



Omnirelevance and interactional context

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ABSTRACT: *Within conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis, the warrant for any instance of analytic interest is always the demonstrable relevance and consequentiality of the phenomena to the interactants. Demonstrating participants' orientations to social structural contexts poses methodological difficulties, as such orientations are often fragmentary, which weakens the possibility of exploring social structural features as omnipresent and influencing the understandings and actions of participants. In this paper, we revisit Sacks's (1995) discussion of omnirelevance, in order to explore the possibility of approaching context within a multilayering of categorical relevances. We argue that, within the layering of membership devices in an episode of interaction, there is an analytically observable orientation to an omnirelevant device. This omnirelevant device operates as background to the occasioned topic devices as a kind of 'default' orientation that organises the participation context. The analysis draws upon a transcript of an (ordinary) conversation in which various touched-off topics generate interactional and membership devices. While these devices are seen to organise the topic at hand, there are occasions where topic talk is suspended and a different membership device is oriented to. The omnirelevant device reveals itself through the cracks, joints, and articulation of touched off-topic devices, suggesting a layering and hierarchy of membership devices. By exploring the notion of omnirelevant devices within interaction as part of a layering of topical membership devices, this paper argues for the possibility of exploring a wider participant orientation within interaction and the warrant to analytically invoke a backgrounded organisational device.*

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Introduction

Traditional approaches to identity and social relationships have tended to focus on essentialised or social structural aspects of a person's identity, such as gender, age, and ethnicity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). From this perspective, researchers have sought to explain how social behaviour and interaction are shaped by, and shape, identity. However, rather than identity

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being treated as a product of essential attributes, ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA) treat identity as part and parcel of the interactional work in which identity is invoked, deployed, and negotiated in doing some social action (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). That is, whoever a person 'is', and how their relationship to another person matters, is locally produced and relevant in specific instances of interaction. Accordingly, then, the idea that some aspect of an identity is 'always possibly relevant' for a person's interactions with others has been challenged. For example, to argue, *a priori*, that a person's gender has a bearing on what and how things are said in interaction is difficult to maintain, as the relevance of this identity needs to be demonstrated as relevant and consequential for the participants themselves (Schegloff, 1991). Thus, while there are commonsense understandings about the relevance of 'who people are' when they interact with one another, the question posed through EM and CA is how participants generate, draw on, and use their understandings about who-they-are-for-one-another within and in the process of doing some social action where identity is made relevant.

In the discussion below, we explore how participants attend to matters of 'who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing' in the course of a particular interaction. We argue that displays of knowledge and understandings can invoke the ongoing relevance of participants' identities and relationships, as well as displaying the relevance of these identities beyond the sequence being examined. In doing this, the discussion demonstrates how an orientation to identities can remain unstated throughout a spate of interaction, yet operate on an omnirelevant (Sacks, 1995) level for the participants both in, and beyond, the immediate interactional task at hand. That is to say, we explore the possibility of describing a membership that is *shared* by all participants—irrespective of displays of 'individual identity'—and examine whether there is a demonstrable orientation to the unstated 'groupness' of the members. Moreover, we suggest that, while this shared groupness may remain unstated, it may also be drawn upon by participants within the flow of interaction at various relevant points, thus revealing for analysis a level of 'context' oriented to within the interaction.

To illustrate this argument, we discuss two extracts of data from a story-telling episode taken from a recording of a naturally occurring conversation between three people known to one another. A gloss of the data, as an interaction between friends where the locally relevant activity is 'telling a story', could be understood as a formulation of





the 'context of the talk'—that is, some sort of description of 'who the members are and what they are doing'. However, such glosses and accounts of context must remain matters for analysis rather than something that is unproblematically used as a framework for understanding the specifics of what actually occurs within an interaction (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992; McHoul, Rapley, & Antaki, 2008). That is, we ask how the members orient to any such context and display to each other that 'who they are and what they are doing' has some sort of relationship with the locally produced actions. Drawing on both membership categorisation analysis (MCA) and sequential analysis, we identify the ongoing and organisational relevance of membership categories for producing local context.

Membership categorisation analysis

Sacks's (1972a, 1972b) work on membership categorisation, and the application of this work by subsequent authors (Butler, 2008; Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, 2009; Jayyusi, 1984; McHoul & Watson, 1984; Watson, 1997), provides detailed accounts of members' methodical practices in describing the world, and displaying their understanding of the world and of the commonsense routine workings of society. Analysis of the descriptive and inferential aspects of interaction involves examining the practices that display 'culture-in-action' in relation to the accomplishment, negotiation, and repair of social and moral organisation through the methodical application of social categories, devices, and predicates mapped onto categories.

The resources and practices involved in categorisation were demonstrated by Sacks (1972b) through his now famous example of the child's story: 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up'. The power of Sacks's descriptive apparatus is illuminated by the consideration of how we hear and make sense of the story as one in which a 'mommy' picks up her baby in response to the baby crying. For Sacks, our understanding of the story is generated through recognising the social categories 'baby' and 'mommy' as related or tied to each other through the membership categorisation device (MCD) 'family'. A MCD is a collection of categories that 'go together', and associated rules of application that serve as an apparatus for producing and understanding descriptions of people. In Sacks's example, the operation of the family device means that we hear that it is the mother of the baby who picks up the baby and that she does so because her baby is crying, when, in fact, no such necessary connection is explicit in the sentences.

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There are a set of expectable attributes (predicates) associated with the categories described (i.e., babies cry; mothers comfort their children). These 'category-bound activities' constitute the actions as not only expected, but also directed at each other—that is, this baby's crying is for its mother and the mommy's action is because the baby is crying. We make sense of the story through applying commonsense knowledge about the way social categories act and interact. The MCD, then, works as a practical register that reinforces the observed or described actions of social categories where such categories are collected within occasioned organisational devices, which form a major part of the commonsensical framework of members' methods and recognisable capacities of practical sense-making.

Through the analysis of categorisation practices, it is possible to approach an understanding of and engagement with the life world through a commonsense organisation of categories and associated attributes that are made concrete *only in any particular location of their use*. Clearly, there is no essential or *a priori* connection between descriptions of social categories, their behaviour, or their interaction. For instance, baby and 'mommy' in the example above are seen to belong together in this instance, but may belong to other organisational devices at other times, depending on the local specifics of their relevance. Social categories and their interactions are thus rendered recognisable only *in situ*, drawing upon referentially adequate commonsense knowledge of the world and an assumed reciprocity of perspectives within the world (Sacks, 1995). Locating the analyst's understanding at the point of social action serves to maintain the necessary fluidity of social organisation and avoid the possibility of invoking prior assumptions preceding any analytic description (Hester & Eglin, 1997).

Omnirelevant devices

According to Sacks (1995), some devices can have an omnirelevance for an interaction. Omnirelevant devices are those that are composed of collections of categories that are always potentially applicable, and that, when invoked, have priority in terms of organising action within—and only in—situated interaction. This is not to preclude the relevance of other devices in the production of an interaction, and does not assume that an omnirelevant device is always in operation for the duration of an encounter, but that

Things may be going along, the device isn't being used; at some point something happens which makes it appropriate, and it's





used. And when it is used, it's the controlling device, i.e., there is no way of excluding its operation when relevant. (Sacks, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 314)

Sacks's observation points to both the categorial and sequential relevance of the device in that, at any point in an interaction, someone can expectedly and relevantly deploy an omnirelevant device to accomplish an activity, and make relevant and consistent the application of the device to the membership and action of other members whom that device may be used to categorise. To suggest that a device is omnirelevant, then, is to say that it operates at an organisational level (of the overall interactional event) and, at times, an immediate level (the sequential and categorial flow of the interaction)¹.

Demonstrating the practical organisation and deployment of an omnirelevant device, Sacks (1995) drew on recordings of teenagers in group therapy sessions, where the omnirelevance of the *group therapy* device with the associated membership categories, therapist and patient, was invoked. For Sacks, omnirelevance was demonstrated in the members' production and understanding of utterances as done by virtue of the *group therapy* device—where any turn or action could *potentially* be understood by reference to the memberships constitutive of that device. For example, the therapist's initiation of a closing in a therapy session was recognised as a closing, and an appropriate and prioritised action, because of the locally relevant membership of the speaker as *therapist*. Schegloff describes this as revealing the 'reflexive co-determination' (2007, p. 473) of action and identity—whereby there is a mutually informing relationship between the category membership of a speaker and the actions done by a turn of talk, via the operation of a situated MCD.

The situatedness of the MCD means that the omnirelevance of a device remains internal to any interaction and potentially relevant and consequential for the doing of any action within that interaction. This holds even when a different device is deployed—for example, with the group therapy session. In playing with the microphone used by the researcher, the 'patients' produced a different device composed of performers and audience. However, the group therapy device was maintained as an overall organisational resource that underpinned the reason why they were there, and the category memberships that were prioritised—or, of first-order relevance—for the duration of the session. In this sense, an omnirelevant device is one that establishes, maintains, and underpins the 'setting-ed' or *contextual* nature of an interaction.

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The question, then, is how does one identify and find evidence for a device as having an omnirelevance for an interaction? One way Sacks (1995, Vol. 1) suggests that people display an orientation to a device as omnirelevant is by invoking the local relevance of features such as time and place. In this way, the device can be seen to be used to formulate a setting, or context:

it's not simply that you invoke a setting, but one of the ways that you make a setting out of some course of activities, is by beginning to develop things like time in it; and that involves being able to coherently use things like 'early', 'late', etc. (1995, Vol 1, p. 521)

For instance, the use of descriptions such as 'this place' by therapy group members, and deployment of notions such as 'being late', demonstrate—and use—shared understandings of what participation in some bounded encounter entails (see also Butler, 2008). Thus, a setting or context and the identities of the participants are built out of the course of activities that members produce, and the practices through which mutual understandings are displayed. An omnirelevant device, then, serves as a resource for interactional practices that both display and constitute—for members themselves—a sense of 'who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing' in situated interaction.

Sacks's notion and analysis of omnirelevance, then, offers a way of addressing the practical relevance of identity and context that is fundamental to—but often unexplicated within—conversation analytic research. It can also be used to handle the practical sense-making that is a focus of work on membership categorisation, but does so in a way that is tied to the specifics of social action without relying on the use of explicit category terms. Furthermore, it offers a way of revealing members' organisational practices for managing extended sequences of interaction. However, despite the potential usefulness of omnirelevance to ethnomethodological research in dealing with some of its core concerns, there has been very little application of Sacks's work in this area.

The limited body of work that has empirically examined omnirelevant devices in line with Sacks's work has begun to explore the mutually informing relevance of the identities and relationships of members with actions within interactional encounters (Butler, 2008; Butler &





Fitzgerald, in prep; Fitzgerald & Austin, 2008; Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002; McHoul & Rapley, 2002; Rapley, 2004). For example, Fitzgerald and Housley (2002) demonstrate how membership in the categories of 'host' and 'caller' in a radio phone-in show had an omnirelevance for the conversations. It was suggested that the omnirelevance of these categories—and the radio phone-in 'device'—was built and displayed in distinct slots within the interactions, such as when introducing the topic or callers, inviting the callers to speak, managing caller transition, and so on. Within the actual business of the call (discussing issues/topics), other categories and actions were invoked and 'layered' over the background omnirelevant categories. Thus, while the categories of host and caller had an ongoing relevance for the course of the calls, these were seen to be displayed—and prioritised—in the sequences before and after the work of presenting opinions and so on, which are fundamental to the actual 'doing' of radio phone-in. In identifying when—within a course of interaction—an omnirelevant device is invoked, and linking this to specific interactional practices, the analysis demonstrates the sorts of practical methods by which members invoke and use their situated identities to organise action within and produce the context.

However, it is not always the case that members use their membership within specific categories to do being 'who they are' in a case of situated interaction. McHoul and Rapley (2002; see also Rapley, 2004) present a case where a member undertakes an action that is not bound to their category within a specific device. The data used is a 'quality of life' assessment between a professional and a person with an intellectual disability. The omnirelevance of the membership categories involved is demonstrated through a 'breach' that displays an understanding of who the participants are and what they are doing. While the professional initiates and maintains conversational talk for an extended sequence, it is the patient who invokes the situated relevance of their interaction by asking 'shall we make a start then?' Similarly, Butler (2008) shows how the omnirelevance of a device used to organise a children's game based on 'playing schools' is invoked when a 'student' says 'aren't I supposed to do my work now', when the 'teacher' has failed to allocate a next activity for the students. In this way, the 'student' displays her attention to the categories and actions that are relevant and consequential for the ongoing interaction, thus invoking a device that has omnirelevance for the episode.

These examples discuss instances where a person with a category-bound obligation to initiate an action fails to do so, and where the

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absent activity is oriented to as an underlying basis for the members' doing whatever they are doing, being who-they-are in this time and place. There is an understanding that there are particular activities to be done in that setting, which is one way in which that setting is produced as a shared contextual resource for understanding and producing an action. In both examples (McHoul & Rapley, 2002; Butler, 2008), an omnirelevant device is invoked in moments where there is a hitch in the progressivity of the sequence. There is an orientation towards the expected trajectory of the interaction, and a demonstration of the shared knowledge about what the participants were doing and why. That in both cases a member of a category undertakes an action not bound to that category (i.e., a patient initiating an assessment and a student initiating 'doing work'), suggests the relevance that the omnirelevant device—as a locus for action—has for the participants' displayed understandings about who they are in relation to one another, and what sorts of activities should be done in that bounded encounter. In this way, we see members prioritising the effective operation of a particular device for organising and producing social action; and, of particular relevance to the current paper, we can note that it is precisely when the activities that might be glossed as constituting the 'reason' for the interaction (i.e., giving opinions, doing a quality of life assessment, working in school) are *not* being done that the operation of the device is displayed.

The examples above indicate how we might see a device as omnirelevant within a course of interaction, but have all drawn on examples of institutional interaction (albeit an 'imitation' of institutional interaction in the case of Butler (2008)). Within these settings, considerations of roles, responsibilities, and entitlements are arguably foregrounded, in that there is a delimited sense of relevance in terms of who the participants are in relation to one another and 'why' they are engaged in a particular interaction. To some extent, the omnirelevant devices discussed so far are indicative of participant understandings of the production and shared understandings of turns and actions *as institutional*. As Raymond and Heritage (2006) note, the focus on institutionally relevant identities is a rather limited application of the concerns of membership categorisation, and 'much more severe analytical problems emerge once we are in the open sea of ordinary conversation' (p. 680). They go on to suggest that, 'paradoxically, these problems arise in their most severe form with the characteristics of participants that are potentially "omnirelevant"' (Raymond & Heritage, 2006, p. 680), referring to characteristics such as age and gender.





Like Raymond and Heritage (2006), in this paper we are concerned with tackling some of the 'analytic problems' that arise in examining identity in conversational talk. We also subscribe to the notion of beginning with the interactional practices themselves, rather than attempting to map identity onto these practices. However, a point of difference lies in our consideration of how locally specific identities are invoked as part of the management of the overall interaction, and as part of evoking the groupness of the members. That is, we are looking at what are essentially shared identities—or, more specifically, the operation of a device that groups the members together—and how this is produced and made relevant and consequential through the organisation of talk and action within and for that bounded interaction. Furthermore, by treating omnirelevance as referring to locally situated rather than 'essential' identities (in line with Sacks), this paper outlines a means of examining how identities and their contextual relevance are reflexive and mutually constituted within and through the flow of conversational interaction.

Identity, knowledge, and context in story-telling

As noted above, a vernacular gloss of the data we discuss would be 'friends telling stories'. Our analysis focuses on instances within this conversation where the memberships of the participants are evoked through displays and management of assumed-knowledge-in-common. In particular, we discuss how references to people in the story-telling make relevant the respective and shared identities of the participants and how the interactional practices through which such references are managed can be understood in relation to the operation of an omnirelevant device. The device is built around (and observable in) displays of assumed mutual knowledge, and an assumed reciprocity between co-members that is used for aligning understanding. We suggest that the omnirelevant device operates as a background resource for telling the story, which is displayed as operational for the participants through orientations to what is 'known' about characters mentioned in the course of the telling.

In examining how knowledge and identities are invoked within story-telling, Lerner's (1992, 1993) work on conjoined participation as 'a locally-situated identity' demonstrates how shared knowledge is 'both a practical concern and routine achievement' (1992, p. 268). While Lerner's analysis demonstrates how the identities and relationships of and between the story-tellers are revealed in all phases of a story-telling, he does not examine the 'gaps' in the story-telling—instances

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where the story is put on hold to attend to some other business. In the analysis below, we argue that such gaps are crucial sites for displays of shared understandings and identities, and, in such moments, there is evidence of not only a locally-situated identity, but also of the members' orientations to a shared knowledge.

The *in situ* use of assumed shared knowledge can, we suggest, reveal a level of context within the interaction that has relevance beyond the local task of story-telling. As Pomerantz suggests:

Interactants enact their personal relationships in their current interactions. Yet what they do, say, and feel in the present may be connected to conversations (and more generally experiences) in the past. For interactants, past interactions may provide a context for events in a current interaction. One way participants use 'context' involves invoking something from the past to explain something occurring in the present. (1998, p. 130)

While contextual relevancies are irredeemably locally situated and generated through the turn-by-turn organisation of talk, the production and management of these local contextual relevancies may also involve the deployment of what might be considered 'background' context—understandings about the identities and associated predicates of members that have a basis in past interactions and experiences. One particular domain of social action in which these sorts of understandings are displayed is reference to persons (Enfield & Stivers, 2007; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1996). Whether a particular person is described as 'Bob', 'Robert Barker', or 'my neighbour' will depend on the recipient for whom the reference is designed. Thus, recipient design, in this respect, is irredeemably tied to understandings of, and past experiences between, speaker and recipient. As Watson points out:

... the procedures of 'membership' and of recipient design are reflexively related phenomena. A membership analysis is established, in part, through the vehicle of recipient design, while the course of the recipient design is itself conducted through consultation of the emergent membership analysis. (1981, p. 99)

In our discussion of the data below, we focus on those places where references to 'characters' in the story are made and, through this,





highlight the way that such references establish co-membership of a device whose membership is predicated on assumed 'knowledge-in-common'. By exploring when and how the device is invoked within the unfolding story, we argue that this device is operating as omnirelevant. That is, it involves the situated relevance of the members' identities and a predicated common-stock-of-knowledge that is observably invoked, repaired, and used in ways tangential to the course of the story, but that is fundamental to the organisation of the situated interaction. While the device is not *directly* referred to (in the sense that the members do not use category terms), it is nonetheless analytically observable through the cracks, joints, and seams of the unfolding interaction. As such, the device invokes a contextual relevance beyond the local action of telling the story through past and present relevance of who-we-are-to-each-other.

Omnirelevance and context 1: Person reference repair

As noted above, the preference for recipient design in referring to persons is discussed by Sacks and Schegloff (1979), who formulate some general observations about a wide range of person reference forms in a range of interactional contexts. Fundamental to this account of recognitionals are the suppositions that are involved in terms of what the speaker and recipient 'know':

The specification of the general preference for recipient design in the domain of reference to persons is: If they are possible, prefer recognitionals. By 'recognitionals' we intend, such reference forms as invite and allow a recipient to find, from some 'the-referrer's-use-of-a-reference-form' on some 'this-occasion-of-use,' who, that recipient knows, is being referred to. By 'if they are possible' we mean: If recipient may be supposed by speaker to know the one being referred to, and if recipient may suppose speaker to have so supposed. The speaker's supposition will be evidenced by, for example, use of a first name, first names being a basic sort for recognitionals. (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979, p. 17, emphasis in original)

The use of a first name, then, tells us something of the relationship and/or shared understandings of the members of an interaction. In the following example, the use of a first name leads to a repair sequence when it turns out that this is not a recognitional reference for one member. Jimmy begins to tell a story by introducing a person ('Dav's Dad'), which is followed by Shirl offering a second person, Toni, to the

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story. Our interest is the ensuing discussion brought about by Ruth at line 43, where she asks 'who's that?'

Extract 1

40 J: =well look at D::av's Da:d (.) I don't know how
 41 much truth is in that bout er=
 42 S: =with that fat slag Toni=
 43 R: =who's that?=
 44 J: =you know-phhhhhh-yu know Jean Roberts-Phil
 45 Roberts' Mum [her granddaughter] -
 46 S: [an she led] 'im on as well
 47 [like]
 48 J: [well yu] don't know like yu don't actua:lly
 49 know like do y::a Sh:irl? (.) There might-I--I
 50 think there's a lot more to it but I don't know
 51 [so I'm not gonna judge either ov um]
 52 S: [I used to knock] around
 53 with 'er [for years]
 54 R: [I::s] that Julie Roberts'
 55 daughter?
 56 J: yer

Jimmy initiates a story that is touched off by earlier talk with the preface, 'well look at Dav's Dad'. This introduces a character that the recipients are presumed to know, and potentially a 'known story', given the use of the indexical 'that', which seems to presume shared knowledge about what 'that' refers to. The person reference assumes recognition from the other members via the relational device 'Dav's Dad'. Shirl demonstrates a shared understanding of not only who is being talked about, but the story that is being introduced, with her completion 'with that fat slag Toni' latching on to Jimmy's incomplete turn, thereby establishing herself as a story consociate (Lerner, 1992). However, while Shirl has displayed her recognition of the person referred to and the story alluded to, Ruth asks 'who's that?' In his response, Jimmy locates the trouble source as being the reference to Toni, rather than Dav's Dad, which displays his understanding of what knowledge is shared and what is not. Jimmy's repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), '=you know-phhhhhh-yu know Jean Roberts-Phil Roberts mum her granddaughter', makes reference to people Ruth is assumed to know, a stock of knowledge that can be used to locate the referred-to person.

At lines 54-55, Ruth demonstrates the (at least partial) success of this identification with a clarification request: 'is that Julie Roberts





daughter'. The clarification request shows that 'Phil Roberts's mum's granddaughter' has been used to locate 'Julie Roberts' and her daughter, at which point a candidate referent for the reference to 'Toni' is proffered. Note that this additional reference to 'Julie Roberts' also assumes a shared stock of knowledge and relies on Jimmy or Shirl recognising this referent. Ruth's candidate is subsequently confirmed by Jimmy (line 56).

The eventual identification of Toni is accomplished through the use of the 'relational pair' device. As Sacks suggests, the use of this device offers a neat solution for 'the single-person problem':

Take the person you have to categorize; treat them as the second person of a pair for which the first is known; find a first. If you can find a first—and in principle you can find a first—you've got a solution. (1995, Vol. 1, p. 327)

This case is rather more complicated, as Jimmy uses a first (Phil Roberts) to find a second (Phil Roberts's mum) to identify 'Toni' as a third. Ruth then proposes 'Julie Roberts' as a first to locate Toni, which may suggest that Julie Roberts was recognised—also by way of the relational pair device—as a second part to Phil Roberts or his mum.

For a relational pair device to work, it requires that the speakers have an understanding of what people are known by the other members. 'Phil Roberts's mum' is used as a first by Jimmy because of a displayed assumption that this serves as a recognitional reference for Ruth. That is, the relational pair device not only categorises the referred-to people, but operates within a device that is operational for the situated activity—a device by which the personal relationships of the members are made relevant for the action of doing identification.

The members of this interaction display their relationships (and associated histories and experiences) with one another in order to draw on knowledge that serves as a shared 'resource' for locating Toni. The locally immediate activity of telling a story is put on hold in order to establish a sense of intersubjectivity (i.e., being able to locate the references to people central to the story), but this shared understanding is itself produced through what the participants already 'know that the other members know'. The locally relevant knowledge (and activity) is produced by invoking some collection of knowledge that is already established as being 'known-in-common'.

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Thus, the work of establishing recognitional person reference not only invokes the participants' identities in the sense of displaying 'who-we-are-and-what-we-know-each-other-are-doing', but displays the relevance of this for the organisation of the locally situated activity. That is, there is a displayed orientation to a background—perhaps 'underlying'—device that is used to undertake the here-and-now activity. That the business of telling a story is suspended (although Shirl carries on in overlap while Ruth and Jimmy establish identification), the turns where Ruth seeks and receives clarification of the person references show something of the 'always there and always potentially relevant' aspect of the device that is used in organising this particular interaction. Furthermore, when this device is invoked, it takes priority in terms of the actions being done, which points to the omnirelevance of this device for undertaking the talk at hand.

Omnirelevance and context 2: Side-sequence

The second example involves a side sequence initiated after Jimmy reveals some mistaken knowledge, and it turns out that this mistaken knowledge is shared by the other members.

Extract 2

85 J: =The only thing right that made me think right
86 Ruth, I-he was in Risley when I got to Risley
87 he was there (.) I went round 'n seen 'im I
88 always thought 'is name was John=
89 R: =His name is John [isn't it?]
90 S: [it's John]=
91 J: =No it's George (.) 'is names George like
92 R: [I thought 'is name was John (hahahahaha)
93 S: [I always thought John was 'is name(hahahahaha)
94 J: I always called 'im John yer- it's only 'is
95 nick name it's not 'is real name (.) n- I've
96 known 'im since I was a little kid as well
97 S: Yer I've known 'im a good while
98 J: Err=
99 R: =I've only known 'im as long as I've ad bins to
100 empty=
101 J: =well J::av-D::av errr D:av-John (0.2) his older
102 son (.) the one that died like (.) used to go to
103 school like w-with uz (.) yuno (.) err me mum
104 used to take all ov uz (.) but err (0.2) the
105 thing that makes me wonder bout Dav's Dad...





In a continuation of the story initiated in Extract 1, Jimmy offers that he saw Dav's Dad in the remand prison they were both at, using the locally subsequent reference form 'he'—given that the referent has been identified in earlier turns (Schegloff, 1996). At lines 87-88, Jimmy temporarily halts his turn-in-progress to reveal that he 'always thought 'is name was John'. The account of a past thought is suggestive of this understanding being erroneous (Jefferson, 2004; Sacks, 1995). What is potentially just a parenthetical remark in Jimmy's turn opens up a side sequence in which Dav's Dad's name is topicalised.

1. Ruth, and then Shirl, orient to Jimmy's claim as suggesting that Dav's Dad's name is not actually John by asserting that 'his name is John'. While Ruth orients to Jimmy's greater epistemic rights in this matter with the tag question 'isn't it' (Raymond & Heritage, 2006), Shirl delivers a straight assertion. Jimmy rejects the assertions and corrects their understanding by stating that his name is George.
2. In a simultaneous start, Ruth and Shirl then report their 'past thoughts' that 'John was his name'. As in Jimmy's initial report, they demonstrate that they understand this to be an error.
3. Jimmy then unpacks his account, reporting that he 'always called him John' and clarifying that John is his nickname, not his 'real name'. Expanding on the temporal references to always thinking/knowing his name was John, Jimmy adds that he has 'known him since he was a little kid as well'. Shirl, and then Ruth, respond by reporting how long they have known John/George.

Following this, Jimmy returns to the story. Interestingly, despite all the discussion about Dav's Dad's real name, the reference 'John' does not replace 'Dav's Dad' in subsequent references. Thus, while this information does not replace the use of 'Dav's Dad' and does not influence the telling of the story, it interrupts the story as a side sequence and aligns the knowledge in common. The story-telling is suspended when Jimmy reveals his mistaken understanding and Ruth and Shirl subsequently display theirs. The symmetry of the side-sequence is remarkable in that it proceeds in a series of 'rounds', whereby each person reports what they 'know', what they 'thought in the past', and the length of time they have known 'John/George', and, in doing so, collaboratively report and establish their knowledge as mistaken.

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As in Extract 1, the business of telling a story is suspended in order to establish mutual recognition and identification of a referred-to person. In this case, the problem is not in identifying the referred-to person, but in establishing the correct personal name reference—not as an integral part of the story-telling, but as an aside. That is, there are no problems of intersubjectivity in relation to the story itself. Of interest are the displays of past and current knowledge by the members. Jimmy's initial reporting of his past thought only has a local relevance because of some supposition about what Ruth and Shirl think Dav's Dad's name is. Whether or not they 'knew' his name was actually George, the fact that Jimmy 'always thought it was John' is presumably mentioned because it has some relation to the understandings of Ruth and Shirl. As it turns out, Ruth and Shirl's self-selection at lines 89 and 90 pick up on this parenthetical remark and display their understandings. Within this side-sequence, then, there is a joint orientation to the knowledge and understandings shared by the participants, resulting in a new shared understanding.

It is through these claims and displays of knowledge that an underlying contextual device is revealed, in that the participants' identities and relationships with one another come to surface during the momentary suspension of the story-telling. The reference to 'relationships' does not intend to suggest that this sequence reveals anything of the members' 'friendships' or the like, but, rather, that 'who-we-are' is observably relevant in this excerpt. That the matter of Dav's Dad's name is topicalised in this way is a product of the past shared experiences and connections between these particular people that is brought out in this particular interactional context. These experiences and connections have an omnirelevance for the interaction in that they can be brought out at any time, can result in a suspension of the activity at hand, and can have a priority in terms of getting things done. Thus, while we have no ethnographic understanding of the participants' 'relationship', nor any explicit references to or topicalisation of their connections with one another, it is evident in the data that the members are orienting to this. As such, it provides a crucial context for the activity of telling this story.

Discussion

The above discussion has pointed to instances where the activity of telling a story is put on hold in order to address matters of shared understandings. In the first case, a member does not recognise





a reference to a person and the story-telling is suspended until recognition is achieved. In the second, there is an extended side-sequence in which a prior understanding, which turns out to have been shared by all members, is revealed as erroneous and there is a 'gap' in the story, during which the participants reveal their 'mistaken thoughts'. We suggest that, in these moments, the identities and relationships of the members are brought to the fore in a way that displays a level of interactional context that extends beyond the immediately local activity of 'telling stories'.

What is invoked and displayed in both instances is assumed-knowledge-in-common that is revealed through the interactional workings of practices such as person reference and repair. In these sequences, matters relating to what each member 'knows', and the extent to which this knowledge is shared (or not), are displayed and managed. As suggested by previous conversational analytic research (e.g., Lerner, 1992; Raymond & Heritage, 2006), such displays of knowledge in conversational interactions can produce locally relevant identities that are consequential for the organisation of particular social actions. We have argued that the 'reflexive codetermination' of action and identity (Schegloff, 2007) demonstrated in these examples can be seen to offer evidence of a device that is omnirelevant for this situated interaction. That is, the displayed relevance of assumed knowledge-in-common in the extracts discussed appears to invoke memberships that form part of a device that is operational in terms of establishing, for the members, 'who-we-are and what-we-are-doing'—that is, people with shared experiences and knowledge about particular characters who are central to the telling of stories related to these experiences and understandings.

The device generates a set of resources and practices that serve as a locus for this specific interaction. The telling of the story involves the deployment of this device in which the respective identities of the tellers and recipients are relevant for how the course of action comes off (i.e., the stories would have been presented differently to strangers, a newspaper reporter, or Dav). However, when the story is being told (the 'main' business of the interaction), an alternative device can be seen to be in operation, perhaps a 'story-telling' device whereby the participants are organised into 'teller-recipient' categories. Thus, as suggested by Fitzgerald and Housley (2002), it becomes possible to see layers of category relevance embodied within sequences of interaction. The story-telling device does not have 'omnirelevance' though—there are no expectations that it will be deployed, and, when invoked, it

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does not have priority in terms of organising the interaction. What does have priority when invoked, and what is expectedly deployed, is the operation of the omnirelevant device that binds the participants together, as well as holding together individual sequences in one extended sequence of interaction.

Moreover, similar to McHoul and Rapley's (2002; also Rapley, 2004) and Butler's (2008) analyses, the above discussion highlights the operation of an omnirelevant device in instances where there was a hitch in the progressivity of an interaction—with people not doing what they were supposed to be doing by virtue of the device that served as an organisational framework for those particular interactions. It is when people appear to momentarily halt 'doing what they are doing' (whether this is through the absence of some expected action in a time and place where it is expected to occur, or in order to set up the expectations about actions to maintain the omnirelevance of some device), that a background omnirelevant device can be seen as demonstrably relevant and consequential for an episode of interaction. The relevance of side-sequences for identifying some of the relevance of 'background' and 'contextual' operations within situated encounters has been pointed to by McHoul and Rapley:

One characteristic of side sequences is that they may 'formulate' aspects of the context in which the 'main business' (here: recording chunks of everyday life with a camera) is getting done. That is, side sequences can point to incidental contextual features outside the main business of the talk in hand. They can note any somewhat peripheral features of the scene. (McHoul, Rapley, & Antaki, 2008, p. 48)

In a similar way, we might view the incidental and seemingly peripheral actions accomplished in the side-sequences discussed in this paper as fundamental to the ways in which 'identities' and 'context' are formulated. In this respect, it might be in the parenthetical moments of an interaction that members display the sorts of sense-making resources and practices that underlie—and are integral to—larger chunks of interaction.

Notes

1. Sacks's account of omnirelevant devices diverges from Garfinkel's (1967) account of gender as being 'omnirelevant' in that, rather than supposing that some social memberships are 'always relevant'





to interaction, omnirelevance is treated as a locally generated phenomenon.

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