

3 Turn management in drama

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EDITORS' PREFACE

Vimala Herman explores the insights that Conversation Analysis, developed by the ethnomethodologists, might afford the study of drama. In particular, she examines the concept of 'the turn': when someone speaks, they take a turn at speech, and when speech alternates, turns alternate as well. Drama as dialogue is a multi-input form, and this raises the issue of the distribution of turns and their management. After briefly reviewing the work of the Conversation Analysts, Herman considers the contribution that turn-taking patterns make to the understanding of situation and character in plays. She conducts an analysis of an extract from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and shows how turn-taking choices (e.g. who speaks to whom, length of turns, pauses, interruptions) affect the reader's interpretation of the characters' speech.

INTRODUCTION

The study of dramatic dialogue as interaction is a complex matter (Herman 1995), involving various frameworks of analysis, but central to the dynamics of interaction is the concept of *the turn*, which can be glossed, informally, as the enactment of a speaker's right to speak by taking an opportunity to speak in a speech event or situation. Although the scope of the concept of 'the turn' is debated in studies of conversation (see Edelsky 1993, for a review), the above suffices for our present purposes. When a speaker speaks, he or she takes a turn at speech and as speech alternates, turns alternate as well. The distribution of turns has, however, to be managed to mitigate the threat of speech chaos when numerous interacting participants have rights to speak and wish to take turns. The 'systematics' involved in turn-taking and turn management have been explored by the Conversational Analysts of the ethnomethodological school. The work of these analysts will be detailed briefly below.

TURN AND FLOOR MANAGEMENT

In a seminal article entitled 'A simplest systematics . . .' the Conversational Analysts of the ethnomethodological school, Sacks *et al.* (1978), attempted to describe the systematic properties involved in turn-taking and turn management in ordinary conversation. Out of the analysis of a large body of data, collected from contexts of naturally occurring speech, the authors revealed that spontaneous conversation, contrary to our habitual expectations, was both ordered and orderly and responsive to unconscious 'rules' that were being observed by participants in daily talk. Generalizing over the regularities identified, a 'system' or 'systematics' for talk regulation was proposed, which is composed of two components: (a) a turn-allocational component and (b) a turn-constructive component (Sacks *et al.* 1978; Levinson 1983: 296–303).

The *turn-allocational component* regulates the changeover of turns. In general, turn change proceeds smoothly: one participant talks, stops, the next participant talks, stops, and so on, but there can also be conflict at the changeover point, termed the Transition Relevance Place (abridged to TRP). A 'one-party-speaks-at-a-time' rule ensures that where there is interruption of the current speaker's turn, or the overlapping of speech either at the end or the beginning of turns, one speaker will drop out so that the turn-holder can proceed with his or her speech. Where this is not the case, and overlaps hold across most or all of the duration of the current speaker's turn, according to the 'one-party-speaks-at-a-time' rule, it could be assessed as conflict, but this is not the only option (see below), since other conventions might well be in force, which could complicate and problematize assessments of what is or is not an interruption or overlap. At any rate, turns have to be relinquished, so that the alternating course of the dialogic structure of turns comes into existence for the interactive possibilities of dialogue to be realized.

And the changeover can be accomplished in different ways. Firstly, *the current speaker can select next speaker* by indicating preference by naming, by the use of pronouns or address forms, by pointing, or by eye contact and gazing at the selected speaker, etc. Secondly, *the next speaker can self-select*, especially if the first option was not used. The selected speaker may not respond so that there is a *turn-lapse*, and the current speaker can incorporate the ensuing silence as 'lapse' into current turn and transform it into a 'pause', and continue with the turn and attempt to relinquish the turn at the next TRP by the use of either of the two methods described above. In the case of a lapsed turn, the silence that follows is regarded as an *attributable* silence, and attributed to the lapser as his or her silence. The lapser 'owns' the silence, as it were, although both parties could well be covertly active in different ways for its duration so that the silence is shared, but disparately. And there are other kinds of silence (Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985; Herman 1995: 96–9). Intra-turn speaker silences could be assessed as *pause*, and these can signify hesitation, or be used as a ploy for emphasis. Pause-ridden speech can also be

used to dramatize the trials of bringing thought and language into alignment (Chafe 1985). *Gaps* can stretch from initial non-responsiveness followed by a response to full-scale silence. In the former case, when initial silence occurs between turns, gaps may constitute *switching pauses* when it is unclear as to whether the silence should be attributed to the first or second speaker or to both. An initial stretch of silence in response to another's speech can also be interpreted as caution, the speaker following the 'think before you speak' maxim. If nobody were selected or a potential next speaker does not self-select, the gap that follows can bring about closure. Silences are generally interpreted in relative terms; relative, that is, to the various cultural or interpersonal values associated with the performance of speech in context. For instance, interactants who privilege a fast tempo and verbosity in speech could find slower, deliberate, disfluent or laconic speakers a trial – and vice versa.

Turn allocational strategies can construct the *order* of turns via the various next speaker selection strategies mentioned above. In two-party speech, turns may alternate in A-B-A-B . . . fashion. In multi-party instances, the order may sanction speech rights for only some selected or self-selected other or others within the pool of possible participants, and flout the democracy of turn rights which is the unstated norm believed to be operative in Western, English-speaking contexts, which is where most turn-taking research has been conducted. Turn-allocational strategies, however, can control the turn order adopted. And the order is significant, since who speaks to whom and who is not spoken to within the contingencies of a situation can colour the way in which the situation itself develops. For instance, if in three-party speech the order were to be A-C-A-B-A-B-A-B . . . C's exclusion from speech by the selection strategies used by the other two could create a noticeably asymmetrical situation.

The *turn-constructive component* regulates variables like the size or length and linguistic texture of a turn. Again, where democracy of turn rights is a strong expectation, long speeches require negotiation, and in conversation speakers who require extra turn time usually signal the need, and attempt to get ratification prior to taking a long turn, as is evident in instances when speakers wish to narrate some personal experience. Bids for 'the floor' are made and, if accepted, the narrative proceeds, as in A: *You know what happened on my street the other day?*/B: *What?*/A: *Well, there was this . . .*, where B, via the responsive question, hands the turn back to A for further elaboration as answer. Long turns place a burden of listening on recipients and, hence, should be used judiciously if the threats of boredom, hostility, etc. on the part of listeners are to be countered. Long turns also block access to the floor for other potential speakers and can function as a ploy for dominance, exclusion or coercion, depending on whether resistance or challenge or counter-measures are undertaken in response.

Short turns, too, are dependent on the responsive dimension for their value interactively – and could be used to signify indifference, urgency, the need

for extra detail if questions are relayed in succession on the same topic, and so on. Various speech repertoires and styles could be used to vary the linguistic structure and texture of the turn – different registers, markers of formality or informality, fluency or disfluency, dialects, code-switching, bilingualism, one-word versus multi-clause turns, poetic or rhetorical styles, etc. could be mobilized as the occasion demands.

Turns also have a joint orientation to the *topic* of talk, i.e. what is talked about, which can form a point of focus as participants initiate, develop, close or change topics via the course of talk. The cohesiveness of a stretch of talk is achieved by various means, but the glue of topic is one important factor. Successive turns and speakers can orientate collaboratively to develop a topic, or negotiate change or closure. Turns in sequence have a projective and a retroactive dimension to them; they can point back to a previous turn, as when an answer is given to a question issued in a previous turn, or constrain the nature of the next turn, as when one issues a greeting to another. But *turn skips* are also possible when one speaker does not orientate to a previous speaker's turn or concerns, but orientates to topics raised in one's own which involves skipping the other's turn. Thus, although each participant takes a turn in alternating fashion, a double strand of talk running more or less independently can also occur. Thus different degrees of co-operativeness and intermeshing of concerns are possible.

The system, as described by Sacks *et al.* (1978) is a general system as well as one that is *locally* managed by participants themselves within the contingencies of a situation. The local management aspects of the system can exploit the different features and variables for specific functional uses.

FLOORS AND TURNS

The above description of the turn-taking system provides one set of conventions for the conversational 'floor' and the 'rules' by which turns are managed within it. '*The floor*' in Conversational Analysis is actually a complex concept and is understood differently by different analysts (Edelsky 1993). The most usual usage is to conflate 'turn' and 'floor', so that taking a turn involves taking the 'floor', or 'having' the floor. Where 'schisms' occur, and different groupings and participant structures develop more or less simultaneously, as in large dinner parties, and there are different foci for talk among different participants, multiple floors can occur (Shultz, Florio, and Erickson 1982), while the overall situation remains the same. In 'free-for-all' floors (Edelsky 1993) much talk is conducted in overlap, with interactive business being jointly constructed via simultaneous speech which is not assessed as either conflictual or competitive.

Other turn-taking conventions can create different types of 'floor' and thus organize the flow of talk differently. In institutional settings, the order of turns is controlled not spontaneously but by appropriate institutional conventions. For instance, in a formal board meeting, the Chair would authorize

who speaks when, as the Speaker would in the House of Commons. Legal contexts have elaborate arrangements regarding who speaks when and to whom. Different cultures, too, could adopt turn orders which award precedence to seniority by age or social rank even in non-institutional settings, as for instance, the Japanese 'round robin' type of floor arrangements in mixed-sex interactions (Watanabe 1993).

The 'one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time' requirement in the turn-taking model described above privileges the lone speaker and its turn, which assumes centrality and becomes the focus of others' attention. The consequence is that a focused and homogeneous 'floor' results via turn-taking rules which preserve the requirement. Where there are dual starts, for instance, one speaker must drop out so that the integrity of the speaking turn can be maintained and the turn can proceed unsullied by other voices. Interruption and overlap are thus assessed as 'competition' for the floor in this model. And in most cases, these conventions appear to operate as predicted, not least because participants wish to hear what the speaker has to say.

'Free-for-all' floors, on the other hand, as Edelsky (1993) notes, are characterized by much simultaneous speech with partial or full *overlaps* enacting collaboration of a different kind, with multiple speakers using the same next turn in answer to a question, or building up different aspects of a joke in different ways simultaneously to tease previous speakers, or by different speakers and different utterance units and contents, contributing to the development of an idea, again simultaneously, with multiple speakers displaying thereby that they are on 'the same wavelength'. Collaboration in this kind of floor uses simultaneous speech, overlaps, etc. positively. These aspects are generally negatively assessed in the singly constructed floor. Different conventions for turn-taking result with the same structural and behavioural features being open to different interpretations. The 'free-for-all' or 'collective' floor is more multi-dimensional than linear, with different kinds of speech business proceeding simultaneously, and with overlaps and simultaneous speech not seen as conflictual. The central speaker role is more circumscribed by comparison, and self-selection in the 'free-for-all' floor can produce multiply occupied speech turns as a matter of course, the focus to previous turn being jointly and multiply performed by others as a mode of joint collaboration. Erstwhile hearers, as speakers, may develop their own line of thought, in depth, in speech tandem with others without a sense of conflict occurring. Turn-holders have to negotiate their goals in speech and may often speak in unison with others, either sharing common goals and functions with different utterances, or even with the same utterance.

Different floor conventions generate different turn-taking strategies and the interactive structures that they authorize as 'normal'. Singly developed floors with the 'one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time' rule in force, awards a pivotal role to the *sotto voce* speaker, with 'collaboration' interpreted as respect of speaker's rights; others are cast as non-speaking 'hearers' who change discourse role to speakers with the same turn rights. Turns respect previous

turns, and, if projecting future turns, require reciprocal attention, usually from one next speaker, either current-speaker-selected, or self-selected. A linear path of development ensues, with interruptions, overlaps, etc. negotiated economically so that the speaker may proceed with a turn. Any disruption of speaker rights by another speaker is generally, if not always, seen as conflictual. And the different floor conventions could be gendered. Women contribute more in collective floors, whereas single floors favour male participation. The focus of this chapter is on the single floor and its rules and conventions and the exploitation of these in drama, since the single floor is more commonly capitalized on in drama.

TURN MANAGEMENT IN DRAMA

The order of speech in dramatic texts is organized to project the order of turns to be taken by the *dramatis personae* and is in the control of the dramatist. The turn-taking conventions used can design different floor types and different situations as a result, since a great many situational kinds make their appearance in drama. Given that the fictional contexts of plays, in the 'lateral' or 'horizontal' dimension of character-character interactions, simultaneously project on a 'vertical' dimension of stage to the audience, dialogue in drama is under the necessity to be heard and understood by the receivers, and thus dramatic dialogue has generally been regarded as tidied up speech, eschewing the use of 'spoken' characteristics like false starts, repetition, interruption, overlaps, simultaneous speech, etc. In fact, a comparison between transcriptions of naturally occurring speech and even the most 'naturalistic' of dramatic speech reveals that the latter is a representation of ordinary speech, and not a mirror image of it. Yet this is to compare 'texts', graphic representations of the two, and not actual performance. In performance, where the medium or channel is the voice, the resource can be manipulated to include multiple voices in overlap, or simultaneous speech, pauses, gaps, etc., but these options, in drama, would be subordinated to some dramatic function.

The one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time kind of floor and the turn-management strategies that construct it are the dominant mode of organizing speech in drama. But within this overall mode, the use of turn-lapses, pauses, gaps, interruptions, overlaps, either partial or as full simultaneous speech, also make their appearance (see Herman 1995: Ch. 2 for fuller discussion). Such choices bring significant elements of meaning which can condition the content and function of what is 'said' or meant by a speaker's speech. For instance, where a dramatic character is consistently interrupted and the opportunity to speak is consistently denied to one or other character, and no counter-bid to speak is successful, the interrupted speaker can be interpreted as the less powerful interactant. Similarly, when dual starts are made for a turn, and become a consistent ploy which does not succeed in gaining attention and the floor, or if turn-taking choices by-pass a character's attempts to speak, the path constructed by the use of such options can dramatize or enact the

fact of a character's ineffectuality. Consistent turn-lapses on the part of a targeted other who is addressed by a speaker can signal indifference, boredom, hostility, the desire to be left in peace, opting out, etc. and import negative tones into the interaction, even in silence.

In floors of this kind, the event being constructed by speech can colour the situation and interpretation of those who are jointly involved in creating it, turn by turn. The following are all variables in the system: (a) who speaks to whom, (b) who is not spoken to, (c) who listens or doesn't listen, (d) whether listeners are responsive in turn, or not, (e) whether those who respond are those targeted by the speaker or not, (f) length of speeches, (g) linguistic style and texture of a character's speech, (h) how changeovers are effected, (i) the uses of silences, either intra- or inter-turn. Situation, event and character thus emerge, develop, in the 'here and now' of speech as speech alternation is blocked or progresses in troubled or untroubled fashion.

In the analysis of the extract given below, the variables in the turn-taking system will be identified and the specific patterns and choices of uses will be interpreted for what they contribute to a reader's understanding of the dramatic situation they construct. This is inevitably a partial analysis, since other dimensions, like turn sequencing and pragmatics, and gender, are left out of account. The interest is in the use of the turn-taking system and the turn-management strategies used for what they contribute to the understanding of this extract. The extract itself is taken from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. There are four dramatic characters – Jimmy and Alison are a married couple, whose marriage is in trouble. Cliff and Jimmy are enduring friends, but Cliff is also close to Alison and a confidant of hers. Helena, an actress, and a long-standing friend of Alison's, is visiting the couple. The turns are numbered for reference.

- (1) JIMMY: Oh, yes, and I know what I meant to tell you – I wrote a poem while I was at the market yesterday. If you're interested, which you obviously are. [*To Helena*] It should appeal to you, in particular. It's soaked in the theology of Dante, with a good slosh of Eliot as well. It starts off "There are no dry cleaners in Cambodia!"
- (2) CLIFF: What do you call it?
- (3) JIMMY: "The Cess Pool!" Myself being a stone dropped in it, you see –
- (4) CLIFF: You should be dropped in it, all right.
- (5) HELENA: [*to Jimmy*]. Why do you try so hard to be unpleasant?
[*He turns very deliberately, delighted that she should rise to the bait so soon – he's scarcely in his stride yet.*]
- (6) JIMMY: What's that?
- (7) HELENA: Do you have to be so offensive?
- (8) JIMMY: You mean now? You think I'm being offensive? You underestimate me. [*Turning to Alison.*] Doesn't she?
- (9) HELENA: I think you're a very tiresome young man.
[*A slight pause as his delight catches up with him. He roars with laughter.*]

(10) JIMMY: Oh dear! oh dear! My wife's friends! Pass Lady Bracknell the cucumber sandwiches, will you?

[*He returns to his meal, but his curiosity about Alison's preparations at the mirror won't be denied any longer. He turns round casually, and speaks to her.*]

Going out?

(11) ALISON: That's right.

(12) JIMMY: On a Sunday evening in this town? Where on earth are you going?

(13) ALISON: [*rising*]. I'm going out with Helena.

(14) JIMMY: That's not a direction – that's an affliction.

[*She crosses to the table, and sits down C. He leans forward, and addresses her again.*]

I didn't ask you what was the matter with you. I asked you where you were going.

(15) HELENA: She's going to church.

[*He has been prepared for some plot, but he is as genuinely surprised by this as Cliff was a few minutes earlier.*]

(16) JIMMY: You're doing what?

[*Silence.*]

Have you gone out of your mind, or something? [*To Helena*] You're determined to win her aren't you? So it's come to this now! How feeble can you get? [*His rage mounting within.*] When I think of what I did, what I endured, to get you out –

(17) ALISON: [*recognising an onslaught on the way, starts to panic*]. Oh yes, we all know what you did for me! You rescued me from the wicked clutches of my family, and all my friends! I'd still be rotting away at home, if you hadn't ridden up on your charger and carried me off!

(Osborne 1965 [1957], Act 1, 50–1)

The turn-taking system proposed by Sacks *et al.* (1978) is one of the options for turn allocation and to initiate turn change. Current speaker can select next, to whom turn rights pass; or next speaker can self-select, or the turn may lapse and the original speaker may incorporate the 'lapse' into their own turn as 'pause' and continue with the turn and try to relinquish it at the next TRP by the choice of one or other of the options mentioned above. In the extract all three options are used, but with different frequencies of occurrence, and with variations on how next turns are actually taken. The two most frequent options used are current speaker selecting next and self-selection, but they often clash since the speaker selected by current speaker is not the one who speaks next, since next speaker self-selects against the rights to speak of the previously selected speaker. Jimmy is the 'dominant' character. Eight of the seventeen turns are Jimmy's and Jimmy does most of the selection. In Turn 1, Jimmy chooses Helena, but Cliff takes Turn 2. Helena self-selects in Turn 5, changing the focus and direction of the talk away from Cliff to herself. After a brief exchange with Helena, Jimmy chooses Alison in mid-turn in Turn 8. But it is Helena who takes Turn 9. After a brief

interchange with Alison, whom he chooses, Jimmy's address to Alison again in Turn 14 is returned by Helena. The self-selections are therefore 'turn-grabs' by unauthorized speakers who interpose themselves between Jimmy and his targets.

Turn-grabs

Turn-grabs can have different functions, since interposing oneself into an interaction uninvited and against the rights of invited speakers can be either self-orientated, to promote one's own interests, or other-orientated. It appears to be the latter here, given that Jimmy selects his targets in order to bait them in one way or another. Thus, the sarcasm directed at Helena in Turn 1, and the potential conflict it can initiate is deflected from developing by Cliff who interjects his own contribution and makes himself Jimmy's interactant rather than Helena for the next two turns. Helena, however, installs herself into the interaction, and takes her delayed turn by self-selection, and, 'rising to the bait', challenges Jimmy. After a brief exchange with her, Jimmy selects Alison, but Alison's turn lapses as Helena interposes herself between Jimmy and Alison, continuing her challenge to him. In Turn 10 Jimmy chooses Alison again, but on a change of topic – as to where she is going. A brief altercation with Alison ensues, but when it gets critical, in Jimmy's insistence to be told *where* she is going, Helena interposes herself in place of Alison again in Turn 15, powerfully sidelining Alison in her use of the third person 'she' in Alison's presence, while taking her turn. Jimmy's Turn 16, addressed to Alison chiefly, gets a collective lapse, and the silence becomes a 'gap' since nobody self-selects to answer him, and Jimmy incorporates the gap into his own turn and continues, choosing first Alison, then Helena, then an aside to himself, and then Alison again in the space of one turn, leaving little room for any response. Alison cuts his turn off with an interruption and holds the floor (even though in panic, as the stage directions note) with a long turn, thus inhibiting his access to the floor.

The development of hostility reciprocally is frustrated by the others self-selecting to speak to deflect the barbs. Turn-changes in the responsive dimension are actually effected in such a way as to curtail the dominance awarded to Jimmy in the frequency of turns. Alison is the most protected in this way, usually by Helena. Cliff, too, acts on Helena's behalf, although Helena has her say, nevertheless, even in delayed mode.

Turn allocation

In defiance of canonical expectations built into turn-taking 'rules', Jimmy's turn allocation strategies via participant selection are *not* designed only to pass his turn to another. His choice of addressee is usually politic, since he targets, often midturn, the addressee most likely to be undermined by his taunts – the two women, in particular. The turn allocational strategy used

first targets those he names as the butts of his speech and then the passing of turn to them is challenging, confrontational. Thus, in Turn 1, Jimmy turns to Helena and selects her by gaze, and addresses the last part of his turn to her, with the sting in the tail specifically aimed at her: 'It should appeal to you, in particular. It's soaked in the theology of Dante, with a good slosh of Eliot as well . . .'. Similarly, in Turn 8, having declared to Helena to whom his turn is addressed that she underestimates him, he selects Alison at the end with the challenge for confirmation 'Doesn't she?' In Turn 16, there are swift changes of addressee from Alison to Helena and back to Alison which brackets them, in his perception, as in collusion against him. The content of his turn becomes accusatory and negative. Although all three participants are addressees and part of the interactive 'floor', Cliff is generally omitted from the scope of the address, as the untargeted addressee, and the conflict and antagonism is directed specifically at one or both of the women.

Turn order

Turn order, too, reveals unequal distribution of turns among those present. The seventeen turns that constitute the extract can be subdivided into basically two-party interactions in succession, within the four-party floor. Jimmy is central to all the interactions and the participant structures in force. All present address Jimmy. He is thus the focal point of their speech. They do not address each other, and so no 'free-for-all' floors or 'schisms' via turn management ensue. This is the 'holding forth' 'one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time', linear development of action which single floors encourage (Edelsky 1993), which provides space for the turn-holding speaker and individuates its participatory trials and outcomes. Turn order takes up and drops participants, one at a time, in succession. Thus, Turns 1-4 have Jimmy-Cliff-Jimmy-Cliff in interaction. The pattern then changes to Helena-Jimmy until Turn 11, when it passes to Alison. Alison's selected turn at Jimmy's Turn 8 lapses as Helena proceeds. In Turn 10, Jimmy addresses Alison and the turn order takes a different course: Alison(Turn 11)-Jimmy-Alison-Jimmy. Helena takes Alison's Turn 15, and so there is yet another shift - Helena to Jimmy, but the order reverts to Jimmy-Alison. Apart from Jimmy, Helena is awarded most turns and interactive prominence in the turn distribution pattern used. Alison has to wait her turn till the last third of the extract.

Turns to speak for Alison are delayed till Turn 11. Cliff, who takes turns at the beginning of the extract, is then sidelined by the other interactions. There is a difference, however, since nobody speaks for Cliff, whereas Helena does for Alison. Nobody targets him, either, as Alison is targeted by her husband. Active measures undertaken to block the Jimmy-Alison participation marginalize Alison more, even if in her own interests, and make her the most vulnerable character in the episode. But the vulnerability can be ambiguous, and can be portrayed variously. For instance, if another option,

provided by the turn-taking system but not included in the stage directions, were to be used by a director, a different interpretation of Alison's demeanour and character could be constructed. And this is dependent on the way silence is used. The above interpretation is built on the assumption that others 'turn-grab' – i.e., turns are returned with the usual split-second timing habitual in conversations. But if Alison were to play her non-responsiveness as a *turn-lapse*, so that she actively *does not answer* when addressed by Jimmy, thus intentionally and ostentatiously ignoring him and his taunts, then her performance would seem more actively resistant, even if she does not take her turn. In fact, she does perform an obvious turn-lapse to Jimmy's Turn 14 when he expresses his opinion of what he thinks of her going out with Helena: 'That's not a direction – that's an affliction.' She does not respond either in comment/comment fashion, or to the implicit demand for information as to where she is going. She indulges in stage business instead, merely crossing to the table and sitting down, which leads Jimmy to repeat his question again. The script and content of her turns does not change, but the change in the distribution of silences at TRP or turn juncture would make a significant difference to the kind of meaning that is conveyed. But whether her silences are played passively, as the consequence of others' grabs, or as turn-lapses, actively, the delay of speech turns for her does contribute to the building up of tension within her, which explodes in the final confrontation with Jimmy at the end.

The fact of ambiguities, and the multiple interpretations they generate, can be extended to cover the nature of 'the floor' and the participant structure that is configured by the turn-taking. And these are wholly dependent on which kind of turn management rules are assumed to be in force when interpreting the dialogue. They do not arise, in this instance, as a consequence of what is said in the text or script which remains constant across the different interpretations. The canonical participant structure is the 'single' floor, which is the one in use here – with one speaker speaking and the others cast as addressees, in a Speaker-Hearer(s) configuration. But the configuration in the extract could equally be characterized differently, with splits introduced between targeted and untargeted addressees at the reception end of the configuration (Levinson 1988) so that the ostensible addressees are not the real targets of speech but someone else in the participant structure, to whom the goals of a speaker's speech are actually directed, with the gazed-at or otherwise-selected addressee mediating the relay. 'Footing' changes (Goffman 1979) could thus be introduced into the participant structure, but without any change in the 'words' of the dialogue.

From this perspective, Alison is actually the targeted addressee. Most of Jimmy's speech antics to Cliff and Helena could be interpreted as having been designed for her benefit and actually directed at her, even when Cliff and Helena are Jimmy's immediate addressees. The hostility displayed to Helena is targeted at her personally as well, but relayed beyond her, the

end-point including Alison. The address to Alison, while speaking to Helena, makes it evident that Jimmy's own consciousness of the participant configuration in which he is involved includes Alison. He does not attempt to get Cliff involved in this way. Again, this mode of performance of his turn could be interpreted variously. It could be either that he is being a considerate participant and wants to involve his wife within the terms of participation by selecting her for speech, or that he wishes her to know that she is also targeted, since his address to her presupposes her attention to what he is saying and doing with the others. Given the negative and interpersonally offensive nature of his speech, indirectly barbed, as it is, the 'considerate' option is less plausible than the alternative one – that the extended relay of his intentions in speech are basically directed at her, which his addressive prompt monitors and makes manifest.

Turn change, on the whole, is smoothly achieved. One speaker speaks, stops, and the next speaker speaks, stops, and so on. There is variation, however, in the two interruptions, both of Jimmy's turn, once by Cliff at the beginning in Turn 3, and again by Alison at the end in Turn 16. These are marked options given the dominant pattern of smooth turn change. But as mentioned above, turn-lapses could be introduced wherever there is a turn-grab, on Helena's part after Jimmy's first address to her, and again, to Alison after Turns 8 and 14. The two dominant participants, Jimmy and Helena, conduct their interactions via smooth turn change. They give each other a full hearing and exchange offences in equal measure, promptly and smoothly. Smooth turn change, paradoxically, does not produce comity, but facilitates an equality between them in the control of the conflict that is enacted between them. Cliff and Alison, on the other hand, interrupt Jimmy and attempt thereby to stem the flow of Jimmy's speech and block his access to the floor. Whereas Helena displays her ability to confront and engage with Jimmy on his terms and he with hers, neither Cliff nor Alison have the stomach for it.

Turn size and texture

Turn size and texture also vary, but not drastically. Jimmy's turns are occasionally longer, multi-clause turns which he uses to develop or to intensify some personal point to be delivered to his interactant – to Helena in Turn 3 to mock her, or in Turn 16, to Alison, to magnify his feeling of outrage at the thought of her aligning herself with Helena in going to church. His turns can also include many questions, rather than one, or question and comment, and so on, although short, one-clause turns are also evident – to express surprise and disbelief, as in 'You're doing what?' to Alison about the imminent visit to church, or in the pretence of innocence to Helena in Turn 6 'What's that?' in response to her direct expression to him of his unpleasantness. Apart from Alison's Turn 17 at the end, when she matches his outburst with one of her own in equivalent fashion, all the rest are short turns. Helena's turns are a

one-clause, the brevity emphasizing the directness of encounter – ‘Why do you try so hard to be unpleasant?’ or ‘Do you have to be so offensive?’ or ‘I think you are a very tiresome young man’, and later, ‘She’s going to church’.

Alison’s turn-lengths vary – short, one clause, evasive answers to begin with but culminating in a long and desperate turn at the end. After her enigmatic silent presence for most of the extract she takes the floor with Jimmy, responding to his questions, but her answers are not satisfactory to Jimmy, who reinitiates his questions till Helena gives him the answer which Alison had withheld. The weapon of silence – *not saying* what he required of her – finds its mark far more effectively than either his spoken taunts or Helena’s directness had done. Whereas his interactions with Helena’s counter-insults to him were met, as the stage directions state, with ‘delight’ and roaring laughter, he responds to Alison with mounting ‘rage’. In her last turn in this extract, Alison not only emerges into full speakerhood (hers is a turn as long as Jimmy’s), but she interrupts Jimmy and reduces him to silence as well. Thus, the tables are turned, with the silent, often passive, long-suffering Alison taking centre stage, and using speech as weapon in active mode, back against Jimmy, whose speech profile has been high throughout the extract. But participatory, counter-speech with Jimmy, for better or for worse, is not her usual mode of interaction with him. Jimmy’s excessive, aggressive speech tactics and Alison’s silent, non-responsiveness and non-reactions, of the kind dramatized here, are part of their marital relationship, which construct a destructive pathology of speech and silence. Only at the end of the play does turn-taking in interpersonally collaborative fashion occur systematically between them, and speech and counter-speech approximates to the canonical requirement of interpersonality. Cliff uses one-liners, in laconic fashion, and then opts out.

The *linguistic style* is uniform for all of them – ‘naturalistic’, standard language prose, in informal, conversational idiom. Given that class is an issue – for Jimmy – in performance Alison’s accent could well reflect her upper-class status, with the others distributed according to their class affiliations. Jimmy, however, in spite of his work at the market, and declared friendships with others of his origins and contempt for Alison’s class, betrays his own ‘upward mobility’ class split – the literary allusions which pepper his speech to Helena (Dante, Eliot, Wilde) reflect his distance from the class origins he champions. His speech casts him as university-educated middle class, even in rebellion against it. Jimmy is thus a more ambivalent figure than his proclaimed class stances might lead one to believe, entrapped in, and resistant to, his class position. Although, in the 1950s, the play questioned hallowed myths regarding class, empire, etc., the sting in the social ambiguities of class, it would seem, is not easily overcome. Jimmy also has a more complex *speech style* – he can be indirect – targeting the women, while bantering with Cliff; sarcastic, especially to Helena, direct and challenging or expressive of personal outrage, and demanding in his interactions, especially with Alison. Helena is mostly direct in delivering questions, even ‘face-threatening’ ones,

or answers to Jimmy. Alison's speech style is mostly composed of answers delivered in minimalist mode, to Jimmy, except for the final long and sarcastic counter-turn.

Topic control is generally in Jimmy's hands, and others' turns orientate to his. Helena is the exception, since it is she who initiates the topic of his unpleasantness with which he engages, but the other topics, like his poem, and where Alison is going, are initiated by him. Neither Cliff nor Alison bother to challenge his topics, nor initiate their own. Cliff develops Jimmy's topic of his poem by requesting information about it but then interrupts him with bantering, half-serious comment of his own. Alison is the minimal responder when she is allowed to or bothers to answer at all. Thus both attempt either to opt out, or to stop development of the course they suspect is about to come into existence by aborting it with interruption.

CONCLUSION

The variables of the system have thus been used in complex fashion throughout the extract to give us cues to interpret both situation and character. The situation is a conflictual one with Jimmy central to the conflict. The situation develops in sequential fashion, with Jimmy interacting with each of the participants in turn. He is the constant participant with all of them, and all the others' turns are addressed to him, which makes him the focus of their attention. The majority of turns are also Jimmy's, and he also initiates the majority of topics. His speech style is varied and complex and adapted to his goals in speech, and he often takes marginally longer turns than the others. The others, given their limited speech presence, relative to his, are mostly short turns, except for Alison's at the end.

Jimmy's control of turn-management procedures awards him dominance, but other factors in the *responsive* dimension, in the strategies used by recipients, in the turn-by-turn unfolding of action, curtail and modulate his dominance. Next turn rarely passes to Jimmy's selected speaker, so that the turn order that actually comes into existence is outside his control, even if the turn order achieved centralizes him. He is also the only speaker to be interrupted twice, so that the intended course of his speech is blocked off by others. The breaks on Jimmy's belligerence are temporary, since he proceeds to wrangle with each of the other characters in turn. His belligerence, too, is modulated and strengthens as the episode proceeds. He interacts half-jokingly with Cliff, and then mockingly with Helena, but gets directly confrontational with Alison. The delay in bringing Jimmy into engagement with Alison only serves to intensify the incipient friction between them, since others' turns and grabs and her own silences had served to hold her at bay and deflect the tension, which then erupts into open conflict when the two are properly facing each other face. Alison's matching counter-speech at least temporarily silences him, since he is interrupted and given a counter-dose of sarcasm in a long turn.

which blocks his access to speech, and which changes the contour of the episode by giving her the upper hand.

Helena's strategies portray her as direct and confrontational and as a powerful opponent, equal to Jimmy, a fact that contributes to their sexual attraction and alliance which occurs later in the play. She is self-directed, self-selects more than once and frustrates his turn choices. She initiates her own topic, and holds her own with Jimmy, turn for turn, without either interrupting or being interrupted, but she is bypassed by Jimmy when he turns the course of his talk to Alison. Alison is the most enigmatic and ambivalent of them all – protected but sidelined by the others, but resistant and provocative in her very silences. Jimmy has to try again and again to engage her, before he finally provokes her into speech. Cliff is the foil to the more intense interpersonal dramas being enacted. A detailed examination of this extract from *Look Back in Anger* shows us that what is important in interpreting dramatic dialogue is not just the meaning of what is said, but the management of the saying itself, in the judicious use of the variables of the turn-taking system which the dialogue projects.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

Select a passage from a play and analyse it for the turn-taking mechanisms used. You might look at the passage from Arthur Miller's *Crucible* in Lowe (this volume); or the passage from Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* containing the interaction between Katherina and Petruchio (discussed from a Gricean perspective by Cooper in this volume); or a passage from Shaw's *You Never Can Tell* (e.g. 1984 [1898]: 214–17). All these should prove rewarding. Questions you can ask yourself include: How many participants are there? And what strategies are used for turns to be exchanged among them and what patterns are created in the variable use of options for turn change – of current speaker selecting next/next speaker self-selecting/turn-lapse, if any? In other words you need to examine the passage for patterns of who speaks to whom, who is not spoken to, who is addressed and who speaks, etc. to get an idea of how the turn-taking rules are exploited. Also, look for smooth turn change patterns and instances of interruption, pause and overlap. Who has control of topic, and how does it develop? What does the choice of turn size and turn texture/style contribute? Who is dominant and why? And finally, why do you think the dramatist has designed speech in this way in this extract, and what does the design contribute to the portrayal of the situation and the characters who are involved in producing it via the speech strategies used?