

The operation of defence in conversation

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ABSTRACT

The co-construction of reality within discursive positionings is an area of literature filled with opportunities to explore issues of defence. The use of language in conversation provides such an opportunity to explore how individuals manage themselves and cope with the anxiety that may arise through talk. This research study explores structural norms in conversation analyses and the ways in which individuals use these to defend themselves against anxiety within conversation. One hundred small samples of conversations are gathered in relation to a topic that is presumed to cause a degree of internal or unconscious conflict. This topic has been drawn from a brief pilot study with twenty participants that used different anxiety-provoking discourse situations. In so doing, the question has been related to issues of weight and dating. The sequences within these conversations are explored for particular patterns in language use and they are analyzed in relation to coping strategies that use defence to reduce and manage anxiety. These patterns have been linked to ways in which speakers filter and manage their responses to help them to appear diplomatic, sensitive or polite. This is then related to defensive talk by addressing issues of facework within a particular context. This data has been analyzed using conversation analyses, and has been informed by psychoanalytic understandings of the unconscious workings of defence against anxiety.

Keywords: Conversation analyses, defence, anxiety, unconscious, discursive positionings, facework

INTRODUCTION

Language and facework

Discourse research has served as an important influence in understanding how 'reality' is constructed in relation to cultural scripts and settings (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The meanings that actors give to their experiences are informed by how they manage themselves within their particular discursive positioning. Cultural scripts within discourse serve as a means through which persons can position themselves in relation to other people. Roles, ideas and ideals in discourse become a useful tool for managing subjectivity and meanings given to experience (Shotter, 2005).

Garfinkel (1967) advocated the use of an ethno-methodological approach which claimed that 'reality' is accomplished and co-constructed by actors in interaction. In this approach, discourse is intertwined with active agents and the domain of 'everyday' interaction increasingly became a key field of study for researchers. Interaction is thus imbued with structural characteristics that examine actor's goals and purposes achievable in interaction. Goffman (1959) pointed to the way that these purposes were related to the presentation of the self. Social constructionist theories support discourse research by linking actors as having both a passive and an active role within their context (Hollway & Jefferson, 2005). Interaction is thereby related to the use of language to achieve particular interests such as managing subjectivity. These interests are habitual processes that do not necessarily occur consciously. It is thus important to reflect upon processes that are often 'taken for granted' and yet reveal much about individual investments and behaviour.

The notion of intersubjectivity is also drawn from in areas such as feminist research to highlight the importance of co-constructed realities within power relations (Frith, 1998; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Performances through language are thus usefully related to *doing* particular power relations and therefore maintaining, producing and reproducing discursive practices. The use of language is not only central in constructing power relations, but also in constructing particular understandings and investments in discourse. These investments inform how individuals understand themselves, others and the world (Avdi & Georgaca, 2007). Language is therefore an important tool to gain insight into how and why

conversations are managed or negotiated in particular ways (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). This insight takes into account the management of the self and introduces the operation of defence in constructing the self. Language is thus extended to examine psychoanalytic notions of defence. It is viewed as involving complicated coping strategies to maintain the self (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). This maintenance of the self may be further informed by positionings in discourse that are conflicting and inconsistent. This research draws on positionings that refer to ideals of beauty and attractiveness, but at the same time refer to unconditional love and acceptance despite appearance. Further, these discursive positionings are informed by what it is to have a favourable or socially acceptable self. Discourse can also be related to individuals' values and morals. These may be in conflict within certain discursive positionings and therefore serve as anxiety-provoking. Issues such as impression management and the importance of negotiating the self are thus involved within defensive practices in conversations (Goffman, 1959).

Defensive practices are managed by understanding the notion of recipient design in accomplishing conversations (Ten Have, 1999). This raises the issue of how one's talk is oriented towards others within interactions. Brown and Levinson (1987) point to the notion of 'face' and how facework entails managing one's public self image, i.e. being socially approved and unimpeded by others. These 'face wants' can be threatened and the term face threatening acts (FTAs) are introduced alongside anxiety. Both are relevant within these instances. The source of these threats varies, but drawing on potentially threatening discursive positionings offers a departure point for defence analysis

In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that facework addresses the issue of recipient design in ways where social approval and acceptance plays an important role in managing subjectivity and hence conversations. The notion of politeness within facework is highlighted in relation to managing anxiety in awareness of possible FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987) point to the importance of speakers' attention to interactional offences and diplomacy within interactions. This attentiveness illustrates speaker support through devices in language that make for tactful management of conversations. Defence is thus usefully related to how language is used within instances of FTAs and this opens up a space in which patterns and defence in language can be explored. The process of co-constructing subjectivity and interactional 'realities' within conversations is therefore a central place to explore

defensive talk (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Defence can in this case be shown to be examined most effectively by relating it to discourse and social interactions or relationships.

Defence within the psychosocial approach

Hollway and Jefferson (2005) advocate a particular way to relate the internal processes of defence in psychoanalyses and the external processes in discourse. They argue that the focus should be on examining how and why actors invest in particular positions in discourse and how these investments are related to their own management of identity (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 2002). The approach recognizes this relationship without viewing the actor as either passive or active. It is thus not simply focused on structure or agency, but on their interrelationship. Lapping (2007) argues that sociology which has primed theories such as ethno-methodology and social constructionism has focused on structure, but neglects the importance of emotions in managing subjectivity. Conversation analytic approaches therefore need to examine these processes in conjunction with contextual factors, including the emotions involved and the workings of the unconscious.

Defence is defined by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) broadly as investments in actors that are used to protect themselves from anxiety. Psychoanalytic notions of defence through categorized defence mechanisms are relevant here, such as repression, projection or rationalization. These are used as coping mechanisms by denying or distorting experiences. This research extends and operationalizes defence more specifically by investigating its form in language. This includes pauses, repetitions or exaggerations, among others, that may relate to and be analysed as defensive practices. Defence is thus conceptualised as a method of unconsciously managing subjectivity and coping with anxiety. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) have used this conceptualization to term actors as 'defended' subjects. Speakers are thus continually guarding against anxiety within conversations. Language as a resource can therefore be explored in managing, reducing or avoiding anxiety.

Conversation analyses in examining defence

Previous discourse research, such as that of Hollway and Jefferson (2000) has understood defence in relation to biographical narrative, rather than conversational devices. Conversation analyses (CA) might serve as an important resource in

exploring defence in conversation. Language and how it is ordered in conversation is central to conversation analyses (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). The rules in language are argued to be unconscious processes that are used to accomplish a conversation (Seedhouse, 2004). Defences should therefore be available for examination through relating responses to the structural framework provided by CA. More specifically the relationship of defence to breaches, repairs and turn-taking in conversation will be examined. CA has explored these principles to define the construction of conversation, but has yet to directly relate these to defence (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1992; Seedhouse, 2004).

The rules of conversation place certain expectations on those in the conversation. If they are breached then anxiety may occur. This is for instance with unanswered questions or inappropriate responses. It will be useful to examine how actors repair and handle those breaches and whether these include ways of accepting or ignoring the violation (Schegloff, 1992). This may further be related to how the self is managed within these breaches and how the conversation is managed. Goffman (1959) explored moments during these breaches and noted defensive and protective practices. This includes 'saving face' or softening one's responses through jokes to alleviate the anxiety of the breach. It may also be indicative of rationalizing the other's direction of the conversation (Schegloff, 1992). The use of humour and laughter may in its own right be indicative of serving particular functions that manage anxiety within interactions (Glenn, 2003).

Conversation is also an accomplishment between actors (Goffman, 1959; Seedhouse, 2004). Intersubjectivity and reflexivity are notions that posit the centrality of a collaborative view on constructing oneself through language (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The co-construction of talk between speakers raises the issue of how we handle each other, i.e. recipient design (Ten Have, 1999). This process can be related to language devices which reflect uncertainty and sensitivity, and are implicated in how speakers invest in a favourable ideal of the self, for instance as a moral and non-judgmental person. The question introduced in this study used discourse to raise issues of weight or obesity as related to unconditional love. This served as a platform which raised anxiety and internal conflict and thus responses can be interpreted as defensive. This may be illustrated through speakers exaggerating or repeating points (Natale, Dahlberg & Jaffe, 1978; Roseneil, 2006). Pauses, silences,

self-interruptions and word extensions are also related to its function as buying time to construct responses. These may be more apparent in an anxiety provoking scenario as depicted by posing a 'tough' question. The need to be sensitive and therefore polite was also raised in the data analysis, given the nature of the question posed.

Narrative analysis has been a favoured method in the qualitative literature in examining defence in conversation. Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) approach uses small number of case studies to elicit biographically informed narrative analyses. The proposed study intends to examine language structures by using CA with a wide sample of participants and with small interchanges of conversation. These conversations are in that way related to regularly occurring patterns within language. Clinical research has focused on using wider samples to illustrate the use of language in defensive talk. This has however been reduced to the content of language (Natale et al., 1978). CA will thus serve an effective tool to examine the orderliness and structure within language in defensive talk.

This research attempts to extend work that has been done on language in both psychoanalyses and CA. Defence is explored by prompting the actor to engage with a question presumably to cause some internal conflict. This is through positionings in discourse that place particularly burdensome expectations on speakers arrived at through a pilot study (Roseneil, 2006). Participants were asked to comment on their feelings towards long term partners who become obese. Patterns in language were then examined in relation to anxiety and therefore defence.

METHOD

Design

This study may be categorized as exploratory research. Conversation analysis is used to analyze data. The functions that language serve are explored through this method of analysis. The analysis is based on comprehensive data treatment (Ten Have, 1999). This attempts to generalize and relate patterns in language from a body of data to a specific theory such as that of the operation of defence in conversation. The analysis is also informed by issues of context such as intersubjectivity and discourse. These contextual issues are further informed by discourse and social constructionist theories. I attempt to identify and explore defence within conversation and make use of approximately one hundred small samples of conversation from as many participants.

The samples of conversation are very brief consisting of at least one sequence and lasting on average for forty seconds.

Participants

The participants conform to the same number needed for the snippets of conversations, i.e. one hundred participants. This is a wide data base intended to generate enough examples to extract regularly occurring patterns or rules in conversation.

Convenience sampling was used to approach participants and there are no specific parameters for including or excluding participants. Sampling depended on whether the potential participants appeared accessible to engage in the project. Participants were mainly approached on a university campus and in a large and busy shopping mall.

Procedure

The participants were approached in a situation that interpreted as appropriate. The recording device was at hand before approaching a participant as well as release forms for the participants to read and sign after our conversation. Conversations were initiated by me introducing myself and a request that our conversations be recorded while I ask them a question on issues of weight and dating. The conversations were recorded and then the recorder was switched off and the purpose and interests of my study was introduced. This latter part may be understood as the 'debriefing' part of the interaction. I then introduce a release form assuring participants of their confidentiality. The forms also request permission for our recording to be used in my research project.

The topic on which the approach is based is informed by discourse which offers conflicting positionings. This has been based on assumptions of burdensome expectations that are used to elicit anxiety. A brief pilot study was conducted with twenty participants. The conversations were used to explore how a range of topics were reacted and responded to. This was based on questions referring to appearance, weight, dating and health, such as issues of plastic surgery, unconventional relationships, exercising and obesity. These were framed to invite self evaluations on the part of the participant. I chose a specific question from the preliminary recordings. The pilot recordings were not extensively analyzed using CA, but were briefly

trawled for patterns in language. The participants' reactions were also examined for which topics were most useful in addressing anxiety and defence. I concluded on a standard question based on participants' feelings about their long term partner becoming obese. I then continued to explore the operation of defence in conversation by presenting this 'tough' question to one hundred participants. Regularly occurring patterns can be effectively explored by having a uniform topic and question to use conversation analyses on.

Data Analysis

The theoretical framework requires a focus on an interpretative approach in analyzing data (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall (1994). The research question centers on forms of defence, and this is informed by psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious that prime the analyses on interpretation (Novie, 2003). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that interpretations of language use and defence need to be warranted by appropriate claims and evidence. Further, the data may support more than one interpretation. Interpretations of language use must be "methodologically, rhetorically and clinically convincing" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 79). I therefore attempt to provide theoretical and methodological support for my analysis that draws from methods of conversation analyses.

I will be specifically using conversation analyses to interpret how defence operates in conversation. The structure and joint construction of the conversation as an unconscious process serves as a medium to explore unconscious impulses such as defence (Hollway & Jefferson, 2005). The principles and rules of conversation as indicated by CA will be directly related to defence as one of a set of coping strategies. These are illustrated through patterns in language use by both participants and me. These include patterns in delays, self-interruption, repetition, repairs and laughter, acknowledgements and overlaps. This is further related to rules of preference and speaker support within adjacency pairs (Sacks et al., 1974). The analysis stresses the importance of orderliness in constructing conversation (Ten have, 1999). Seedhouse (2004, p. 16) points to interaction as action and highlights functionality within talk. This is especially in asking "Why that, in that way, right now?" (Seedhouse, 2004, p. 16). It is through the construction of joint responses and sequences in language that defence is shown to operate. I draw from this especially to consider what speakers are *doing* through patterns in language use. I consider these patterns significant to this

research by its frequency and placement in sequences. I did not specifically count across the samples, but analysed regular and recurring themes across conversations. These themes are then related to its function in that particular point of the conversation.

The transcription conventions are drawn from Schegloff's homepage on CA transcriptions (<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/>). A table of these transcript symbols are found in the Appendix.

ANALYSIS

The following analysis is supported by continual attention to the implications of orienting oneself to another in interaction. Shotter (2005) argues that language is continually drawn upon as a useful resource to manage oneself in interactions. I therefore refer to language as an important tool in meeting one's interests, even unconsciously. I will turn now to patterns in language, addressing its uses in constructing conversation. These patterns will be specifically related to the management of anxiety and thus defence.

Rephrasing and borrowing thinking time

Silences, token fillers and word extensions. The arrangement of the conversations recorded within research falls under the unit of adjacency pairs (Sacks et al., 1974). These are sequences of conversations which have expected or predictable second turns, i.e. greetings or questions (Seedhouse, 2004). I ask a question and expect and oblige participants to answer it. I therefore select the speaker. The subsequent management of their responses provided space to explore regular occurring patterns. This is especially considering the use of language to borrow time in order to assess the situation for responding.

Participants often acknowledged the difficulty of responding to a tough question. In this situation, they are confronted with issues of honesty and genuineness in terms of feelings towards obesity and ideals of beauty. The case scenario positioned participants in ways which are challenging and thus anxiety is presumed to be elicited. This is reflected in the way they respond, in the silences, token fillers and word extensions which help to borrow time to think and structure and frame responses. A

theme throughout responses consisted of participants admitting the question as 'tough' or 'hard'. The potential dispreference and anxiety is thus acknowledged and softens the situation by recognizing it.

- 1 Nic: hhh[h ((her head in her hands))
 P33: [that's a tough question
 Nic: ya
- 2 P47: and try and work out the problem (.) um: otherwise eh that's that's a
 tough on[e
 Nic: [hhh
 P47: I don't know that's a catch 22 [like you] you don't know what to do
 then its (.)
 Nic: [ya]
- 3 Nic: uh I mean how would you *feel* about that (.) basically (td)=
 P72: °oh my word°
 Nic: hh

The above examples show the demands of the question. Participants thus reflect upon these demands in ways that acknowledge the situation and thus expose its demands. The demands of the question were not always explicitly said and silences both immediately after my selection and during turns reveal the trouble in talk.

There is a recurrent pattern with regard to silences and delays in participants' response to the question. These silences perform particular functions in order to manage the conversation. Although brief silences of 1 - 3 seconds, are commonplace in all conversation, this analysis suggests that these delays are frequently used to borrow time to assess and construct responses (Ten Have, 1999).

I distinguish between delays in this analysis through their placement in the conversation. Delays immediately after my question are of similar time as those within responses. These delays last from 1 second, written as (.), to 3 seconds. I will firstly discuss the implications of delays after my question. Delays immediately after my question are illustrated as follows:

- 4 P32: (1 sec) u::m generally::↑ (1 sec) if I'm ok with [it]↑ its fine =
- 5 P35: (2 sec) I don't think I would actually °really care°
- 6 P37: (3 sec) uh: I think it would depend on how much (.) I liked him in the

first
place↑=

These indicate that time is used to formulate a competent and accountable answer (Seedhouse, 2004). A varying degree of anxiety may be presumed from this question. Speakers prefer to have their responses accepted by others. Seedhouse (2004) points to the principle of preference within CA in order to help speakers orient themselves to others through talk. In this instance, the frequent use of delays shows how speakers borrow time in order to minimize the degree of disaffiliation. This therefore reduces a potential dispreferred second turn. A dispreferred second turn would consist of devaluing and questioning participants' response. I continually avoided this in conversations as this posed consequences for my own facework, i.e. in maintaining an appreciative and positive self image. In one instance I interrupted my participant as she had misunderstood my question. This example is as follows:

- 7 P46: ...I'm not happy but it like (.) if [I'd put on a] bit of weight it probably means I'm happy (.)
 Nic: [h but your]
 P46: °[if that ma]kes sense°
 Nic: [ya]

In this example I interrupt the participant's answer. This may display disagreement through my attempted and failed repair. In this way I am not showing dispreferred second turn. This is shown as dispreferred by the participant's interpretation of her answer as not making sense and thus not accountable. This illustrates the potential for anxiety, given a question which may be responded to with dislike or disaffiliation. The use of time to assess the situation and mediate anxiety and dispreference is therefore important.

Time is used in this way as thinking time to reduce future anxiety and protect one's face from negativity. The concern for preference is thus tied with issues of facework. Facework is relevant here as there is a public image that needs maintenance. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that facework often includes hesitation and delays before speaking, i.e. hedging. It is thus important to note that my question can be considered a face threatening act (FTA) and facework is required to manage anxiety from this. In avoiding such anxiety, silences are seen to be used to assess the question and the potential response before taking one's turn (Ten Have, 1999).

There are other language devices which were recurrent and met the same uses of that of hedging. These were seen through the use of token fillers such as words like ‘um’, ‘well’ and ‘uh’. These were regular devices used immediately after my question. Silences may be problematic given its potential to stop the flow of conversation (Schegloff, 1992). Questions are positioned so that they require responses. These need to be spoken and silences impede this process. These silences, when they occur, are thus not longer than 3 seconds. Token fillers may in this case be used to indicate to me that they are thinking, rather than remaining silent. In addition to delays at this point, token fillers appear to serve in assessing the situation as well. Furthermore, these were in combination with the words being extended. A typical case would have these token fillers lasting 1 – 2 seconds. These opening words not only serve to introduce participants’ opinion and response, but borrow thinking time to respond. Some examples of these instances include the following:

8 P34: well:: I I’m personally an active person so:

9 P88: (2) well:: um: if it *did* bug me=

10 P91: um: (.) well (.) I don’t really care about peop- what other people say=

The purpose of having to think and manage the question further introduces cases where participants explicitly acknowledged how they should respond. This was either by specifically asking themselves how they should respond or by reflecting back what is asked of them. These instances appear to suggest that participants are thinking about the question and the potential answer. This is through repeating the question as a rhetorical question. This is not a repair or clarification of what I asked, but rather a statement registering what is needed from them. Some examples include:

11 P95: um::: (2) basically (1) °how do I answer this now°

12 P66: what would I do (.) um: (2) I’d be so concerned: coz if people are starting to talk about it then maybe it means: he is (.) getting out of ha:nd

13 P77: (1) how would I feel about that h[hhh] um::: (2) I don’t know I [I’d]
prefer if she if...

Nic: [hhh] [ya]

Example 8 illustrates how participants acknowledge how they should answer and thus manage the response. This acknowledgement explicitly exposes the situation rather than remaining silent. This therefore helps speakers to borrow time and identify the anxiety the question has induced in them. Example 9 and 10 are those which reflect what is asked of them and also borrow time to assess the situation.

In addition to token fillers and their extensions, silences within turns are particularly illuminating. Delays within participant's turns were found while they provided an opinion. Delays were also found between sentence completions or within transitional relevant places (TRPs). This latter term describes the place where a potential next speaker could talk, but as I asked the question it was these instances which required participants to continue and build upon their response. Delays were found often in between phrasing such as within self-repairs and they were frequent within responses. The pauses within turns occurred before participants posed claims or asserted their answer. The pauses were also often combined with other time borrowing devices such as token fillers and word extensions. This is with participants having to pose answers after time is taken to assess how it should be portrayed. This is again related to having to filter responses so as to provide an accountable and acceptable answer. Time is therefore borrowed through hesitation in order to consider responding. Some examples of such pauses are:

- 14 P82: =let them know↓ (.) [I] would tell them (.) that: they should:: go to the gym:
Nic: [ya]
- 15 P89: =you know what I mean [like] (.) um (1) I don't think um I don't know though I
Nic: [ya]
think (1) mm:: (.) ya I don't think I don't think it would really matter if somebody was obese

Example 14 and 15 show the use of delays within turns and before particular claims. Example 15 shows for instance a series of pauses and words that occur before they claim that it does not matter if somebody was obese.

Repairs, self-interruptions. The analysis showed a particular trend in self initiated repairs. I will firstly discuss them with regard to participants and later address my own use of them. Seedhouse (2004) argues that self initiated repairs are most preferred, especially as these repairs function so that speakers avoid being repaired by the other, misunderstood or unfavourably perceived. This is characterized by self-interruption and rephrasing. Participants frequently self-repaired what they were saying and therefore managed potential anxiety. Schegloff (1992) points to how repairable items serve as trouble for speakers. A speaker displays sensitivity to the appropriateness of self-repair by continually rephrasing what they say in order for their response to be packaged in a suitable and effective way (Schegloff, 1992; Seedhouse, 2004). This is related to facework and continually means attending to one's positive and negative face to be appreciated by the other. This means not only being accepted, i.e. positive face wants, but also avoiding being impeded by others, negative face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In attending to these wants, participants frequently rephrased their opinions. Schegloff (1992) suggests this process as a self-righting mechanism used as a defence to avoid unpleasantness in FTAs. Participants are allowed to explain themselves and at the same time be accountable for any possible breakdowns. This avoids repairs done by others, i.e. such as myself correcting or questioning their response (Seedhouse, 2004). Some examples include the following:

- 16 P8: um: (.) so it would probably make me angry if o[ther p]eople- I mean obviously I'd want that person to get healthier: =
 Nic: = ya ya=
- 17 P24: u:::m (.) I don't know probably wouldn't be so too happy [but]- like then again you
 Nic: [is it]
 P24: know you love someone °you know you (.) love° them for who they [are I guess]
 Nic: [ya ya ya]

Example 16 shows the participant adding to what they are saying. It is thus not only about issues of appearance, but the health issues as well. It is a FTA in assuming that I might consider them to care only about the appearance and not the person's health. This is adding to their response by encompassing a well rounded answer. Example 17 shows an interesting point. The participant is adding to the response by contradicting

it at the same time. It is thus not that obesity is bad, although it not good for health and appearance reasons, but that you should love them despite this. This issue was a regular point in the conversations. The tension between the right and wrong answer is linked to anxiety. Participants showed this in acknowledging the tensions between issues of appearance, health as well as unconditional love. This was reflected in their timing to self repair, but also occurred through the content change throughout their response. The issue of presenting good or bad impressions is significant to this analysis. Patterns were found not only through conversational rules, but through participants' contradictory remarks. This is acknowledged in the following examples:

18 P16: but um: (.) ya no I'd probably be worried about his health and hopefully I'd be a good enough person not to let the physical [over play the] rest but [you never know] hh[h]

Nic: [ya ya ya] [no that's great] [hhh]

19 P19: =primarily (1) I mean (.) I wouldn't say that I wouldn't you know *not* acknowledge it because (.) most people would want to say that coz it sounds like the most ethical thing=

Examples 18 and 19 show the issue of stating a claim and then acknowledging the social appropriateness of it. This relates to recognizing the tension of it for one's self-presentation as good or bad, as in example 18. This also relates to the tension of genuineness in answering a question calling on societal norms and tensions, as in example 19.

I return now to issues of repairs in relation to its use of constructing sensible answers. Repairs not only occurred as self repair mechanisms. Participants also repaired immediately after my questioning. This serves to help speakers formulate their answers as best can be, given all the information they need to do so. This other repair allowed for my question to be understood and clarified more to participants' satisfaction. Some examples are as follows:

20 P2: I would (.) umm (.) how do I feel about it (.) I don't understand the question

Nic: like um I mean if you were dati[ng

P2: [I would I would be like (1) I don't even wanna be with them anymore

21 P5: are we talking about of someone I'm dating?

Nic: yes (.)

Schegloff (1992) suggests that repair in this way is the last defence on mutual understanding. The reflection and repair in both these examples made me either repeat the question or clarify a concern of theirs. Participants could check their understanding as well as any possible misunderstandings. This helps to manage an appropriate answer as well as gain a better understanding of the situation through repair. Repairs thus serve as a last resort in obtaining information to formulate a sensible answer, and thus manage anxiety by avoiding misunderstanding. Repairs therefore serve to borrow time and to help gather more information in order to construct an answer that is accountable. This shows the trouble taken in accomplishing the response. Language is therefore used to manage this trouble through talk.

Mitigating words, repetition. There were frequent mitigating words within participants' response. Sentences were framed in ways which softened their claims. Some words include words such as 'might', 'probably', 'sort of' or 'guess'. These were used to construct responses as more indirect (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Participants are not rudely refusing to answer and manage a diplomatic response. Schegloff (1992) suggests that through this indirect process the chance for me to repair is also avoided. This is by the softening of claims and thus dispreference is avoided. This vagueness serves to meet participant's interests of my acceptance and understanding. This facework builds affiliation and social solidarity between us, in a situation where dispreference is possible, such as that made by the presence of FTAs through my questioning. Face saving is thus managed through language by the use of mitigating words. Some examples include:

- 22 P53: um: well for his *own*: sort of health purposes I'd probably encourage him [to] lose
 Nic: [ya]
 P53: it (.) I suppose it .h (sigh out) it it would↑(.) it would compromise sort of attractiveness I guess but I [suppose] if you *with* someone and they mean that
 Nic: [ya:]
 much and you with them for a whi:le =
- 23 P84: <maybe I would like kind of maybe ask him (.) you know don't you

think you're putting on weight =

Examples 22 and 23 show the use of varying and frequent mitigating words. Example 23 shows many one after another. This displays the trouble taken in accomplishing talk. Mitigating words were often repeated. This thus served as a temporary escape to borrow time to think and form a sensible answer, while also using mitigating words to soften claims and avoid an unfavourable appraisal.

There was also a recurrent use of repetition. This occurred in ways where participants would repeat certain claims, often towards the end of the conversation, and would serve to sum up the answer. Anxiety rising from thinking about what to say could be brought back to any claims the participant felt were appropriate and satisfactory for a response. Their responses could be asserted as warrantable by resorting back to the gist of what they were saying. Some examples include:

- 24 P1: umm honestly I wouldn't have a problem wit[h it] coz if you dating for so: long::
 Nic: [is it]
 I don't think the way the person looks should ma:tter anymore < coz you love them so much: .h that being (.) overweight: it doesn't- it shouldn't matter anymore
- 25 P6: = then I I don't care anymore I already have an established relations[hip with]
 Nic: [is it]
 P6: them↓ <I wouldn't care what other people thought abou[t hi]m
 Nic: [ya] ya

Example 24 shows the response starting and ending off with the claim that 'it doesn't matter'. This is the gist of her opinion. In example 25 this is illustrated more than twice, not only in this example, but at the beginning of the conversation (not included in this extract). This refers to the point that the participant would not care if the partner was obese.

Politeness and speaker support

Laughter. I turn now to encompass my own defensive talk in addition to those of participants. I emphasize the use of language to create affiliation and social support by firstly turning to the recurrent use of laughter in the conversations.

- Nic: who you are
- 34 P47: =uh: because obviously she'll also be f feeling insecure so: um: (1)
that's that's a tough one <I don't know what I would d[o] [°ya°]
- Nic: [hhh] [you]
have to be in that situation
- P47: ya [to] see what I'll do
- Nic: [ya]

Example 33 and 34 show how I reflect upon what they seem to be saying or want to say. Overlap is common before TRPs and we can see this in these examples. I do not interrupt as such, but rather finish and confirm what they might be trying to say. This builds a sense that I know what participants mean. This further creates social support where I ease the situation if I interpret it as uncomfortable or incomplete. In example 2 for instance the participant says they do not know what they would do. I give them a way out by saying that they would have to be in that situation. I thus help to construct an accountable answer through reflecting upon what they might mean and want to say.

Politeness is thus attended to by supporting, agreeing and validating participants. Pridham (2001) claims as well that politeness depends on how much speakers feel they are imposing on others. I suggest that in these conversations I acknowledge that I am imposing by introducing an anxiety-provoking question. Pridham (2001) notes this for speakers, but I suggest this applies to listeners as well. This is especially in line with appreciative and active listening, which attempts to validate the words of speakers. In line with facework, positive and negative face is being threatened for participants and thus I take measures to reduce this for participants. I thus continually build on positive and negative politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that positive politeness is an expression of solidarity, whilst negative politeness is avoiding being an imposition. These are both at work here in different ways through language use. I have discussed acknowledgements and overlaps as showing affiliation and support. These patterns show positive politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) state that positive face threats are easy to be received by participants. I thus use language as a tool to reduce anxiety. I use this in different ways by firstly noting the relevance and competence of the speaker. This recognizes that what they are saying is valuable, meaningful and

correct. This is especially with regard to my demanding question which puts these issues at risk and thus is itself an FTA. In the below example an interesting point is risen concerning common ground:

- 35 P13: =yah it really doesn't feel [nice]
 Nic: [yah]
 Nic: no especially coz I know when I was in my first year I picked up so:
 much weight: =
 P13: =mmhm=

This example follows from the participant relating the question to a personal story. I support and validate the story by relating it to myself. This was a case of affiliating to the point where I took a turn to discuss my own personal story. In many conversations, my question was answered by relating it to personal stories. In these instances this could be viewed as introducing the self, rather than a distant person. I do not necessarily continually support them with my own story such as the case above, but appear to continually offer acknowledgments in these instances, either by agreeing, stating encouraging remarks or even laughing. The example below shows my encouraging remark concerning their own situation.

- 36 P22: (.) well it depe[nds::: coz] im going out with someone n[ow:] and we
 Nic: [mmm] [mm]
 P22: planning in getting married [s(h)o if got(h)ten] obe(h)se then (.) I
 Nic: [oh wow:::]
 P22: would still *love him* but I'd just help him lose weight

Politeness is thus communicated or socially constructed between people in conversation. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that it is an awareness of face sensitivity. This is especially relevant considering the potential FTAs within the question. There are many strategies to build politeness, such as affiliative language devices. I do however note the use of tact in questioning in order to construct politeness. This avoids and manages anxiety given the demands of my question. Furthermore, this relates to recipient design and sensitivity.

Self-interruptions, mitigating words. There is a pattern within my questioning of self-repairs or self-interruptions. I maintain a routine question. If the order of it is broken, I stammer and hesitate. I find comfort in having a standard question, and moving from

this is thus avoided. I do however focus on a functional aspect of self-repairs that serve a different function. This is its use in avoiding anxiety and FTAs. I do not want to be seen as offensive and insensitive, i.e. positive facework. I attend to politeness in ways that does not compromise the others ‘face’ as well. I therefore acknowledge the dispreference or offence in being misjudged or repaired by participants. This is heightened by the demands of the question. I thus use language to soften the invitation or question where I can. This is consistently attempted in my routine questioning. Examples are as follows:

- 37 Nic (85): alright so say for example you with somebody nx um you were dating them .h and then over time: he started to pick up a lot of *wei:ght* (.) so much so:↑ that it id be considered by *others* that he's a bit obese (.) I mean how would you *feel* about that basically↓
- 38 Nic (P96): ... you know they started to pick up some *wei:ght* um so much so that I guess it id be considered by *others* that maybe you know that he's a bit obese ...
- 39 Nic (P97): ... and then they started to pick up some (.) they started to pick up *wei:ght* uh some weight and um so much so though that it would be considered by *others* they're a bit obese...

Example 37 shows how I introduce and emphasize certain words. I want the participant to know what the main point of the question is so I explicitly say what I require from them. I do however join this with mitigating words to soften the invitation, i.e. ‘a bit’ obese. This is coupled with noting that it is *others* who consider them obese, but not me specifically. I thus avoid appearing offensive whilst still getting the message across. I thus phrase my questioning in this manner and avoid missing these points.

I also did not want to appear rude when asking the question to certain participants. Thus when I was confronted with participants who were overweight I was anxious at how they would perceive my question. This is reflected in examples 38 and 39. I changed the word ‘lot’ to ‘some’ weight. This is interesting considering that I perceived those participants as overweight. I did not want to be rude and this was reflected in my questioning through introducing a mitigating word, despite that I meant a lot and not some. This can be perceived as negative politeness in that I am being indirect and I am trying to minimize my imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

There was thus anxiety with being insensitive to participants and I therefore asked my question tactfully. I did not want to presume for instance heterosexual relationships and this caused me to rephrase or self-repair at certain instances. Some examples are:

- 40 Nic (P18): alright so basically say for example you with somebody and you with them for a while: (.) um like boyfriend or girl-whatever=
- 41 Nic (P21): =and you were with them for a while um a guy boyfriend or whatever .h and: he started picking up a lotta wei:ght (.) um so much so that oth(h)er people would think his obese or overweight =

There is thus much attention drawn towards managing conversations based on orienting oneself to others. This is for varying purposes of tact, sensitivity and facework. Language can thus be seen to reveal particular functions in manage anxiety within interactions. I turn now to relate defensive talk specifically to the patterns I encountered through language.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis supports the notion that conversations are not haphazard phenomena. On the contrary, conversations are embedded in complex cultural settings that inform its construction. The complexity of this context or discourse is especially interesting when conflicting discursive positionings are joined in conversation. As CA is not an in-depth narrative and biographical analysis, context is limited to assumptions of discourse before hand. CA has been criticized for neglecting issues of discourse and limiting ideology and power to what can be directly seen in the transcription (Parker, 2005). I agree with Hollway and Jefferson (2000) that analysis needs to explore intersubjective constructions of defence in conversation. This involves issues of power and ideology and thus discourse is not limited strictly to text, but recognized as embedded with the invested participants. This is evident in introducing issues of obesity within relationships.

However, this anxiety-provoking situation raises the implication of how language is used to manage, construct and filter conversations among speakers. These

situations also offer space whereby anxiety is presumed to be present and therefore defensive talk can be explored through patterns in language. In response to a demanding question, participants used various language devices to assess the management of that question. Anxiety is thus avoided, reduced and managed by using language, and thus is used as a defence. Silences and extended words such as token fillers borrowed time for participants think about ways to do appropriate facework. This is especially in regard to the demands of the question drawing on social norms and ideals in its response. The question I pose introduces the issue of having not only to sound competent, but also appear moral. This is given that I request self evaluative information which calls on one's judgement of a partner's appearance. This is influenced by the social appropriateness of the answer in relation to the question. The issue lies in participants having to tailor or package what they have to say to me, a representative of a wider audience. This audience constitutes norms and preferences for certain answers. In addition to patterns in language, this was also often explicitly recognized by participants. This can be seen for instance in the mention of tensions between issues of appearance, health and love. Subjectivity is implicated within this questioning which makes salient one's moral self. In maintaining the self, continuous rephrasing also occurred through self-repairs. This is with the aim of tailoring the response correctly to avoid dispreferred appraisals or FTAs, and occurred as well with requesting or repairing for more information to manage a response. There was also frequent use of mitigating words to soften claims and therefore manage anxiety. Anxiety thus was continually attended to through language. Language thus served as an important tool to avoid and manage the self and the potential of dispreferred responses. The importance of being aware and tactful considering the other speaker is therefore an important point in managing talk.

The anxiety in the interaction was also managed in ways which attempted to create a sense of social support. Participants and I both used laughter in ways to recognize the demands of the question. It was thus an attempt to soften the situation using a sense of affiliation through shared laughter. It is a tool for defensive practice in managing anxiety. In recognizing the difficulty of the question, I continually attended to their anxiety and thus mine by reducing the threat I posed. I therefore continually used self repairs and mitigating words to reduce the demands of the question. I was orienting my talk to the other by maintaining sensitivity to the situation. I was also continually offering support, as the listener, by the use of overlap

and acknowledgments. This creates a sense of affiliation and manages participant's anxiety and thus my own. I use language to attend to being polite. This is managed by not only appreciating the other, but by avoiding being an imposition. Participants face was thus a concern of mine, which therefore I used to build upon my own facework.

Suggestions for future research

This research serves to directly relate defence in conversation by means of CA. This has been neglected with previous research on either defence or language. This research thus serves as a starting point for further exploration in this area. Further comprehensive data treatments are needed in order to relate and compare findings to my research. I will briefly note possible future research in exploring defence in conversation.

The focus of this research is on structure rather than content of conversations. Power and ideology is embedded within these structures. This is informed by the construction of realities and selves given by performances of individuals. It would be interesting to extend this research with comparative groups. Analysis across categories based on gender, age or intimacy may provide illuminating uses for language as a defensive tool. This may explore the influence of discourse on different categories and therefore possible 'cross-type comparisons' or investments (Ten Have, 1999). Roseneil (2006) suggests that the perceived gender of speakers also construct different responses. This is for instance with particular understandings of 'good' and 'bad' feminine or masculine impressions. Defence can thus be explored across categories.

It is also possible to extend this research by exploring different anxiety provoking situations. These may perhaps draw on questions which refer to particular gender or power relations. This can therefore introduce scenarios which makes one's social identity more salient. Defence through language would thus be interesting to consider under situations which call specifically on participant's social identity or status. It is also possible to compare different levels of anxiety provoking situations. This may then compare defence across situations, and relates for example to tense and conflicting scenarios in comparison to 'everyday' conversations.

CONCLUSION

It is through this research that much of how language is used moves beyond its representational function, but its constitutive function as well. Language defends against anxiety, through the multiple patterns observed in the analysis. Language is used to help borrow time and rephrase one's talk. This is shown continual attention to the diplomatic way of responding a question which calls upon demanding discursive positionings. Speakers' sensitivity to their own facework as well as that of other is shown through interests of social support and politeness. Language is thus used to affiliate and build subjectivity between and for one another. Defence is therefore embedded in these language devices in order to avoid, reduce and manage anxiety in conversations. This occurs unconsciously through the normative principles of conversation, as drawn from conversation analyses. Language is an important social activity. It constructs and maintains selves through talk by drawing from its varying devices as defensive tools.

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APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

[]	Square brackets	This indicates overlapping or simultaneous talk. Brackets bridging two lines indicates a point of overlap onset, whether at the start of an utterance or later
=	Equals sign	Equal signs ordinarily come in pairs, one at the end of a line and another at the start of the next line or one shortly thereafter. If the lines connected by two equal signs are by different speakers, then the second followed the first with no discernable silence between them, or was "latched" to it.
(.), (1), (2), (3)	Delays or silences	(.) Indicates of a brief delay that is under a second long. The numbers in the brackets show the number of seconds the delay took.
word::	Colons following a word	Indicates the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons, the longer the stretching.
?	Question mark	Indicates rising intonation, which often coincides with asking a question.
-	Hyphen	A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption
<u>word</u> or <i>Italics</i>	Underlining or using italic formatting on parts or whole words	Indicate some form of stress or emphasis, either by increased loudness or higher pitch.
°word°	Degree sign	When there are two degree signs, the talk between them is markedly softer than the talk around it.

↑ ↓	Up arrow or down arrow following a word	Marks sharper rises or falls in pitch or may mark a whole shift, or resetting, of the pitch.
<	Less than symbol	Indicates that the immediately following talk is "jump-started," i.e., sounds like it starts with a rush.
hh (hh) .h	'h' represents hearable aspiration	With the full stop before it, it indicates a breath in. Otherwise it indicates laughter. This is either on its own or it can be within words, which it is then enclosed with brackets within words.
(())	Double round brackets	These are used to mark transcriber's description of events, rather than representations of them, e.g. (coughs)
(word)	Word in brackets	The words in the brackets indicates uncertainty on the transcriber's part, but represents a likely possibility.
...	Ellipsis	I use this symbol not in the conventional CA transcriptions, which indicate speakers 'trailing off'. I use this to indicate that there are words before and after this symbol, but they have been excluded due to their irrelevance for the particular claims being discussed.

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

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3. This essay/report/project/assignment is my own work.
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