C: I-I only hear parts  
28 R: yeah=  
29 C: =of conversat[ions  
30 R: [mm  
31 [(R resumes writing))  
32 C: [erm- from what- (1)  
[(C is looking ahead, at neither R nor D))  
33 myow:n: idea- (.)  
34 i:s  
35 that the- [the scheme beforehand (.)  
36 [(C turns her head towards D & R looks up at C))  
37 meant they could go out a lot earlier (.)  
38 R: yeah ((nodding, looking at C))  
39 C: is that correct?  
40 they could get [ou-  
41 R: [yeah ((R resumes writing, and C turns head towards D))  
42 C: and they could finish off earlier  
43 D: mhm.  
44 C: the: wa:lks hav:::e  
45 >doubled< ((in terms of the intonation in lines 44 & 45, C sounds like she's  
starting on a list))

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[ overlapping talk or action  
[  
>text< speeded up or compressed relative to surrounding talk  
te::xt Stretched sounds  
= latched turns, no pause between turns  
( (text)) 'stage directions', or description of non-verbal activity  
( ) transcription uncertainty (including blank space in parentheses for inaudible utterances)  
. falling intonation  
.hhh audible inbreath  
t- word cut off

46 (1)  
47 D: s:ome. ((D nods his head a little))  
48 C: [some have doubled whereas t-  
[[((C withdraws eye contact with D, and looks straight ahead))  
49 [so em (.)  
[[((C looks up in the air to her right, gazing above of D))  
50 ((speaking fast and quietly:)) [(I also) heard them mention (1.5)  
51 [[((C looks right down to her left, to the  
left & below R))  
52 I dunno ((shaking her head, not looking at anyone))  
53 just the union all the time  
54 R: ((laughs))  
55 C: ((laughs))  
56 D: welcome to ((NAME OF THE COMPANY))  
57 ((all laugh))  
58 D: (that a frequent sc )  
59 R: okay that's all right  
60 (.) ((R looks up from his writing))  
61 erm (1) what about in oth-other jobs  
62 (.)  
63 er-were there changes ei-either because: (.) the nature of the job changed  
64 while you were ther:e (.) or you moved into something that was very  
65 different than what you'd previous had experience of  
66 (.)  
67 I imagine workin Vision Express must have been a little bit different  
68 C: mm-  
69 well- p what-  
70 p-between the two companies [or as in:  
71 R: [yeah  
72 (1)  
73 R: er- ah- I mean- (1.5) that's quite an unusual-  
74 y- you know actually making the spectacles=  
75 C: =mhm  
76 (.)  
77 R: erm- (.) and the time pressure that- that your under t- to achieve that  
78 C: [mhm  
79 R: [that must have been quite different from just about anything else you've  
80 ever worked in  
81 C: erm well .hh it is  
82 I think- t- [m-majority of the jobs that I have worked in I have bin:-  
83 [(R resumes writing))  
84 erm (.) [customer focussed and deadlines n under pressure  
85 [(C looks towards D)) ((C looks away from  
86 from D, & he writes  
87 a couple of words))  
88 (.)  
89 .hhh erm (1) catering I've m- you kn[ow  
90 R: [oh yeah  
91 C: m- my family (.) own a business and I've worked in that since the age of  
92 nine  
93 (.) you know helping them out  
94 .hh erm (.)  
95 but that- (.) I suppose that's [a different field altogether  
96 [(R looks up from writing))  
97 [from customer focus but-  
98 R: [yeah  
99 (2)  
100 C: ((quieter:)) I've sort of gone off on a tangent now .hhh  
101 (4)  
102 R: nno it's (1) I mean the range of experience just [shows y y to-  
103 C: [mhm  
104 R: in many ways that y you used to-  
105 C: yeah I'm [quite  
106 R: [having new things thrown at you [so .hh no:  
107 [(R resumes writing))  
108 I-I don't see anything::  
109 ((to Daniel)) anything you need to add to that ( )?

110 D: no  
111 [no I'm comfortable with that  
112 R: [((very quietly:)) okay  
113 (.)  
114 R: ((quiet:)) all right  
115 (.)  
116 er- (2) you've done a number of rou-delivery rounds  
117 (.)  
118 C: mm that's [right

## 5. Some analysis

### 5.1 Activity type(s)?

The first step is to assess the activity types in play in the episode, defining activity types as

“culturally recognised units of interaction that are identifiable by constraints on (a) goals/purposes, (b) roles activated in the activity, (c) [sequential] structure/stages, and (to some extent) (d) participants and setting”

If you're familiar with the cultural environment, you can draw on your own knowledge to identify the activity type(s), checking this with the data to ensure that you're not off-beam. Here's an initial characterisation of the data in Section 4:

Questions about the activity type:	The data in Section 4
i. What kinds of event and activity type do we have here?	A blue-collar job interview
ii. What goals/purposes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Overall goal of the interviewer(s)</i>: to assess the job suitability of the candidate(s), and to select the best one. <i>Local goals</i> may vary in step with the different sub-stages (e.g. record the candidate's answers clearly)</li> <li>• <i>Interviewee</i>: to perform well, impress &amp; charm the interviewers, get offered the job</li> </ul>
iii. What roles are activated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Interviewer(s)</i>: representative of the organisation, senior enough to be entrusted with personnel selection (R is a personnel manager, and D is a collections manager)</li> <li>• <i>Interviewee</i>: competent and reliable worker, very well suited to the post being advertised</li> </ul>
iv. What sequential structure/ stages?	<p><i>Overall structure:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interviewer questions to candidate =&gt; candidate questions to interviewers =&gt; administrative detail. (cf. Roger's introduction at the start (<i>original transcript, line 12ff</i>): “the interview will last about forty five minutes, various questions we've got to raise around your experience of working i- in this business and elsewhere, ehm and your various experiences em there's opportunity at the end f-for you to ask questions and we've got er things like rates of pay and that to cover as well so”)</li> <li>• A standardised set and order of questions for the interview as a whole (R to D: “you got any questions there?” D: “not on that section, no” (<i>original transcript l. 128</i>)). (From the data on this interview as a whole, the themes seem to run: () location preferences () working with people? () training or mentoring colleagues () dealing with the public () coping with change () suggesting small improvements/dealing with difficulties () fitness, scheduling preferences, cycling ability, cash handling experience, upcoming holidays or training, current employment status, appeal of this advert () work-problem scenarios () housekeeping)</li> </ul> <p><i>Sub-sequences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• main question (usually preceded by a short contextualising preface) =&gt; candidate response (=&gt; follow-up or other questions) =&gt; notes made of Pippa's response by interviewers + inter-</li> </ul>

	<p>interviewer agreement that the section is completed (R after c. 5 secs of writing: “I’m sorry I have to write all this down as we go along” (<i>original transcript l. 128</i>); at the end of question sections, R asks D: ‘you got any questions there’ (o.t. 148), ‘anything you need to add?’ (o.t. 284)</p>
v. What participants and setting?	<p>Adults, located in an organisation &amp; a society invoking meritocratic principles (Two men and a woman seated around a large table in an office)</p>
vi. What constraints are there on participants and modes of participations?	<p>Whereas e.g. a conversation can shift into a round of joke-telling, it would be very difficult for an activity type like this to mutate into any very different genre. If the candidate tries to shift the frame too much, they’re unlikely to get the job. If the interviewers try, there are a number of official bodies that could call them to account, as well as their own internal audit procedures – in addition, each of the interviewers is observing the other in an official capacity. Still, there are moments when they switch away from Q&amp;A sequences designed to assess the candidate’s competence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ there’s some tangential chat (and laughter) about the biggest number of pouches that C has ever had to take out, cross-referring to the national/local record (101-122 in the original transcript)</li> <li>○ Pippa asks D what type of work he prefers (“Which field would you say you preferred, could I ask?” [o.t. 393-5])</li> </ul>
vii. Are people doing what’s expected of them, or are they doing something different?	<p>Mostly yes, but in the first part of the data in Section 6, a sequence develops in which Roger asks Pippa (C) about the rumours about organisational change that she’s heard at work in the mornings. This question isn’t relevant in any obvious way to the assessment of Pippa’s job suitability, and they position her more as a witness (or informer!) than as a candidate. In fact, this is a potentially tricky combination. On the one hand, Pippa risks talking herself out of the job if she reports discourses, or shows sympathies, that Roger and Daniel don’t like/approve of. On the other, organisations aren’t normally supposed to probe into the political views of job candidates, and if they pursued this line of questioning too far, Pippa (or the video-researchers!) might make trouble for them later. See immediately below...</p>
viii. How are the activity types related? How do the participants manage the relationship between them?	<p>This is one point where it can be useful to turn to turn-by-turn micro-analysis. Micro-analysis will (a) allow us to see whether, how and how far there’s support for the preliminary observations about a ‘frame clash’, as well as normally (b) generating lots of additional thoughts, issues and theoretical possibilities.</p>

### 5.2 Turn-by-turn micro analysis

Most of this Section contains line-by-line annotations of the transcript in Section 4, products of the turn-by-turn micro-analytic brainstorming introduced in Section 3. As also noted above, it is important to follow up this kind of relatively free-flowing, reactive annotation with analytic summaries – pulling out key patterns, noting anomalies, identifying potential connections, plotting the next move etc – and it is a good idea to place these at the front of the annotated transcript, so they are ready to provide you with useful reminders and orientation when you come back to the data after a period away.

The present analysis, though, isn’t actually part of a real piece of research, and there hasn’t been an overarching research interest steering my account. Instead, this section of data was chosen for intensive analysis because there seems to be an interesting instability in the main activity type guiding the encounter (see 5.1 above). This lack of grounding in a larger research plan doesn’t necessarily matter very much for the brainstorming annotation process, but it makes a real difference to the writing of analytic summaries, since these should be partly guided by the data’s relevance to more general questions.

So instead of trying to provide an analytic summary that looks in the direction of a particular topic, project, subject or literature, here are a set of relatively pedagogic observations focused more exclusively on the data. (Since you’ve already spent some time looking at the data yourself, you

probably have your own ideas about the kind of wider relevance the data could have, and so feel free to bring these to bear as you read through the exercise as well).

### 5.2.1 *Some (pedagogically slanted) analytic summaries and comments*

#### *People and social relations in interaction*

Analysis of lines 3-62 reveals a very delicate on-line choreography of talk, as the participants navigate a politically sensitive issue in an asymmetrical 'gatekeeping' situation where the subordinate person is being asked to report on opinions that the gatekeepers disagree with.

The participants are closely tuned to one another's moves, but problems can still arise:

- *innuendo gets out of hand*: during the reference to change in the organisation, Pippa's smile gets reciprocated by Roger's laughter (4-5), leading to Pippa's verbal intimation (6,7), which then runs into Roger's serious request for explication (10, 11)
- *making it worse by explaining*: Roger's attempt to clarify and justify this request for explication places Pippa in a dilemma, asking her to provide information that she knows he disagrees with (17-22)

So the participants create mini-dilemmas for one another as their interaction unfolds from one moment to the next, though their fine-tuning to each other also guides their efforts either to extricate themselves or help the other(s) out. We see

- Roger trying to ensure that his interest in what Pippa's heard about the industrial dispute doesn't come across improperly as an interrogation (11-22)
- Pippa responding to Roger's request for information about the dispute, feeling her way (e.g. 37, 39), reading the feedback (?31-32, 43,47), changing tack (49), back-tracking (50 vs 33), calling it off when she senses she's going too far (48,49), showing willing but unable (50-52), before finally affiliating with the management line (52)
- Roger & Daniel responding to Pippa's (obliging) account of the complaints in way that masks or tones down their lack of agreement, thereby avoiding further discussion of a controversial topic that's not relevant to the interview (lines 31,38,41,43,47)

#### *Two micro-ethnographic rejoinders to dominant discourses:*

- *The view of persons in interview ideology*: There are obvious differences between the participants in terms of institutional power, and there is more at stake here for Pippa than Roger and Daniel. Still, we wouldn't be able to understand or analyse the patterns and processes in the transcript if we overlooked the continuous reciprocation of signals that the participants use to steer the unfolding of their interview together. All of the participants display agency and skill, but they are all continuously shaping the mutual environments in which these displays are possible. So the performance is co-constructed, and it's actually much harder to identify and assess the 'competence of individuals' than standard ideology of interviews would lead us to expect.
- *The view of speech and articulateness*: Reading the transcript through at normal speed, processing it with the standard sensibilities associated with print literacy, we might look critically at Pippa, regarding her as a rather inarticulate person who quite often has difficulty producing coherent well-formed utterances. But a micro-ethnographic analysis suggests that far from being personally incompetent, Pippa's tuning her speech very delicately to the reception it's receiving. In lines 48 and 49, she doesn't finish the utterances beginning 'whereas t-' and 'so em', but this isn't because she's a poor speaker *per se*. Rather, it's because she's sensed that if she follows these conjunctions through, they'll lead her into making statements that won't go down well with the two interviewers, and so very wisely she cuts them off. In line with the note about 'individuals' above, the general point here is that speaking isn't an exclusively individual production – it's very finely tuned to the people and the situation where it's being produced. Indeed, if we carry this through, we can start to see 'inarticulateness' not as individual

incompetence and stupidity, but as an implicit comment on the speaking situation, as well perhaps as “an invitation to listen in a new way” (McDermott 1988).

There are all sorts of other patterns and issues that might be formulated in this summary, depending on one’s interests – the penetration of the ‘micro’ by the ‘macro’, the performance of professional roles (see lines 16, 41 below), the rhetorical management of double-binds etc etc etc. But it is worth now turning to the transcript annotations.

### 5.2.2 Annotated transcript produced from a micro-analytic brainstorm

- 1 ((c. 6 secs silence while Roger writes. Then he looks up and starts to  
2 speak:))
- R looks as though he finishing off his notes on Pippa’s reply to the previous question
  - a lot of importance seems to be attached to the documentary record of the interview – Pippa’s answers will live on after the interview’s finished
- 3 R: as a business we’ve gone through quite a bit of change (.)
- this sounds like the preface to another question prepared in advance – check this out (with the other interviews in the series, or in the texts accompanying the interview)  
But the question that Roger actually produces next – ‘I’d be curious to know what sort of things..’ in line 10 & 24 - doesn’t sound like a pre-set question calculated to assess the candidate’s suitability for the job. Instead, the question about the C’s own personal experience or adaptability to change gets delayed until line 61ff.
- 4 erm (.) although you come in on the[back end of it ((light laugh on last word))  
5 [(C starts to smile)]
- If the question preface in line 3 was standardised for these interviews, then the utterance in line 4 tailors it to this particular candidate, recognising that the information about ‘change in the business’ isn’t new for her.
  - C starts to smile during R’s turn, and he reciprocates at the end of the turn. What’s going on here? C’s smile suggests recognition of some non-neutral experience or issue above and beyond what’s just been stated (joining the organisation at the end of a period of change). R’s laugh suggests that he’s in the know as well, joining her in knowledge about experiences that have only been intimated, not stated explicitly. (In fact, later on in line 15, he names ‘getting rid of the second delivery’ as one of the issues in question.) This isn’t the first time that levity has entered the interaction – they’ve laughed together on 4 previous occasions (see original transcript, lines 101-5,120,151-4,180-1)
  - What’s involved in the phrase **‘the back end of it’**? The obvious implication is that things are now settling down, but does ‘back end’ suggest that the changes were troublesome? ‘Back end’ sounds informal and vernacular – hardly a public relations formulation (which might refer to the fruits of the change etc). Is C picking up on negative associations like this when she refers to ‘rumours’ in line 7?
- 6 C: that’s correct I have er–
- Compare ‘back end’ with **‘that’s correct’**: is this designed as a humorous contrast in tone, shifting from vernacular to more formal, but continuing the co-construction of a humorous exchange initiated in lines 3 & 4? Or does she often use this formulation in the interview? No, she only uses it twice - see line 39 below (a rather ‘sticky patch’ in the interaction) – otherwise she uses ‘right’. Look more closely into this.
  - Exactly what was ‘correct’ in R’s prior turn? (see the comments on line 7)
- 7 I’ve [heard ((smile voice)) heard a few rumours in the [morning ((laughs))
- This line elaborates on the agreement she’s expressed in line 6. C doesn’t simply say that R is right in what he literally said (ie she joined the organisation at the end of a period of change). Instead, she seems to be saying that R was correct in the intimated meaning that she attributes to his utterance in line 4, and she begins to explicate the unstated source of humour with the word ‘rumours’
  - **‘Rumours’**: rumours refer back to recent events that for one reason or another, can’t be openly discussed. C isn’t saying exactly what these recent events were, but they’re receiving more explicit recognition from her here than they did with the smile and laugh in lines 4 & 5.
  - Her smiling and laughter keeps the ‘key’ playful, and from the video-tape, it looks as though R is collaborating in this levity in the rather intensive back-channelling that he provides during her turn (see line 8 below). But this is rather different from the consensual laughter in lines 53-55.
  - **‘Heard a few rumours in the morning’**.
    - In what other ways might C disclose her knowledge of the change in the organisation – could she have said “I heard a lot about it”? That wouldn’t have been consistent with the sequence of ‘knowing laughter’ she’s building up.
    - I’d need to double-check the timing, but there have been major upheavals at this particular company, getting a lot of coverage in the national press. Still, C’s ‘in the morning’ locates these rumours much more specifically in the routines of the workplace itself. Still, describing

- what must have a major talking point as 'a few rumours' seems to be designed as humorous understatement.
- When it's combined with the fact that she's only been working for the company on a casual basis, does her formulation here also have the effect of positioning her as relatively peripheral to these workplace discussions of change? As it happens, this is a line that she later works quite hard to project (line 25ff). But is it her very peripherality (and good humour) that makes R feel that it's okay (safe? appropriate?) here to find out more about the workers' discontent?
- 8 R: [yes (js s) [yeh (just a )  
[((sitting back ?aimiably Starts moving his left  
hand to his eye))
- What's R doing here with his intensified backchannelling? On the tape it really seems to be just continuing the collaborative levity started in line 4, but could it be because they are moving into a tricky topic? Are there other sequences in the interview where he backchannels as intensively as this, or is this exceptional?
- 9 (.) ((R briefly puts a finger to his left cheek))
- 10 R: I'd be curious to know wh-[what sort of things that people (d-) (.)  
[((C laughs lightly))
- R now wants to bring the hitherto 'unsaid' into the open – the intimations have been building up (a smile, a laugh and 'rumour'), and now R is interested in discussing it. Is this, for him, a rather straightforward matter of 'the hitherto unsaid', whereas in contrast, for C, could this be more a matter of the 'unsayable' – a set of disclosures that would sink her chances of getting the job? How does the different institutional positioning of the participants impact on this discussion? Interesting power and information asymmetries here (cf e.g. Scott's 'hidden transcripts'). Check this out in the way that the interaction unfolds from here on.
  - This is an indirect question – 'I'd be curious to know what sort of thing...' rather than 'What sort of things did people say?'. The grammatical elaboration makes it more polite than a direct question, as does the conditional 'I'd' (for 'I would') (which he subsequently changes to 'I'm curious' in line 24)
  - With 'I'd be curious', R's taking personal responsibility for the question – does he do this elsewhere in the interview? The question also responds to a comment from C that could never have been anticipated in advance, so this looks like a spontaneously emerging line of questioning, not a pre-scripted one. Earlier on in the interview, R & D have used 'just out of interest' & 'out of curiosity' to introduce unscheduled questions (R: 'just out of interest, what's the biggest number of pouches you've ever had' [101]; C: 'what time did he finish out of curiosity' [112])
  - On the video, there's no obvious shift in R's facial or postural demeanour when he produces these words, and C laughs lightly during it, maintaining the light-hearted keying of the previous utterances. But R doesn't complete the sentence, and instead, in line 11, he starts to change key.
  - Note the point where R cuts his sentence off – just before the verb characterising the actions or views of the people C was working with – '**what sort of things that people -**'. He does the same thing in lines 24- 26.
  - He comes back to the question later on (line 24), but only after he's authenticated his interest in the matter (lines 12 & 14), described his efforts to understand more (16), his findings (17 & 18) and the way these changed his original opinion (21,22). R evidently feels that the question needs to fully contextualised before he can really pose it. Compared with the other unscheduled questions in the interview, the contextualisation here is much more elaborate.
- 11 no because- (1)
- 'no' appears to be responding to C's laugh, equivalent to 'no seriously? I'm genuinely interested...'
  - 'because-': this starts a justification of his question, and the fact that he feels a need to explain the reasons for asking constructs the question as non-routine. What is it about the question that makes R think it needs justification? Is this just because it departs from the preset interview script? Is it because he's now going off on a line of questioning that isn't directly relevant to the assessment of C's job suitability? Is it because there's a history of industrial dispute lurking in the background? Is it possible to decide between these possibilities?
- 12 [I mean to an outsider=
- R starts to authenticate his curiosity, locating his question in a lack of first hand knowledge. In principle, his question 'I'd be curious to know what sort of things' could be construed as a manager's incredulity at the imbecility of the work-force. But if he's a detached outsider, this is much less likely, and the question can be seen as part of the pursuit of understanding rather than the return/resumption of an industrial dispute.
  - Questions directed to the detached pursuit of understanding aren't typical in job interviews. In job interviews, managers ask questions with a view to evaluating the candidate's response – so is there a tension here between R's purportedly detached interest in this particular issue and his more general position as an interview assessor?
- [((C starts to look serious again))
- 13 C: =mh=
- C's back-channelling shows she's picking up this new, non-jocular footing
- 14 R: =I don't work in a delivery office (.)

- 15 getting rid of the second delivery erm
- *The nature of R's 'outsiderhood' needs qualification - yes he works for the company, but not in a delivery office (in fact, he told C that 'I actually work in personnel' right at the start of the interview).*
- 16 I'm erm- I was asking round (.)
- **'Asking round'**: compare R's 'asking round' with C's 'heard a few rumours'. An interesting difference in the way they project their agency – R as the burrowing investigator, C as the innocent bystander. A reflection of institutional asymmetries? – exactly how?
  - *I wonder what business this was of his if he didn't work in the delivery office? Was he asking around in any official capacity, or was this a reflection of a more wide-ranging, intellectual interest in key issues facing the organisation? Maybe 'asking around' like this is what you'd expect with a personnel officer*
- 17 well most of the second >deliveries< weren't happening anyway
- *what's the force of R's 'well... anyway'? Quirk et al 1973:292-3 describe 'anyway' is a 'concessive conjunct', which "signal[s] the unexpected, surprising nature of what is being said in view of what was said before", and "well" is also a discourse marker that often signals disagreement. But the counter-position to R's utterance here isn't actually stated – the 'well' and 'anyway' in R's utterance clearly imply some influential complaints about the loss of the second delivery, but as before, worker dissent gets intimidated rather than stated.*
- 18 because we were forever needin the staff to cover the fi:rst deliveries
- *Compare 'we were forever needing the staff' with 'to an outsider' in line 12: R is now aligning with management*
- 19 C: mhm  
20 (.)
- 21 R: erm so in some ways I-I didn't think it was as big a change as I('d) thought  
22 it was
- *R's account reports a change of view, conjuring a sequence: first I thought the loss of the second delivery was a big change; then I asked around and found that most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> deliveries weren't happening anyway; so in the end I didn't see that the fuss was justified. The account of his enquiries and findings in lines 16, 17 & 18 suggests that this was an empirical conclusion, not just reflex siding with management. (Later on in the interview, he reveals that 'I've had to cover deliveries when offices went out on strike' (line 336 of the original.)*
  - **'in some ways'**: this does soften his position, and leave some space for C to come up with 'OTHER ways' in which it WAS a big change.
- 23 (.)  
24 ehm (.) so I'm curious what so-what sort of issues did people c-
- *R repeats the question he initiated in line 10, though now it's been contextualised as a genuine question. But he doesn't actually finish it, and as before, he hesitates with the selection of a verb to characterise what C's 'rumour-mongers' were doing. He starts with a word beginning with 'c' – was he about to say 'complain about' or 'come up with'? In the end, he opts for 'face' in line 26.*
  - *R has now explained how he's come to the (provisional) conclusion that the loss of the 2<sup>nd</sup> shift wasn't such a big issue (lines 12-22). So this question is now loaded – if C's going to elaborate on her earlier reference to rumours, she'll be contradicting R's current position on the matter. She's in something of a double-bind.*
- 25 C: I've not actu[ally] heard th- you know I'm-
- *C doesn't wait for R to produce a well-formed sentence (though she's not interrupting – she's perfectly able to anticipate what he's asking). She's producing a disclaimer, placing herself at the margins of the talk she's going to report on. In extricating herself from the double-bind that R has put her in, how far is she having to backtrack, contradicting the 'knowingness' that she implied in lines 6 & 7?*
- 26 R: [face
- **'face'**: R finally picks a word to characterise the morning workers' relationship with the organisational changes. 'Face' is a much more positive word than 'come up with' or 'complain', suggesting genuine difficulties, courage etc
- 27 C: I-I only hear parts
- **'th- you know I'm- I-I'**: Quite a few dysfluency markers in lines 25-27. How does this sequence fit in with standard CA accounts of the conventional marking of 'dispreferred' status within preference organisation? – there must be CA accounts of how people design talk to extricate themselves from sensitive topics/potential arguments/double-binds like this.
- 28 R: yeah=
- *Supportive back-channelling from R*
- 29 C: =of conversat[ions
- **'parts of conversations'**: She's emphasising her marginality – 'parts', not 'wholes', and 'conversations', not 'meetings'. Is she (a) reporting on her genuine ignorance or incomprehension about the things she's

- (over-)heard, or is she (b) responding to the difficulties involved in coming out with them in this particular situation (where they're at odds with the views of the person interviewing her). It's soon clear that it's (b) – tact – rather than (a) (ignorance), because she itemises two of their complaints (staff can't get off as early (35-36), and the walks have doubled (44-45)).
- What are the strategic options open to her at just this moment? She's knowingly spoken of rumours, and so if she claims she didn't understand them or that they weren't complaints, she risks being seen as either stupid or mischievous. Equally, if she says nothing, she might look secretive?
- 30 R: [mm  
31 [(R resumes writing)]
- This seems an extraordinary: on the one hand, R backchannels vocally, while on the other, withdrawing visual attention from C, focusing on the page in front of him instead. Is this tact? What on earth could he be writing about at this juncture? (Do we have his notes?) Does he resume writing in the middle of C's turns-at-talk in other parts of the interview?
  - In withdrawing his gaze, is R encouraging C to make D the addressed recipient, effectively handing the handling of this topic over to D? So far in this part of the interview, C's head has been turned towards R – she hasn't yet used eye contact to make D the addressed recipient.
- 32 C: [erm- from what- (1)  
[(C is looking ahead, at neither R nor D)]
- More dysfluencies, maybe responding to R withdrawing his gaze (cf Goodwin 1981)?
- 33 myow:n: idea- (.)
- **'my own idea'**: why this formulation? Showing that she's thoughtful, and that she's not part of the rumour-mill (recycling what's officially unsayable)? Echoing back the image of an 'independent thinker' that R projected in lines 12-21, converging towards him in the space he's created for workplace reflections?
- 34 i:s  
35 that the- [the scheme beforehand (.)  
36 [(C turns her head towards D & R looks up at C)]
- In turning her head, C is taking R's cue to address D on this issue. (In looking up, is R now taking a timid peek, knowing that he's successfully passed the buck!?)
- 37 meant they could go out a lot earlier (.)
- **'going out a lot earlier (line 37)...finish off earlier (line 42)**: presumably, what the delivery workers liked and complained about losing, was 'finishing off earlier', not the fact that they also had to start their rounds earlier. So she's not jumping straight in with a specification of their discontent..
  - **'they'**: The people that she's describing worked close enough with her for her to over-hear parts of their conversations in the mornings (lines 7,27-9), so in another context, could she have said 'we'? (or is there a distinction between 'collection' and 'delivery' jobs that would prevent this?). But her use of 'they' keeps these people at a distance from herself, maintaining the spirit of detached analysis.
  - **'a lot earlier'**: this is a strong formulation – see what she does with this as her account progresses.
  - Is the micro-pause at the end significant, inviting a response?
- 38 R: yeah ((nodding, looking at C))
- R provides the affirmation, displaying the open-mindedness intimated in the narrative in lines 12-22
  - What could R do at this point if he disagreed with C, or thought that she was wrong? He could produce an intonationally modulated, qualified yeah ('fall-rise'), but if he did, that would set up a fuller discussion of the changes, making the talk less relevant to assessment of the candidate's competence for this particular job.
- 39 C: is that correct?
- C is checking that her interviewers are going a long with her account, and we'll see that in line 42 she softens it, moving from 'a lot earlier' to 'earlier'
- 40 they could get [ou-
- **'get ou-'**: C stops this utterance before it's complete, reformulating it a second later as 'they could finish off earlier'. Is this because the distinction between 'going out' (at the start of the day) in line 37 and 'getting out' (at the end) her wouldn't be clear enough?
- 41 R: [yeah ((R resumes writing, and C turns head towards D))
- C has asked for confirmation in line 39 ('is that correct?'), creating a limited set of options for her interviewers – (a) provide confirmation (easiest), (b) don't respond at all (which would give off negative signals), (c) flatly contradict (which would be very tricky), (d) provide only qualified confirmation, leading into a discussion of the points of disagreement. R goes for (a), but in going back to writing, he withdraws active ongoing support for what she's saying.
  - How far is the line that R's developed here characteristic of a personnel officer? – opening a line of discussion about sensitive issues, showing open-mindedness, encouraging workers to put their case, but retreating from judgement about the validity of the case (leaving that to operational staff)?
- 42 C: and they could finish off earlier
- **'earlier'**: compare this with 'a lot earlier' in line 37. If she'd said 'finish off a lot earlier', this would have suggested that these people had a good case for seeing the changes as detrimental. If she'd said 'finish off a bit earlier', it would seem as if they were complaining about nothing very much, lining her up with the position that R articulated in line 21. What she actually says here – 'finish off earlier' – is more neutral. In fact, her shift from 'a lot earlier' in line 37 to just 'earlier' in line 42 shows her toning

*down the formulation as she feels her way forward over the course of lines 39-41 - logically, if the delivery workers start their rounds a lot earlier, they should finish a lot earlier as well.*

- 43 D: mhm.
- *The intonation on this isn't upbeat and encouraging – the intonation goes down rather than up. Also, 'mhm' is more non-committal than 'yes', signalling 'I've heard you' but not 'please do go on'. Might C hear this as a noticeable toning down from R's two 'yeahs' in lines 38 & 41?*
- 44 C: the: wa:lks hav:::e
- 45 >doubled< ((in terms of the intonation in lines 44 & 45, C sounds like she's starting on a list))
- *The intonation suggests she's starting on a list, and this is consistent with line 50 & 51 where she displays something like 'not being able to remember'.*
  - **'doubled'**: *this also sounds strong, and if she carries on like this (escalating her account of the complaints in a list), it might not be good for her candidacy.*
  - *I wonder why C seems to be going for escalation, having taken care to gauge the R & D's reaction to her account a second ago, and then toned it down accordingly? Maybe 'walks have doubled' was a phrase often used in the union literature, and this is the formulation that she's managed to recover in her mental search?*
- 46 (1)
- *This is quite a long pause.*
    - *Of course, C does have the option here of continuing with the enumeration of the complaints, regardless of R&D's failure to provide any verbal response, but she was active gauging their reaction in line 39, and she's not abandoning her caution.*
    - *D's delay here fits with the patterns of preference organisation described in conversation analysis. It signals that he's going for the dispreferred option – he's not going to confirm C's statement.*
- 47 D: s:ome. ((D nods his head a little))
- *Qualified agreement, rather than outright disagreement. But D's intonation doesn't indicate that he wants to elaborate on this.*
- 48 C: [some have doubled whereas t-  
[((C withdraws eye contact with D, and looks straight ahead))
- **'some have doubled'**: *C accepts D's qualification and incorporates it into her account, continuing the same trajectory as before, styling it now as a collaborative production?*
  - **'whereas t-'**: *it sounds as though she continuing with her list. What kind of thing might 'whereas' be about to introduce – 'whereas the pay stayed the same'? It sounds as though she's about to move from a description of the-way-the-work-has-been-getting-harder to an account of the organisation's failure to reward this. If this is the case, she's wise to abandon this clause!*
- 49 [so em (.)  
[((C looks up in the air to her right, gazing above of D))
- **'so'**: *the word 'so' often signals that a conclusion is coming up – in other words she's abbreviating/abandoning her list itemisation, going for the upshot instead..*
  - **'so em (.)'**: *but she doesn't provide a conclusion either, and in the next thing she says, she makes a show of trying to continue with her list, which might at least be safer than offering her own assessment of the list's significance .*
- 50 ((speaking fast, breathy & quieter:)) [(I also) heard them mention (1.5)
- 51 [(C looks right down to her left, to  
the left & below R))
- *C is back with the task of listing, which is of course still complying politely with R's request for a report in line 24. But she's now making a show of actively trying to remember, giving up after 1.5 second in line 52 ('I dunno'). In doing so, she escapes the responsibility of producing an account that's proving relatively unpalatable, and she does so in a way that shows she's willing but simply unable.*
  - **'I also heard them mention'**: *C is retreating from personal identification with the list – contrast 'my own idea' in line 33. She's back to describing herself as over-hearing, and 'mention' also downplays the weight of what she's reporting (compare e.g. 'discuss', or 'claim')*
- 52 [I dunno just the union all the time ((starts laughing))
- 53 [(shaking her head, not looking at anyone))
- **'I dunno'**: *a disclaimer, extricating her from the ability to provide R with an adequate answer.*
  - **'just the union'**: *organised industrial politics is out in the open now, but C's 'just' gives it diminished significance*
  - **'all the time ((laughs, shakes head))'**: *constructs the union as habitual/incorrigible grumblers (rather than a strategic group acting selectively on specific issues of importance). Interesting contrast with 'a few rumours' in line 7, and C is now aligning with management more explicitly than before.*
- 54 R&D: [(laughs))
- 55 C: [(carries on laughing for c. 6 secs))
- *Does C laugh for as long as this anywhere else in the interview?*
  - *This is now consensual laughter about the union, and it is different from C's laughter in lines 4 and 7, which was spiced with innuendo and then explicitly down-keyed by R in line 11 ('no because')*
- 56 D: [(laughing:)) welcome to ((NAME OF THE COMPANY))

[(D is looking down at the table in front of him, and then at the end of the utterance, looks up at R)]

- o A humorous contribution, amplifying C's 'just the union all the time', and now confirming a shared position. The difference of opinion intimated in his earlier utterances in lines 43 & 47 is now passed

57 ((all laugh))  
58 R: (that three month's and you' )  
59 R: okay that's all right

- o R draws this sub-topic to an official close

60 (.) ((R looks up from his writing))  
61 [erm (1) what about in oth-other jobs

- o the erm & the pause re-establishes a serious footing
- o R is now going back to the prescribed interview question

62 (.)  
63 er-were there changes ei-either because: (.) the nature of the job changed  
64 while you were ther:e (.) or you moved into something that was very  
65 different than what you'd previous had experience of  
66 (.)  
67 I imagine workin Vision Express must have been a little bit different  
68 C: mm-  
69 well- p what-  
70 p-between the two companies [or as in:  
71 R: [yeah  
72 (1)  
73 R: er- ah- I mean- (1.5) that's quite an unusual-  
74 y- you know actually making the spectacles=  
75 C: =mhm  
76 (.)  
77 R: erm- (.) and the time pressure that- that your under t- to achieve that  
78 C: [mhm  
79 R: [that must have been quite different from just about anything else you've  
80 ever worked in  
81 C: erm well .hh it is  
82 I think- t- [m-majority of the jobs that I have worked in I have bin:-  
83 [(R resumes writing))  
84 erm (.) [customer focussed and deadlines n under pressure  
85 [(C looks towards D)) ((C looks away from  
86 from D, & he writes  
87 a couple of words))  
88 (.)  
89 .hhh erm (1) catering I've m- you kn[ow  
90 R: [oh yeah  
91 C: m- my family (.) own a business and I'v worked in that since the age of  
92 nine  
93 (.) you know helping them out  
94 .hh erm (.)  
95 but that- (.) I suppose that's [a different field altogether  
96 [(R looks up from writing))  
97 [from customer focus but-  
98 R: [yeah  
99 (2)  
100 C: ((quieter:)) I've sort of gone off on a tangent now .hhh  
101 (4)  
102 R: nno it's (1) I mean the range of experience just [shows y y to-  
103 C: [mhm  
104 R: in many ways that y you used to-  
105 C: yeah I'm [quite  
106 R: [having new things thrown at you [so .hh no:  
107 [(R resumes writing))  
108 I-I don't see anything::  
109 ((to Daniel)) anything you need to add to that ( )?  
110 D: no  
111 [no I'm comfortable with that  
112 R: (((very quietly:)) okay  
113 (.)  
114 R: ((quiet:)) all right  
115 (.)  
116 er- (2) you've done a number of rou-delivery rounds

## An introduction to multimodality

Carey Jewitt & Jeff Bezemer

### Introduction

Day 4 of this course discusses a ‘multimodal approach’ to interaction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress et. al., 2001). Multimodality looks into how people make meaning using the ‘semiotic resources’ available to them. In the job interview clip these resources include seating arrangement, body posture, dress, gesture, gaze, writing, and speech. In a classroom they might also include resources such as writing. When analyzing communication, we ask (1) which semiotic resources do people use and combine to make meaning and (2) how these modal resources work: what you can do with them and what not: their potentials and constraints, their ‘affordances’.

### Some starting points

#### *1. Language is one mode among many others*

Whereas language is the starting point for the linguistic ethnographer, from a multimodal perspective language is always one mode among others, operating together as ‘ensembles’. The transcript we have looked at is organized around language, and later on non-verbal cues have been added to it. In order not to privilege language and to ensure that non-linguistic interaction is not lost in transcription multimodal analysis usually takes time as an anchor rather than utterances or linguistically defined turns, filling in the range of modes in play. In this example this would include description of the spatial layout of the interview room, the distances and angles between participants, the duration and direction (object) of the gaze of participants, the objects of interaction, pens and papers and the moments of writing, the posture of participants – when they shift and maintain a posture, the direction (and degree) of their body and its alignment with other participants, their gestures and object/direction/focus of these gestures. There are different ways of making multimodal transcripts from these ‘descriptions’, and we will look at the differences between these on Day 4.

#### *2. Including or excluding modes in your analysis has epistemological implications*

As the linguistic micro-analysis of the job interview has shown the approach that we take to interactions, and the tools (such as transcripts) we use to look at it, shapes the production of data—it configures the world. Linguistic ethnography and multimodality draw different boundaries around the data – what is to become the domain of the analysed. While the linguistic ethnographic account of this example attends to some respects of the ‘non-verbal’ the reasons for inclusion and exclusion of this additional information is primarily to provide a *context* for the linguistic (Cf. Gumperz’ ‘contextualisation cues’). From a multimodal perspective the context is the dynamic interaction of all of these modes. Which is not say that a multimodal analysis is always useful – this depends on your research question and theoretical approach. On Day 4 we will address the question of when multimodal analysis may be appropriate. But for now we could say that attention to all the modes in play may be useful if your research question is something like: How do teachers and students engage with Science in secondary school? How do doctors establish rapport with their patients? How can the participation of Xs in meetings Y be improved? How do commuters find their way out of the station? How do museum visitors find their way through the exhibition? How do police interrogators elicit confessions? How do people negotiate space in the bus?

#### *3. The use of modes is always socially and culturally shaped*

Job interviews constitute a particular ‘activity type’. Such activity types (‘genres’, ‘context’, ‘situation’, practice’) come with specific potentials and constraints for the various semiotic

resources available to the participants. When being interviewed for a job you'd like to get, the resources available to you are different than when you find yourself in the court room, or in a political interview, or in the audience of a stand-up-comedian. Hence the prominence of and functions served by different modes depends on the activity type within which it is framed.

### The job interview

It is important to stress that a multimodal approach does not deny the potential significance of speech. Having said that, as the 'micro-analysis' that has been presented focused on speech, we already have (1) some idea of what is going on in this clip and (2) we have some idea of what speech 'does' in this clip. So let's focus on some other resources for a moment.

#### 1. Seating arrangement

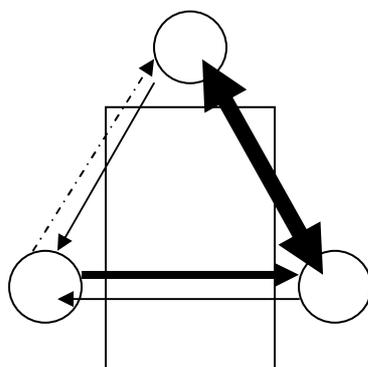
We do not know from the data set who was in control of arranging the seats as they are (perhaps the interviewers, the researchers, the company, the health and safety authorities), but they have chosen a layout that affords 'equality' among three participants: they have equal access to each other. It's not difficult to think of arrangements that define the roles of the participants significantly different.

#### 2. Gaze, body posture and movement

If we watch the job interview clip a couple of times, turning the volume down, we can observe that the interaction between the participants is not even/equal:

- Through directing and maintaining his gaze, turning his body, using 'open' gestures at the interviewee, keeping notes, and his talk the interviewer on the right expresses/realises his lead role.
- The interviewer on the left, through the use of his gaze and posture being directed more at the other interviewer than at the interviewee, appropriates a different role, one that allows the interviewer on the right to perform his 'lead' role.
- The interviewee uses gaze, head tilt and posture to direct her orientation. For instance, she usually gazes at the right interviewer until he starts making notes, in which case she turns her gaze to the interviewer on the left.

So gaze patterns and body posture suggest who engages with whom and with what intensity, and we can map these as a visual analytical way of thinking about the data:



## Rationale

But what does this add to what we already knew about what was happening here? We suggest that one could equally ask what a linguistic analysis might add to a multimodal one – our point being that these approaches are differently interested and focused and yet overlapping and complimentary rather than in competition. But here are a number of reasons why we think multimodality can be useful.

### 1. *'Reinforcing' meanings*

The strength of meanings only becomes fully clear when attending to the ensemble of modes within which speech operates. In the job interview, an analysis of speech told us that power relations are unequal. Gaze patterns and other uses of modes point to a similar unequal relation. This has a kind of an accumulating effect. Given the interview genre and the power relations involved in the job interview it is perhaps unsurprising that most of the modes in use in this interaction (gesture, posture, position, gaze, talk) reinforce each other in this way rather than modifying one another or expressing very different meanings.

### 2. *Modification of meanings*

Meanings expressed in one mode are often modified by a simultaneous expression in another mode. A very 'strong' spoken statement ("I hate you") can thus become mild, or reframed as irony, sarcasm or something else, and likewise a very 'strong' gesture can be modified by speech, or facial expression, et cetera. Modes are always being used simultaneously, hence this kind of modification is always happening.

### 3. *Realization of different meanings*

Meanings expressed in one mode can be accompanied by different –complementary or contrastive–meanings expressed in other modes. Think of unauthorized, silent communication going in eg a classroom, or 'imposed' discourses such as school uniforms or safety regulations detailing the layout of the office. In the case of the job interview clip, a focus on language serves to dissolve the presence of the left interviewer. His silence through much of the interaction makes him barely visible in the transcript and the triad of the interaction is moved from the analytical focus – in short he becomes analytically unimportant. Multimodality offers a way of making his presence visible. If we take language to be one mode among others and meaning to be produced through the interaction of modes the presence of the man on the left is a central part of the production of the talk and the relationship between the three participants. Imagine how the talk might have unfolded if the interviewer on the left would have been absent. Would they still have opted for the triangular seating arrangement? Would the interviewee have continued talking while the interviewer was making notes? Would the interviewer actually have made as many notes as he did?

### 4. *Organization of communication*

A linguistic analysis shows that there is a linguistic structure to the interaction and a multimodal analysis shows that this linguistic structure is a part of a broader multimodal configuration of the interpersonal structure realised by the participants' use of gaze, body posture, writing and spatial position. In other words, communication is not necessarily structured by linguistic units such as utterances, and turns do not necessarily begin where one participant starts talking and stops again. Analysis of the full range of communicational resources that professionals and others are using in interaction can be useful in investigating how communication is managed, understanding how it breaks down and how it might be made more effective.

## **An indicative illustration of transcontextual analysis**

Adam Lefstein

Incorporating texts into ethnographic practice is essential to institutional ethnography. It is what enables it to reach beyond the locally observable and discoverable into the translocal social relations and organization that permeate and control the local. Enunciating this principle is one thing; creating a practice or practices that realize it is another. (Smith, 2006, p. 65)

While engaging in micro- and multimodal analyses, you probably tried to stay focused as close as possible to the immediacy of the interaction, basing your inferences on what the participants were saying and doing. However, you at least implicitly based your interpretations on conjectures about what happened before the interaction and what is expected to come next, probably noting for instance traces of these activities in texts or other artifacts that originated outside the interaction, such as the interviewee's identity tag, the set-up of the room or the interviewer's papers.

Indeed, the very designations of "interviewer" and "interviewee" are institutional identities that participants bring into the interaction from the outside. These identities, and their divergent roles, responsibilities and purposes, are created by the Company, which employs the interviewers and into whose ranks the interviewee is applying to join. The Company, in so doing, applies existing 'models' of such roles, again brought in from the past and the outside. The interaction wouldn't make much sense without an appreciation of the Company's influence upon it. We get glimpses of this influence, for example, in the tension surrounding the "rumours" and the Union, though most of the details around these issues appear to have been left unspoken.

How can we come to grips with the 'absent presence' of this and related contexts? How can we move beyond the specific event to investigate the forces that influence it – forces that are often distant in both time and space? One point of leverage is to follow the 'itineraries' of texts that are woven into the interaction: texts that precede the interaction and/or texts that are produced as a result of it.

In order to briefly illustrate this idea, which we investigate in greater depth in Day 5, we provide excerpts from three texts: the Company's instructions to interviewers, the pamphlet given to interviewees by the Company in order to help them prepare for the interview and the Interviewee Assessment form that interviewers are required to complete after the interview.

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Text #1 – from the instructions to interviewers

## Guidelines for Conducting Front Line Interviews

This four page manual, produced by the Company, includes the following headings: “Introduction”, “Encouraging diversity”, “Avoiding Discrimination”, “Using the Structured Interview”, “Questioning Techniques”, and “Hints and Tips for Successful Interviewing” (a set of Dos and Don’ts). Below we’ve reproduced one section:

### Using the Structured Interview

#### **Introducing the Interview**

Remember to make the candidate’s [sic] feel at ease, most interviewees are nervous. It is your job to get to know them as well as you can within the timescale available, by helping them to put the best case they can for their candidature. Introduce yourself and explain the structure and length of the interview. If possible offer them a drink of water or tea. Make sure they understand you will be looking for examples of what **they** have done in the past.

#### **Why use a Structured Interview**

The structured interview ensures the same information is collected from all candidates, and that the questions asked are relevant to capabilities that support performance in the job. Deviation from these questions can mean that the candidate is treated differently from other candidates, which provides them with the opportunity to appeal against the decision and could provide grounds for indirect discrimination. Do not try to mark the candidate’s responses as you ask the questions. Observe and record, during the interview, but do not try to judge or formally mark the response until after the interview.

Text #2 – from pamphlet for candidates

## What should I expect from the interview?

During the interview, you will be asked about yourself and your past experiences.

The questions will be based on five different topics. You will be asked to give some brief examples. Ideally these should be examples from the last two to three years, either from your work life or school, although you may also use other examples as appropriate.

### **What can I do to prepare for the interview?**

The five interview topic areas for you to think about are listed on the following pages. To help you prepare for this interview, you may like to think about the topics in advance and write down a few examples from your own experience. This is purely for your own preparation and to help you get ready for questions at the interview. No-one in [the Company] will need to see the answers that you write.

[The pamphlet devotes one page to each of the following headings: “Getting on with others”, “Dealing with customers”, “Staying motivated”, “Doing things differently”, and “Improving things”. Underneath each explanation blank space is provided for “Your notes”. Below is the explanation of one of the questions:]

### Doing things differently

Think about a time when you were asked to do something differently, or try out new things. How did you react? Did you enjoy the new experience? Do you consider yourself a flexible person? Think about why.

Examples might include: taking on new tasks in the workplace, doing a completely new job, being asked to change how you do something, starting a job after many years at school, changing your routine for yourself or your family, having to adjust to something new in your life.

Text #3 from “Interview Assessment Form”:

<p><b>Key Capability Dimension: Openness to Change</b></p>		<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Key Capability: Managing Change)</b></p>		<p><b>Grade</b> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Is willing and enthusiastic to adopt to changing situations and requirements; willing to try out new ideas; positive about doing something in a different way, adaptable; prepared to alter the way something is done, flexible; does not stick to rigid ways of doing something if there are more appropriate alternatives; is motivated to modify their behaviour.</p>		
<p><b>Questions</b></p> <p><i>The job involves having to change and adapt to new ways of doing things at times. Think of a recent occasion when you had to adapt to a new way of doing things. What was the situation?</i></p> <p><b>For example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>having to change something you were doing when your manager asked you to, maybe having to take on new responsibilities, or to work more as a team.</i></li> <li>• <i>having to learn a new part in a school play.</i></li> <li>• <i>having to play a different position in a sports team.</i></li> <li>• <i>having to cope with unexpected redundancy or early retirement.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Tell me....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>what the change was....?</i></li> <li>• <i>what did <b>YOU</b> have to do to adapt or adjust to the new way of doing things....?</i></li> <li>• <i>how did you cope with having to change your way of doing things....?</i></li> <li>• <i>what was the hardest thing about having to change....?</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Optional follow-up question</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>what have you learnt about yourself from the way you coped with the change....?</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Candidate’s Responses</b></p>	

How can and should we understand these texts? There are many possibilities, and the decision of how to interpret the texts is dependent on our research purposes and theoretical assumptions. The documents also change function depending upon one's perspective: for the person who designed the evaluation form they probably "mean" something different than for the interviewer who is required to write in the form, or for the analyst who comments on both activities. One possibility is to read the texts as utterances or rhetorical acts, i.e. to look at what problem the authors are trying to solve, which audience(s) they are addressing, and how the situation constrains or enables their possible means of persuasion (cf. Bitzer, 1968). Another approach, similar to our analysis of activity type above, would be to look at intertextuality and genre, examining the ways in which these texts evoke the language, structures, images and/or style of other texts (e.g. Briggs & Bauman, 1992, Rabinowitz, 1987; Swales, 1990). Yet another approach would be to analyse these texts as instances of a broader discourse, e.g. critiquing their ideological assumptions, or how they position potential readers (Fairclough, 1995; Luke, 1995; van Dijk, 1993). A fourth approach, which we illustrate here, is to trace the circulation of voices and discourses, as the written texts become instantiated in participants' spoken texts, which are then later inscribed into further written documents (e.g. Blommaert, 2001; Briggs, 1997). (It's important to emphasise that these different interpretive frameworks are not mutually exclusive; they represent complementary heuristics the analyst can draw upon in exploring various dimensions of the text and its role in the interaction.)

One thing that immediately strikes us is the extent to which the texts have attempted (and also, to a lesser extent, have succeeded) to pre-script the activities of both interviewers and interviewees, and how they enable the 're-scripting' of the event after the interview – the creation of a 'record' that follows and imposes a specific, regimented, structure. Questions are clearly specified, and the interviewers are warned against posing their own, original questions: "deviation from these questions can mean that the candidate is treated differently from other candidates, which provides them with the opportunity to appeal against the decision and could provide grounds for indirect discrimination" – in other words, deviations from the script could expose the Company to legal action. Likewise, the pamphlet for interviewees instructs them in how to conform to a set of narrowly defined expectations for how to answer the questions, including even examples of acceptable topic areas from which to draw their accounts of relevant experience.

We can observe how both the interviewers' interventions and the candidate's responses are oriented toward the criteria set out in these texts. For example, in line 84, the candidate attempts to justify her diverse work experience as evidence of ability to "deal with customers", while the interviewers reassure her by invoking the "Doing things differently/Managing change" criterion (lines 102-109).

However, in the main part of the section selected for analysis in this workshop the interviewer deviates significantly from the script (starting in line 10). In our micro-analysis we noted that there is heightened tension here: intensive backchanneling, increased seriousness, justification of the question, etc. Against the context of the instructions for interviewers we can begin to appreciate the risk involved in this shift: not only has he moved into unfamiliar territory, but also into dangerous territory from the standpoint of institutional requirements.

As we noted in the micro-analysis, it is interesting that the interviewer took notes during this deviation. What was he writing? And how did it fit into the Interviewee Assessment Form?

Under which category – cf. the five topic areas “Getting on with others”, “Dealing with customers”, “Staying motivated”, “Doing things differently”, and “Improving things” – were these notes recorded? Unfortunately, we are not privy to his notes in this case, but we can begin to develop some conjectures. The path into the diversion began with mention of change: “as a business we’ve gone through quite a bit of change...” (line 3). It is not hard to imagine how that remark could have served as a preface to the prescribed “The job involves having to change and adapt to new ways of doing things at times. Think of a recent occasion when you had to adapt to a new way of doing things. What was the situation?” (text #3) And indeed, at the end of the deviation, the interviewer returns to these questions, asking in lines 61-65: “What about in oth-other jobs er-were there changes ei-either because: (.) the nature of the job changed while you were ther:e (.) or you moved into something that was very different than what you’d previous had experience of?”

So, if the category is “managing change”, what notes were being recorded? Did he write about the rumours Pippa heard, or about the way she positioned herself relative to the Unions? It’s likely that her comments were somehow translated into the criteria of the Interview Assessment Form:

Is willing and enthusiastic to adopt to changing situations and requirements; willing to try out new ideas; positive about doing something in a different way, adaptable; prepared to alter the way something is done, flexible; does not stick to rigid ways of doing something if there are more appropriate alternatives; is motivated to modify their behaviour.

We don’t know precisely how the candidate’s responses were inscribed, but we can see from this example how such transcontextual analysis – i.e. examination of processes of pre-scription, enactment, and inscription – allow us to bring into study of the interactional event broader contexts and time-scales.

## Talk on Trial: Job interviews, language and ethnicity

The data used in this workshop were drawn from “Talk on Trial”, a two year project (2004-6) funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, which examined the discourse practices of job interviews. The full report is available here:

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep344.pdf>

You might also like to read two articles based on this research:

1. Roberts, Celia and Campbell, Sarah (2005) Fitting stories into boxes: Rhetorical and Textual Constraints on Candidate’s Performances in British Job Interviews, *Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 2(1): 45-73.

### *Abstract*

This paper examines the restrictions placed on the narrative practices of candidates in job interviews, looking in particular at the ways in which these narratives are made bureaucratically processable, as they are reduced and organised by the interviewer into a limited number of evaluative categories and a written record, and the impact which this has upon the candidates’ chances of success, particularly those born abroad (BA) for whom English is not an expert language.

2. Campbell, Sarah and Roberts, Celia (in press) Migration, Ethnicity and Competing Discourses in the Job Interview: Synthesising the Institutional and Personal, in *Discourse and Society*

### *Abstract*

This paper, based on a unique data set of video-recorded job interviews, examines the institutional and personal discourses of the competency-based interview and how their synthesis produces an ‘authentic self’. The interview’s requirement for the synthesis of work-based and personal identities is particularly disadvantaging to foreign-born minority ethnic candidates. Foreign-born candidates often lack access to British ‘job interview English’ because of unemployment, marginalisation in ethnic work units and the dominant culture’s ‘othering’ of their identity.

Examples of candidates producing a convincing synthetic persona are contrasted with unsuccessful candidates whose ‘lack’ of synthesis marks them as having a hybrid identity. They are judged by interviewers as ‘inconsistent’, ‘untrustworthy’ and non-belongers to the organisation. Since there is little relationship between the required discursive skill of interviewees and the actual demands of the job, the interview ritual is as much about constructing the institution as it is about the fair and effective selection of candidates.

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