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ABSTRACT

This study examined the office hour consultation between teaching assistants (TAs) and undergraduates from the participants' viewpoints. A total of 40 consultations involving five TAs from the economics department of a major American university were videotaped and transcribed. After dividing the consultations into three sections, namely initiating business, conducting business, and finishing business, a detailed interactional analysis of each section in a selected number of consultations was carried out. It was found that the initiating business stage is student-dominated, with students expressing their needs, identifying the business of the consultation, and providing background, and with TAs and students negotiating the encounter. In the conducting business stage, the TAs dominate the process to either initiate an explanation sequence or to continue probing the student in order to better identify the problem that brought the student to the consultation. In the finishing business segment, it is the student who indicates that the consultation is over, while the TA may choose to offer some advice or to improve the tone of the consultation. Two appendixes provide transcript notation symbols and selected transcripts of the consultations. (Contains 17 references.) (MDM)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OFFICE HOUR CONSULTATION
A CASE STUDY

JUAN CARLOS GALLEGO

Abstract

Based on analytical principles derived from conversation analysis and the ethnography of speaking, this case study attempts to describe the structure of the office hour consultation as viewed from the participants' perspective. Forty consultations involving five teaching assistants and a number of undergraduate students were videotaped and transcribed. After dividing the consultation into three sections, namely, "initiating", "taking care of" and "finishing business", a detailed interactional analysis of each section in a selected number of consultations was carried out. Among other findings, the study revealed that at the 'initiating business' stage--a student-dominated process, TAs and students may negotiate the encounter, and students express their needs, identify the business of the consultation, and provide background, all of which is achieved interactionally. The 'taking care of the business' stage, on the other hand--a TA-dominated process, is the locus for TAs to either initiate an explanation sequence or to continue probing the student in order to better identify the 'problem' that brings her to the consultation. Either behavior is regarded here as having pedagogical implications worth exploring. Finally, although 'finishing the business of the consultation' is also jointly achieved, it is the student who indicates that the consultation part of the session is over, while the TA may choose to offer some advice or to improve the tone of the consultation. Asides and interruptions are also addressed and their effects on the consultation are explored.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OFFICE HOUR CONSULTATION: A CASE STUDY

Office hours, or out-of-class sessions where students meet with their professors or teaching assistants (TAs) for individual consultation, offer students the opportunity to expand and clarify what has been presented in class. They also allow students to relate to their instructors in a more personal way, to voice personal concerns, to seek help with exams, homework, and term papers, and to discuss grades and other administrative matters (McChesney, 1990). That the office hour is a teaching environment with characteristics of its own is recognized by researchers and reflected in TA-training textbooks. Pica et al. (1990) state that "(w)orking with students on a one-to-one basis requires skills that are somewhat different from those needed for standing in front of a group of students and presenting new information" (65). For students who attend office hours regularly, these can be as important as class sessions. In spite of this, what happens during the office hour remains relatively unexplored territory.

Through an analysis of interaction, this paper examines one aspect of the office hour, its structure, in an effort to understand this activity as its participants view it. The study is part of a larger project which attempts to provide an ethnography of the office hour consultation.

Background

A number of disciplines address the study of interaction, but two are particularly related to the present study: Conversation analysis (CA), and the ethnography of speaking (ES). CA attempts to find out and document how talk-in-interaction is organized in ordinary conversation (see Heritage,1984, for a detailed account of the theoretical underpinnings of CA). Most concepts unearthed by CA have also been recently applied to the study of other than ordinary conversation, such as studying the 'institutional' character of talk in work settings like court hearings (Moerman, 1988), television interviews (Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991), airports (Goodwin, 1991), and teaching environments (McHoul, 1990), among others. The notions of *turn* (Sacks et al., 1974), *sequential implicativeness* and *adjacency pair* (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:296), and *repair* (Schegloff, 1987:210), for example, are very applicable to the study of interaction in the office hour setting.

Like ES, the present study takes into consideration "the range of actual or potential speakers, the spatio-temporal dimensions of interaction, (and) the participants' goals" (Duranti, 1988:216), and its purpose is also to understand the relations between everyday talk and the social activities in which it happens. Therefore, in the speech activity that is the office hour consultation, the participants' talk is interpreted not only in view of immeditely preceding or subsequent talk (i.e., the context of CA), but also in light of the larger concept of context proposed by ES.

Methods

Five TAs were selected from a department of Economics at a major public university in the U.S.[1]. They all taught basic introductory courses and had between seven and twelve quarters of teaching experience. The five subjects were videotaped in the Spring of 1991 at different times during the quarter. The number of student-consultations or sessions videotaped per TA ranged from four to fourteen, with a total of forty sessions for the five TAs. Every TA was videotaped for at least one hour and twenty minutes and up to four hours. The total videotaped time for all TAs was about fifteen hours. For every hour recorded, the researcher spent between two and three more hours in the TA offices observing TA and student behavior and taking notes.

Data analysis took place at two levels. In the first one (reported in Gallego, 1992), the researcher viewed all the tapes several times, taking notes about the use of the physical space by participants, the content of each consultation, the various activities which take place during office hours, and the time dedicated to each activity. These notes, and those taken during observation, provide the basis for a description of the physical setting, the session format, and the session content.

The results of the second level of analysis, reported in this paper, consist of a description of the structure of the office hour consultation through an interactional analysis of a selected number of consultations. In order to achieve this, the available beginnings of consultations, some

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1 Three of the five TAs are nonnative English speaking. They were selected for the study first, because they represented about one half of the TA population in this department, and also, because a follow-up project to the one described in this paper aimed at comparing native and nonnative-student interaction in the office hour. In the present study, however, no attempt is made to distinguish between the two groups.

endings of consultations, and some consultations in full were transcribed following Jefferson's transcription conventions published in Atkinson and Heritage (1984: ix-xvi) with slight additions (see Appendix 1). A turn by turn analysis was then performed in order to determine the participants' understanding of this activity and its structure.

The structure of the office hour consultation

Based on observation notes and on a preliminary analysis of the data on videotape, the office hour consultation can be said to have a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Since the central function of office hour consultations is for TAs to take care of some business that students bring to them (Gallego, 1992), these three components are labelled here 'initiating business', 'taking care of business', and 'finishing business'. The sections that follow describe each of these processes one at a time. Interruptions, which may occur at any time during the consultation, are dealt with in the last section.

Examples of each phenomenon are provided either in parenthesis or in segments within the text. Occasionally, the reader is referred to the appendix section for a longer segment.[2]

"Initiating business"

Twelve out of the thirty-nine consultations in the study were videotaped from the very start. In twelve others, the videotaping began

2 The line and page numbers in the transcripts have been left as in the original full transcripts for future reference, were the reader interested in ordering them from the researcher for further viewing and analysis.

somewhere in the 'initiating business' stage. In the remaining sessions, it began somewhere in the 'taking care of business' stage. This section makes reference only to the twenty-four sessions where the 'initiating business' process was videotaped at least in part. First, a brief description of the opening sequence in the consultation is carried out, and then, how initiating business is achieved by its participants is addressed. (Note: In the transcribed texts, 'L' stands for 'line' , 'S' for 'student' and 'TA' for 'teaching assistant'.)

The opening sequence

An important aspect of openings is getting the other speaker's attention (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976). In eight out of the twelve sessions with full beginnings, the TA and the student have already made eye contact before anything is uttered. This is normally achieved by the student's entering the visual field of the TA and waiting for the TA to look at her[3]. In three sessions, however, the students resort to talking in order to get the TA's attention (eg. session 17, L.2, S: "I *I: may I ask you a few quick questions or you..." ((*TA looks at S))). Session 16 is unusual in that the student finishing a consultation calls the TA's attention to the student who is waiting by pointing in her direction (L.7, TA: "*So" ((*S1 points in the direction of S2 who is waiting and TA looks at her))).

Audible openings in the consultations in the study consist of six greetings, one summons, two introductions, two pre-requests, and three

3 Since all fine TAs in the study are male, they are referred to in the masculine form. Also, since most students are female, they are referred to in the feminine form when addressed in general and by their gender when individually.

offers. Let us now elaborate on each of these, providing examples when appropriate. Greetings are always informal and initiated by the student: "hi" in sessions 12, 13 (L.12--see Appendix 2); 18 (L.2--see Appendix 2), 20, and 21; and "howdi" in 34. With these informal greetings, the students are claiming a certain degree of familiarity with the TA. These greetings also seem fitting to an office hour setting where students and TAs often know each other. The same reasoning applies to session 36, where the student summons the TA on a first-name basis (L.3--see segment 3 below). It is tempting to infer from such type of treatment that the students are claiming equal status with the TA (i.e. that they all belong in the student category). However, in U.S. universities, this level of informality is also acceptable between undergraduate students and professors, where the claim of equal status is out of the question. In sessions 12 and 36, one student cuts into another student's consultation, thus interrupting the opening sequence. This is addressed later, when analyzing interruptions.

In one of the two cases where an introduction is used,

(segment 1, session 13)

```
12       (.5)
--->S:   Hi. I'm (*        )                ((*S sits down. Chair noise))
         (.5)                               ((TA nods shortly and smiles))
```

the introduction follows a greeting, but who or what is introduced cannot be heard because of background noise. Something unusual about this session beginning is that it actually opens with a question by the TA (L.1. TA: "You are waiting for me?"), but then there is an aside in which the TA addresses another student (see Appendix 2). It is after this aside that the student produces her greeting and introduction, which seem redundant after the TA's opening. The student's behavior in line 13 above indicates that she is treating this point as the beginning of the consultation, probably because the TA has been oriented to someone else, and she wants to get his full attention. In the other case where a student opens with an introduction (session 29), instead of providing his own name, the student provides the name of the professor whose class he is taking:

(Segment 2, session 29)

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--->S:  Uhm I'm in Dan's Econ two?
2   TA: Right.
```

Here the student offers the TA information by which he may be identified, implying that the TA would not readily recognize him. The TA's response does not necessary claim recognition of the student but simply acknowledges the student's information. The students' behavior in both cases highlights the fact that TAs are not always expected to know who their students are, especially in a department where students are allowed to attend the office hours of any TA who teaches the same course, as is the case in the Department of Economics. In addition, offering this type of identifying information also constitutes the office hour as an event reserved only for students who qualify for consultation (here, those studying a particular course in this department).

The two pre-request openings found in the data are both student-initiated: session 17 (L.2: "I I: may I ask you a few quick questions..."); and session 22 (L.2: "I just want to know if..."). Offers, on the other hand, are TA- or researcher-initiated: session 11 (L.2, TA: "You wanna talk with me:?"); session 13 (L.2, TA: "You're waiting for me?"); and session 16 (L.10), where the researcher asks the student whether she has any questions for the TA. These three TA and researcher questions have been regarded as 'offers' here because they seem to function very much like a shop assistant's "do you need some help?" at the store, or a teacher's "do you have a question?" in the classroom.

Whether pre-requests or offers, these openings index the office hour as a consultation activity in two distinct ways: first, by their position as the opening turn in the interaction, since the participants may skip greetings and go straight to business; and, second, by implication (taking into account the academic context in which they are formulated), since these utterances reflect the core identities of TAs and students in this activity. (In sessions 17 and 22, the students present themselves as needing the TA's assistance, and, in 11, 13, and 16, the TA and the researcher take for granted that students are there to seek the TA's assistance.)

Overall, it has been observed that the responsibility to make the first move at the beginning of the office hour session seems to lie more with the student than with the TA. Whether through visible or audible behavior, it is the student who catches the TA's attention and not vice versa. Even in the cases where the TA initiates talk, he does not address any student in the room, but only a student who has exhibited through position and gaze that she is next in line for consultation.

How business is initiated

As mentioned above, in twenty-four consultations, the process of initiating business was videotaped in part or in full. This process is achieved interactionally by the participants in these consultations; therefore, every case is somewhat unique and different from the others. However, there are also a number of commonalities among some of these cases which will be pointed out.

In addition to getting the interlocutor's attention, as seen in the previous section, the most salient features in the process of initiating business identified in these data are: 1) negotiating the encounter (determining whether the consultation is going to take place or not and under what constraints, if any); 2) expressing need; 3) identifying the business of the consultation (outlining the agenda, locating the issue of concern); 4) providing background to the business of the consultation; 5) posing a question/concern; and 6) asides (getting ready). A turn-by-turn analysis of two selected consultation beginnings will be carried out now, one in which a minimum number of the features listed above is present, and the other in which all but number two (expressing need) occur.

How business is initiated: examples

In session 36, business is initiated in a short and to-the-point manner:

(Segment 3)

((TA and S1 sitting. Middle of consultation. S2 interrupts))

S1: Okay.

(.8) ((S1 writes throughout most of S2's consultation))

--->S2: *Bill? ((*TA's name. S off screen))

TA: *Uhum? ((*Raises head, looks off screen in the direction of S2))

-->S2 Do you- do you have extra office hours before the midterm,

(.5)

TA: Mtch u::hm=

The student in 36--S2--gets the TA's attention with a summons (L.3) and immediately poses his business concern--in this case in the form of a pre-request (L.5). These two elements can be said to exist in all office hour beginnings in one form or another. As mentioned above, students can get the TA's attention in various ways, the most common one being standing within the TA's field of vision to catch his eye. Once this is achieved, one of the participants may get straight to business.

Consultation 17, by contrast, exhibits several of the elements listed above as part of the 'initiating business' process:

(segment 4)

(End of previous consultation. Ss are getting up. TA is sitting down.S17--off screen, sitting at a desk nearby, addresses TA.))

(.2) ((Chair noise))

S: I *I: may I ask you a few ((*TA looks at S, then at watch))

quick questions or you [( ) discussion

TA: [U:::h

Yeah (I noticed. so) five minutes.

S: Okay. oh that's yeah. that's (enough).

(.2)

(I d) I just u:h (.3) had a question u:h (.5) let me see.

okay on (.) ( )(.) *third preference ( ) ((*Sits)) y-you get a hundredd thousand dollar grant and I would just

uh (budget) constraint would pretty much (loop) out. righ?

TA: Uhum= ((Nods))

S: =like that? now (.) in the second one (if) you'd be

spending more money (now on um) public safety.right?=

TA: =Uhum ((Nods))

S: So would would it just be: uh (.5)

mtch see (.) would it be a *shift ((*S gets up, looks for a pen))

like like if (.5) *okay well ((TA offers S pen. *S accepts))

TA: If you want.

S: would it just be something like th- like this stays the

same and it just shifts out? or what.

TA: No it i- it is ( ) *because (.) ( ) u:::h) ((*S sits))

The student in L.2 opens the interaction with a pre-request which also gets the TA's attention. The student's question also begins the process of negotiating the encounter. On the one hand, the student requests permission to ask questions: "may I ask". In addition, the phrase "a few quick questions or you..." suggests expedition ("quick"), while allowing the TA a way out ("or you..."). The student here is indicating awareness that the TA is in a rush. The TA responds with a time limit for this consultation (L.5: "five minutes"), and the student agrees to it in the next turn (L.6). Although the conditions of the consultation are negotiated by the participants in the interaction, in the process of negotiating the encounter shown above, it is the TA who has the ultimate decision power.

The student identifies the business of his consultation in three stages. First, he provides a general agenda to the TA (LL.2-3: "a few quick questions"). Then, he revises this agenda based on the time limit imposed by the TA (L.8: "I just u:h (.3) had a question u:h"). Finally, he identifies the specific business he would like the TA to help him with (L.9: "( ) (.) third preference ( )". He then continues by providing background to this issue (LL.10-14) in the form of an explanation of what he already understands, while checking with the TA for correctness (L.11:"right?"; L.13: "=like that?; L.14: "right:="). The TA provides continuers ("Uhum" and nodding) to the student's checks. The student finally begins to phrase his question (L.16), which takes him until L.21 to complete. This question is riddled with false starts, hesitations, and repetitions. In addition, there is an aside in the middle of phrasing the question (L.18 S: "okay well"; L.19 TA: "If you want.") in reference to a pen the student is looking for. In L.22, the TA begins answering the student's question, marking the transition from the 'initiating business' stage to the 'taking care of business' section of the consultation.

Summarizing, the elements which have been highlighted in session 17 as part of the process of initiating business in the office hour consultation are: negotiating the encounter, identifying business, providing background, posing the question/concern, and an aside (getting ready). Let us now elaborate on each of these components of office hour beginnings, providing examples from different consultations. The component 'expressing need' will be addressed at the end of this section.

'Negotiating the encounter': examples

In addition to 17 (segment 4), more evidence of how the encounter is negotiated is found in the beginnings of sessions 13, 18, 26, 32, and 37 (refer to Appendix 2 for transcripts). References to rate and length such as TA: "=Very quick. because" (18, L.5) or TA: "A lot o- questions in an hour and a half to get them down." (37, L.40), are common in these negotiations. It becomes apparent in these cases that it is the TA who may finally decide how long the consultation will last.

In at least two instances, students' references to rate and length meet no response by the TA. This suggests a different interpretation than negotiation for time. In consultations 13 (L.17, S: "*Quihcklyhh. (.) uhm (.) on this question uhm" ((*Soft laughter))) and 26 (L.2: ".Hh in the meantime I'll have you do the mister C with me." ((Smiles))), the students' mentioning of "quihcklyhh" and "in the meantime", respectively, seems to have face-saving value, for there is nothing in the students' or the TAs' behavior indicating that they are in a rush See Appendix 2 for context). In addition, these students accompany their remark with either soft laughter or a smile. It appears then that the students are softening a request for help (i.e., a face-threatening act) by indicating that they will not take too much of the TA's time--what Brown and Levinson call "minimiz(ing) the imposition" (1987:176).

'Identifying the business of the consultation': examples

Segment 4 (above) illustrates how identifying the business of the consultation is, at times, an elaborate process in which the student first provides a general agenda and, then, gradually narrows her concern until focusing on a very specific point, which then leads to posing the question/concern. Another good example of this is consultation 29: (segment 5)

```
        (3.0)                                 ((TA stretches, looks at S))
    S:  Uhm I'm in uh *XXX's **Econ ***two?     ((*Prof's name.**TA nods
    TA: Right.                                           /***S sits down))
        (.2)
-->S:   I'm just going to ask you some questions about the te:st.
    TA: Su:re.
--->S:  Uh (.7) basically these two.                  ((Pointing at test))
        (.3)
        Uhm (.) I thought uh (.) tha that this is the right
        answer (on the:) (.3) [uh
    TA:                       [tsss
        (.5)
    TA: °(  get) a piece of paper.       ((TA is looks for paper; gets up))
        (2.5)                            ((TA sits down, looks S's notes))
->S:    Let's see: uh this one:: (I got) (.3) the (right) control being
        this (line) here. here at T1 (.3) creating ex[cess demands
    TA:                                              [Oke:y. I'nd
    S:  and you know ho[w
    TA:                [I mean that'ss that's correct but it's not
```

The process of business identification begins in L.5 with the student's statement of the agenda of his visit: "to ask...questions about the test". It continues in L.7 where the student, pointing at the test, narrows his concerns to "basically these two.". The student then begins to provide some background to his question (LL.9-10), but the TA interrupts his turn with an aside. After this, the student at last locates his business in L.15 ("let's see: uh this one::") and begins posing his question/concern by claiming that his answer is correct (LL.15, 16, and 18). The TA overlaps the student (L.17) and interrupts his turn in L.19, indicating that he has understood the student's concern and does not need to hear the rest of the student's turn. The TA's turn begins the 'taking care of business' section.

Most consultations exhibit some type of identification of the student's concern at the stage of initiating business. As in segments 4 and 5, this process often includes one or several of the following (here are two examples for each of the categories and subcategories listed below):

1) Locating the general area of concern--proposing an agenda for the whole consultation (eg., sessions 13, L14: "stuff on the past test" and 38, L.1: "these four points").

2) Locating a specific area of concern, such as a particular item from a problem set or a test, using either abstract referents (eg., sessions 16, L.21: "this problem right here." and 38, L.3: "the fourth point"), or concrete referents (eg., sessions 23, L.6: "thisssurpluss", and 28, L.4: "the paradoxes thrift").

3) Stating the general and/or a specific purpose of the consultation: eg. asking questions (sessions 17--see segment 4, and 28, L.4: "Uhm I've a question about"); getting credit (sessions 18, LL.19-20: "I mean that was thirty points for that section I got fi:ve.", and 34, LL.6-7: "I'm a little concerned about this grading here."); checking correctness (sessions 19,

LL.17-18: "=I was wondering uhm if I did (.) all like this part right,", and 26, see Appendix 2); going over an economics problem (sessions 9. L.17: "We:ll I kind of had it bu:t (.3) I don't know. can I go over it?", and 26, see Appendix 2).

'Providing background to the business of the consultation': examples

Most session beginnings (twenty-two out of twenty-four) contain some background information to the student's concern (see segment 4 above). Providing background information to the first business of the consultation can have a double function: 1) it focuses the business of the consultation--'identifying the business of the consultation' has the same effect; and 2) it lets the TA know precisely what it is that the student already understands and what she needs assistance with. In our data, it is always the student who initiates and leads this process, with the TA often taking a listener's stand and contributing occasionally with a continuer or a comprehension check. One other example which illustrates what has been defined here as background in the process of initiating business is session 26:

(Segment 6)

```
    TA: Khhh
--->S:  So I just so:lved it like thisss,
    TA: Uhum,
    S:  And (*       ) I got this                ((*S2 stands up to see better
        <I got the same number as you did                        /Chair noise))
```

<so I did that part right.

TA: Okay.

(.7)

S: The dema:nd.(.) I always do the demand first (   )

I think that makes the other relations easier, basically?

TA: Uhum?

S: Yes? is this the demand for X and is this the demand for Y?

(4.5)   ((TA looking at S's notes))

--->S: It's clo:se to what you have but it's not the same.

<I think maybe it's because I have this one half down here,

and somehow you have a two up here and a two over here,<'nd

(.7)

TA: Uh [this is

S: [So I think what you just did was put the the one

ha:lf up on to:p.

TA: This is P·right? X over two.(.2) you get here from here.

this is okay.

Noteworthy in this segment is the fact that the student provides background before and after posing the question/concern. Between lines 18 and 26, the student shows the TA how she solved an economics problem, what results she obtained, and why she followed that procedure. Then she poses a question (L.28), and, after a long pause during which the TA is still reading the student's notes, she continues providing more background (LL.30-36) in the form of a possible explanation of her difference in procedure. The TA begins 'taking care of business' in line 34 and, after the student's interruption, manages to get his turn in line 37.

Other examples of providing background information to the first business of the consultation were found in sessions 18 (LL.10-15, see Appendix 2), and19, 21, 23 and 28, among others (no transcripts provided).

The length of the background component in a consultation beginning varies by case. In 21, for example, it is several times longer than in the other consultations listed above. There is also variation in what the student considers relevant background information for the TA to know. For example, in addition to showing the TA their understanding of a particular problem-solving process (as seen segment 4 above), students also make occasional references to their professor (eg. session 10, L.4: "the professor u::h"; and session 32, L.17: "He' emphasized chapters...") and to the logistics of finding a solution to a 'problem' (eg. session 13, L.28: "I went back and re-did it."; and session 26, L.18: "So I just so:lved it like thisss,"), among other matters.

Occasionally, the TA takes a more active role in the process of providing background information to the student's concern. In session 9, for example, the TA refers directly to the student's lack of understanding (LL.15-16, TA: "[Ah you didn't understand the: u::hm"), prompting the student to elaborate on his question (L.17, S: "We:ll I kind of had it bu:t (.3) I don't know. can I go over it?"). Another example is 28 (L.5, TA: "All right (you think it's a little more) clear on that one huh"). In other instances, the TA asks the student for more background information directly, as in session 4 (L.12: "(°Okay show me.)"; L.16: "draw the graph."); and in session 37 (L.48: "Why do you think this is so:."). This strategy, through which the TA engages the student in the process of solving a problem posed by her, may be regarded as being part of the TA's taking care of business process, and will, therefore, be dealt with in that section below.

One final case worth mentioning is session 30, where, after the student has posed a concern about the credit she got for an answer to a particular question in a test (L.22, S: "I I just want to know like what's the answer. why::"), the TA inquires about the student's feelings with regard to credit given for other questions in that test (LL.23-24, TA: "okay. yeah. I hope you::: you're are not upset with this one."). Here the TA explores the student's satisfaction with the overall grading of a test before taking care of the student's business.

<u>'Posing the question/concern': examples</u>

All session beginnings in these data contain some form of posing the question/concern, and, in all cases but one (session 20), it is the student who initiates this sequence. The beginning of session 17 analyzed above (segment 4), represents the type of question/concern most commonly used by students both in terms of form (posed as a question) and content (dealing with an 'economics problem'). Similar examples are:

(Segment 7, session 10)

```
20      (.)
--->S:  Bu[t h how do you do up *to **tha::t.        ((* TA begins drawing))
    TA:   [(   )       ((**S rests head on folded arms on table--receptive))
        (1.3)
```

(Segment 8, session 21, page 2)

```
    TA: =Okay.
```

--->S: HOw do I determine how much each firm produces,

(.5)

TA: Uhu,

35->S: A::nd (.2) how many more firms a:re

(.)

(Segment 9, session 37)

(.)

--->S: U:hm (.) does (reduce) marginal ((TA is reading

---> utility: or value? /question in book))

45 TA: Number four. ( ) demand ( ) quite well.

Some 'economics problems' are posed as a statement:

(Segment 10, session 27)

6 (3.0)

--->S: Let's see how you're going from *this ((*Points at notes with pen))

equation to this equation.

(4.0) ((TA begins writing on S's notes))

(Segment 11, session 30)

21 S: Hohkay: u::h we:ll (.) let's see..hhhh number ((S gives TA test))

---> eight. I I just want to know like what'[s the answer. why::

TA: [Okay. yeah. I hope you:::

(Segment 12, session 38)

12 S: Wait.hh (.) yea:hh, (.) like I I mean the the other three make

---> sense. but I don't understand what they're try[ing to explain

TA: [Ohkay

Session 36 (segment 3 above) represents another type of question/concern in terms of content: an administrative/logistical business (eg. L.5, S: "Do you- do you have extra office hours before the midterm,"). One other similar case is found is session 11 (L.11, S: "Can I look at the uhm sample final?"). Sometimes the student is concerned primarily with getting extra credit for a test answer and this comes across in the content of the question/concern. Here are two examples: Session 18 (L.16, S: "when I followed throu:gh didn't I do it all correctly:?") and session 34 (LL33-34, S: "I:: (.) that'ss ridiculous. <I should get at least ha:lff for what I said."

As indicated in the beginning of this section, session 20 is the only one where the TA poses the first business question/concern in a consultation:

(Segment 13)

```
    TA: .hhh hhhhhhhhhh
     S:  *Hi.                                          ((*TA nods and smiles))
    TA: Hi.
             (.5)
--->         I have yourr grade. *d'you- do you have  ((*S moving towards chair))
--->         yourm your quizz?
     S:  *No.=                                                 ((*Sitting down))
```

In line 6, the TA poses an administrative question following the greeting sequence. This, however, is not the business the student came to the office hour for, as the student makes clear a few turns later after an interruption by another student:

(Segment 14)

```
      (.3)                                          ((chair noise))
    S:  I've a question (on this) (.) a couple of questions here?
    TA: Uhu? uhu?
---->S: U:hm (.) why: it's not just the (horizontal) formation okay
    TA: Well that'ss
```

The student in line 36 states the purpose of his visit (i.e., his agenda), and then (L.38) he poses his first question. What this session beginning illustrates more clearly than others is the potential of the office hour consultation to accommodate the interests of both TAs and students. Not only the length and time of a consultation may be negotiated, as shown above, but also its content and form (eg. in terms of business order).

'Asides' (getting ready): examples

In the process of initiating business, an aside occasionally takes place, temporarily halting the flow of the interaction. These asides appear to be an optional but genuine component of that process, because, through them, the participants take care of matters that help get business started. Regular interruptions can be distinguished from asides in that the former do not relate to the business of the on-going consultation, whereas the latter do.

Asides are initiated by TAs and students alike--even the researcher initiates an aside. The one in session 17 (segment 4 above) begins with the student looking for a pen while posing his first question (L.17). The TA understands what the student is doing and offers him a pen (L.18), which the student accepts after interrupting his turn (same line: S: "okay well"). The TA closes the sequence in line 19 ("If you want"), reflecting the student's hesitation to accept his offer. The student then starts posing the question again, repeating part of its beginning (L.20).

Another example is session 13:

(Segment 15)

```
    S:  *Quihcklyhh. (.) uhm (.2) on this question uhm ((*Soft laughter))
--->TA: Wait wa wait.
        (.7)
        I hhave I hhave the (.) I hhave the:: (3.0) the key of
        (             )
        (2.5)
        °This one.                              ((TA looking for notes))
        (2.0)
        Okay the second one (I think) (.) I remember the second one.
        (.5)
        Okay.
    S:  Okay I go:: I go:t thisss when I went back and re-did it.
```

Here the TA needs to look for an answer key to the test following the student's reference to a particular question in that test. After the TA has found the answer key, he signals to the student to continue (L.27), which the student does by providing background to her question (L.28). Similarly, in 29 (LL.11-14), when the student is providing background to his question/concern, the TA intervenes, to get up and get a piece of paper to write on:

(Segment 16, session 29)

S : Uhm (.) I thought uh (.) tha that this is the right
answer (on th:) (.3) [uh
TA: [tsss
(.5)
-->TA: °(get) a piece of paper. ((TA looks for paper; gets up))
(2.5)
S: Let's see: uh this one:: (I got) (.3) the right control being

In 39, the aside consists of the TA's informing the student that he is being videotaped for a research project (L.4, TA: "You're being videotaped..."). In 16, on the other hand, it is the student at the end of a consultation who makes a suggestion to the new student about the sitting arrangement (LL.12-14):

(Segment 17, session 16)

S2: *Why don't you- you could ((*Signals for S1 to join TA and himself))
*(.5) ((*TA moves chair, looks at S1))
S2: I jusss stand around.

There is one last example which is worth exhibiting because it involves the active participation of the researcher. It takes place in session 30:

(Segment 18)

TA: [questions [that you ha:ve (.) [complaints
S: [Hu?

-->R: [Would you- [would you sit (.) ((R off screen))
*( ) ((*S looks at researcher, then TA does))
would you sit like (.) sideways so that I can capture you:r face?
S: Oh. ((S grimaces, then smiles. TA has been smiling for a while))
--->R: Just here. for example. how is the-
*chair right here. ((*S gets up. R points at new location))
(.)
You'll see his notes better you know?
(1.3) ((R moves S's chair. S moves chair and sits down))
There you a:re.
TA: ( )
(.2)
Perfect.
TA: This could be your big break. ((TA and S smile))
S: *Cuhhhhh huh .hhhh [hhhhh .hhhhhhhhh ((S laughs))
->R: [Thank you.
S: Hohkay: u::h we:ll (.) let's see..hhhh number ((S gives TA test))

The researcher's arrangement of the student's sitting position so that she would face the camera (LL.9-17) is followed by a humorous comment by the TA and laughter by the student (LL.18-19). The researcher closes the sequence with a token of gratitude (L.20), and the student resumes her business by locating the number of the test question she wants to enquire about (L.21).

The asides shown above tend to be logistical in kind. Each one of them addresses a matter that the participants see fit to take care of in preparing for the consultation. It must be pointed out that taking care of logistics (taking notes out, getting a chair, looking for a pen, etc.) is a necessary part of every consultation, but does not always manifest itself as an aside. More often than not this is achieved while the talk continues, with no explicit reference to this fact. For example, in session 20, the participants are talking while the student approaches the TA's desk and sits down, while in session 28 the TA pulls a notebook toward himself while continuing his turn (no transcripts shown).

Finally, a brief comment about the two instances where the aside relates to videotaping (sessions 30--segment 18, and 39--example shown above). These asides illustrate that both the camera and the researcher are participants in the interaction not only by virtue of their presence, but also by occasionally becoming engaged in it, actively shaping its course, as segment 18 shows. There are many other examples of this phenomenon in the data, but their analysis lies beyond the scope of this paper.

'Expressing need': examples

This is the last feature of consultation beginnings which will be described in this section. Having left it for the end is merely a consequence of the two examples selected to illustrate the process of initiating business (segments 3, and 4 above), which do not contain explicit references to need. Needing assistance is, of course, an essential component of the office hour consultation. One can safely assume that every student who attends office hours needs something from the TA, be it help in reviewing for a test, information about (or adjustment of) a grade, clarification of concepts not understood in the lecture, or confirmation of consultation time, to mention a few possibilities (see Gallego, 1992, for a content analysis of the consultations under investigation). In the context of the office hour consultation, pre-requests such as, "May I ask you a question." or "Can I talk to you.", may be interpreted as requests for help and, therefore, as expressions of need. This same argument was made above in the 'opening sequence' section. However, in this section, the need for help, which is a student-initiated phenomenon, will be identified through the student's explicit reference to problems in understanding not originating in the consultation itself, to failure, or to having trouble accomplishing a task.

A number of students use the terms 'not understanding'--in various forms--in the process of initiating business. Some even use them several times within that process, as is the case in session 38:

(Segment 19)

```
    S:   Right. these four points right here?
         (.)
--->     I don't understand the fourth point.
         (.)
    TA:  You don't [understand the fourth poin[t            [o:r
    S:             [(      )                  [Yea:h h-becaus:[se yeah.
         becau:se u:hh (.) I mean like the other the other three make
--->     sense but the fourth one has .hhh u:hmhhh (.) I don't
--->     unders[tand
    TA:        [Ohkay we haven't really talked about this .hh uhm (.)
         first through your final.
```

S: Wait.hh (.) yea:hh, (.) like I I mean the the other three make

---> sense. but I don't understand what they're try[ing to explain

TA: [Ohkay

The student refers to her inability to understand in lines 3, 9, and 13. What seems like a clear and straightforward statement in line 3 is not considered sufficient information by the TA, who, in line 5, repeats the student's statement. The student does not make herself any clearer; she basically repeats herself in lines 6-9. In the next turn (L.10), the TA adds new information which clarifies his puzzlement at the student's statement. He then proposes a course of action (L.11). The student finally modifies her statement, but her response (LL.12-13) does not seem to correspond to the TA's suggestion in L.11, she seems to be pushing her agenda. The TA, nonetheless, acknowledges the student's comment in line 14.

Other cases where students express their need for help with references to 'not understanding' are: Session 16 (L.24, S: ".hhh u::h I still don't quite understand why iss thiss like"); Session 25, L.5, S: "(°Which is B) I still don't understand totally the- ( )", and L.12, S:"I didn't understand like the limits"; and Session 27, L.5, S: "I don't understand how you go fromm"

Failure and having trouble accomplishing a task (solving an economics problem, a mathematical equation, etc.) are also explicitly referred to in a number of consultation beginnings in the process of initiating business. Some examples are: Session 13, L.14, S: "Uhm what I'm ( ) stuff on the past test that I got wrong and I never figured out how to do:" and L.31, S: "See I got the price index here wro:ng."; Session 19, L.7, S: "=I was just wondering uhm if I did (.) all like <u>th</u>is part right,<cause I've ([been doing [the whole thing) wrong,"; Session 21 (p.2), L.7, S: "it it uhm I was kind of confused"; and Session 26, L.4, S: "Okay. tell me if this is right. it's not exactly what you have".

There is one type of consultation where the student requests more credit for an answer on a quiz or a test (the student's need here is to revise an item and get the TA to agree with her). In two such consultations, the students claim two different degrees of correctness. In 29, the student believes to have the correct answer to a test question (LL.9,10, and 15): (Segment 20)

```
         (.3)
--->S:   Uhm (.) I thought uh (.) tha that this is the right
->         answer (on the:) (.3) [uh
    TA:                          [tsss
         (.5)
    TA:  °(  get) a piece of paper.        ((TA is looks for paper; gets up))
         (2.5)                              ((TA sits down, looks S's notes))
->S:     Let's see: uh this one:: (I got) (.3) the (right) control being
         this (line) here. here at T1 (.3) creating ex[cess demands
    TA:                                               [Oke:y. I'nd
    S:   and you know ho[w
    TA:                 [I mean that'ss that's correct but it's not
```

If the TA agreed with the student, he would simply need to give the student the credit she deserved (this is the case in session 39--see transcript in Appendix 2). However, the TA disagrees with the student (L.19), and a negotiating process begins in which student and TA try to convince one another that each is right. In session 18 the student admits partial error (LL.10,11 and 13) but, like the student in segment 20, he claims more credit for the correct part of his answer (LL.16,19 and 20): (Session 21)

```
    TA: Ah Okey.(         )*                          ((*TA sits down))
    S:  Yeah. I was wondering about the credit that
->      I got for this because I know see what I did? .hh I:
--->    [subtracted the thirty-six
    TA: [Uhum?
--->S:  Instead of [adding it?=
    TA:            [Uhum?                                      ((Nods))
        =Uhum?
--->S:  Whenn I followed throu:gh didn't I do it all correctly:? except fo:r
        (3.5)
        I mean that was thirty points for that section I got
        fi:ve. I mean (        )
        (.)
    TA: Well (.) yeah.(.) no' the point' yeah. no I I well I-
        (. ) this is the pri:cce,
```

Here also the TA disagrees with the student, first by holding a turn after a long silence by the student (L.18) and then more explicitly through a dispreferred "Well" and an undecisive response (LL.22-23), so more negotiation is needed to resolve the matter (not in transcript).

Summing up 'initiating business'

Except for openings, negotiating the encounter, and some general references to the consultation agenda covered under 'locating the problem', the phenomena described in the 'initiating business' section may occur in other parts of the consultation as well: for example, when finishing one item in the agenda and beginning a new one. It seemed appropriate, however, to address them in the context of initiating business, for that is where they appear first, most frequently, and often in combination (eg. in segment 4 above, among others). These phenomena may also not be the only ones taking place at the beginning of a consultation, but they are the most salient, and they appear to play an important role in the process of initiating business.

Initiating business is a student-dominated process overall, with the TA playing mostly a recipient's role. Patthey (1991) found a similar pattern of behavior in the computer lab, where, during the problem-description phase, the students played a more active role while the consultants were expected to do coordination work (139). Minimally, this process may be initiated by posing a question/concern (so long as this also catches the interlocutor's attention), although some background to this question/concern is provided in most consultations, at times becoming a form of posing the question/concern itself (as in segment 5, LL.15-19). All other elements, from greetings to asides, seem optional.

The order in which these phenomena appear, whenever several of them occur in the same consultation beginning, does not seem to be fixed, but some patterns do emerge:

1) Openings (greetings, summons, and introductions) tend to take

place before anything else, with the exception of session 13, which seems to have two opening sequences as a result of an interruption.

2) Negotiating the terms of the consultation also precedes other phenomena such as providing background and posing the question/concern.

3) Identifying the problem/concern, whether in general or in specific terms, is always done before posing the question/concern.

4) Providing background tends to happen before posing the problem/concern, but it may also happen afterwards. It may also turn into posing the question/concern, as noted above.

5) Asides related to getting ready to initiating business can flow freely within the office hour beginning except for appearing in first position (by their very nature, something has to have happened before in order to make them asides).

"Taking care of business'

This section addresses the beginnings and the endings of the process of taking care of business, as well as transitions from one item in the participants' agenda to another. A detailed analysis of how business is taken care of in the office hour consultation could well be the purpose of another paper. (In the meantime, see Gallego 1992 for analyses of problem-solving sequences).

The TA's response to the student's question/concern

In the previous section, it was stated that while the student's posing the question/concern to her first item in the agenda marked the end of the 'initiating business' process, the TA's response to that question/response signalled the beginning of the 'taking care of business' process. This classification is meant to reflect the participants' involvement and responsibility during each process, for, whereas initiating business is a student-dominated section of the office hour consultation, taking care of business tends to be TA-dominated one. It is understood, however, that, in interactional terms, that division is artificial because the student's question and the TA's response form an interactional unit (often an adjacency pair) as the following two examples illustrate. Both segments begin with the student posing the first question/concern in the consultation:

(Segment 22, session 36)

```
      S2  Do you- do you  have extra office hours before the midterm,
          (.5)
--->TA:  Mtch u::hm=
    S2:  =Like onn Thursday, (or some- hhhh)
--->TA:  I'm not I'm not going to be on campus tomorrow. .hh (.)
          I wo- (.5) actually I'd be aro:u:nd (.7)
```

The student's question (first pair part, L.5) gets a dispreferred answer by the TA (second pair part--a pause, L.6, plus hesitation, L.7). The student insists, inquiring about actual options for an extra office hour (L.8)--first pair part, and the TA responds with a negative first (L.9) and an option next (L.10)--second pair part.

(Segment 23, session 17)

```
    S:  would it just be something like th- like this stays the
        same and it just shifts out? or what.
---->TA: No it i- it is (    ) *because (.) (     ) u:::h  )        ((*S sits))
        (.7) u:h (.) they would match for every dollar that
        you spend,(.7) they would give you another dollar.
```

As in segment 22 above, in 23 the student asks a specific question (first pair part, LL.20-21--here a clarification request) and the TA responds with an explanation (second pair part, LL.22-24) that begins the taking care of business process.

Some examples have been shown above in which the first question/concern in the consultation was posed in the form of a statement (see segments 10, 11 and 12 above). Here are two such cases in order to illustrate how these statements are interpreted as questions by the TA:

(Segment 24, session 27)

```
    S:  I don't understand ho:w you go: fromm
        (3.0)
        Let's see how you're going from *this  ((*Points at notes with pen))
        equation to this equation.
        (4.0)                               ((TA begins writing on S's notes))
  ->TA: From he:re, (.2) you go to (.5) PX: (.5) X plus alfa.
        (.3)
```

(Segment 25, session 38)

```
    S:  Wait.hh (.) yea:hh, (.) like I I mean the the other three make
        sense. but I don't understand what they're try[ing to explain
```

--->TA: [Oh key

S: [(   )

--->TA: [what they are saying here is that (.) u::hm we haven't really
talked about long run average cost(ers),

The TAs in these two examples treat the students' statements as requests for an explanation and thus respond by beginning the 'taking care of business' process.

TA responses to the student's problem/concern take many forms. One of them, illustrated under the section on 'providing background' above, is to engage the student in the process of taking care of business by responding to her request for help, clarification, etc., with another request, as in sessions 4 and 37:

(Segment 26, session 4)

S: like ho- how the shifts in a cu:rve, ('cus) you know
sometimes they fall ba:ck, (.2) like all the way<an they
come ba:ck like half between-between or something like tha:t?

TA: (°Okey)

(1.2)

---> (°Okey show me.) ((TA gives S his pen))

(1.2)

S: Right.

->TA: Draw the graph.

(Segment 27, session 37)

(.)

S1: U:hm (.) does (reduce) marginal ((TA is reading
utility: or value? /question in book))

45 TA: Number four. ( ) demand ( ) quite well.

S1: Right. right.

(.)

--->TA: Why do you think this is so:.

(.)

In these two examples, the TAs employ a technique characteristic of interactive teaching methodologies which promote students' active participation in the learning process. Instead of taking a teacher-centered approach to problem solving, here the TAs engage the students in the process of solving their own problem while the TAs avail themselves as helpers along the way.

Ending the response sequence and transitioning to the next item in the agenda

The response sequence ends typically with a token of recipiency or understanding by the student before new business is initiated. Here are three examples:

(Segment 28, session 1)

-1 (3.0) ((This gap occurs at the end of the TA's explanation process))

0-->S: °Okahy.

TA: And final is:: this question I have

(Segment 29, session 28, p.2)

TA: Okay but (.2) income must be at lower level because that also uh

*savings got [shifted now. ((*S nods))

--->S: [okay okay. ((S nods))

(1.5)

*U:hm (.3) let's see:: (.2) oh this (.) in my: ((*Closing notebook))
khm *reading I just didn't understand this ((*Turning pages))

(Segment 30, session 39, p.2)

TA: But (that) questions are gonna be the exact same format.=
--->S: =n-okay.an most of it .hhh you think ther there'll probably
be a greater proportion of (s) like the la::st four
chapterss of anything that wasn't on the last two midterms.
(.2)

In segment 28 above, the TA exhibits knowledge and control of the session agenda by initiating the next business item himself, as well as by labelling this item "final" (L.1). Although there is no record of the beginning of the session, one can speculate that this agenda was probably negotiated at the beginning of the consultation (an example from session 29, segment 32 below, better illustrates this point).

Not all transitions from one item in the agenda to the next are done so smoothly. Some take more negotiating on the part of the participants in order to achieve completion of the response sequence. The segment below, extracted from the end of a taking care of business section of a consultation, illustrates this:

(Segment 31, session 13, p.4)

S: [uhn [uhnn five okay.
TA: Right? ((End of an explanation sequence by TA))
(1.5) ((TA looking at S. S finally nods and responds))
--->S: Okay.
TA: Thiss (notes?)

S: Yeah, yeah. ((S nods repeatedly))

TA: Maybe the(r)e's a question in the final here.

so you you have any:: c [( ) comments o:::::r

S: [*Hehehehe .hhhh No ((*Laughs))

I understand now.<[I understand about that. u:::::h ((S writes))

TA: [(Okay)

(5.0)

S: U:hm I have one more question and ( ) ((S looks at notes))

(2.3)

In this segment, the TA produces a comprehension check (L.29) at the end of his explanation. The student responds with a token of recipiency (L.30) which acts as a transition marker and could end the response sequence, but the TA is still oriented to that response and offers the student the notes taken during the explanation (L.32). This starts an expansion to the response sequence in which the TA tries to make sure that the student has understood, while stressing the fact that the question explained could be asked in the test (LL.34-35). After the student's assurance that she understands (LL.36-37), it is the TA who closes the sequence with a transition marker (L.38). After a long silence, the student initiates a new business item with a pre-question (L.40) which will lead to the next response sequence.

An unusual type of completion, where no token of recipiency is provided by the student, takes place in session 29 (p.2):

(Segment 32)

TA: Nothing more I can say.<I mean what you did is not wro:ng (.)

it's just not enough.

(.2)

S: U::h.(.) well as long as everyone else is consistent.

I guess that=

--->TA: =(°U::::h) what do we have here.

(13.5) ((TA is reading S's test))

Here the TA treats the student's turn in lines 21 and 22 as a form of closure and brings up the next item in the agenda (L.23), latching on to the student's incomplete sentence. As in segment 28 above, the TA in segment 32 also exhibits knowledge of a session agenda by initiating himself the next business item (L.23). This agenda was proposed by the student and accepted by the TA at the beginning of the consultation:

(Segment 33, session 29)

S: I'm just going to ask you some question about the te:st.

TA: Su:re.

S: Uh (.7) basically these two.

When the end of a response sequence occurs at the end of the consultation, the same possible transitions as the ones seen above can be found, the only difference being that a reference to finishing business may take place immediately after the end of the response sequence:

(Segment 34, session 18)

TA: U::::hm (2.0) well here it issss five points on(ly [ )

--->S: [Yeah (.) OK.

TA: All right.=

--->S: =I: I understand.

(.5)

TA: That's it?* ((*S gets up and goes off screen))

S: Oh yea::hh. I *guesss hhe. ((*TA gets up. S laughs))

In this segment the student and the TA acknowledge the end of the response sequence in LL.46 to 48. After a silence (L.49), the TA starts finishing business with a pre-closing (L.50) which leads to the closing of the session (L.51).

'Finishing business'

The third structural component of the office hour consultation is finishing business. Three common types of sequences which are found in this section of the consultation are pre-closings, closings, and post-expansions, but not all of them occur in every consultation. Some sessions end with a simple transition marker and a token of gratitude initiated by the student (eg. session 12, L.47. S: "Okay: tha:nks."). Others, like session 18, close with a check by the TA about further business and a reply by the student (LL.50-51, TA: "That's it?"; S: "Oh yea::hh. I guess. °hhe."). In every case, it is the student who indicates to the TA that the business section of the office hour is over, often with pre-closings such as: "and ( ) (.) 'think that's i:t." (session 13, p.5, L.33); "Okay. [well that's it" (session 28, p.7, L.3); "°Okay. (.) I guess that's all." (session 29, p.2, L.53); etc. Occasionally, the student's indication that she has no more question/concerns comes in response to an explicit question by the TA in that regard, as in session 18, mentioned above (L.50, TA: "That's it?"); or in session 10 (TA: "that's all?"), for example.

Post-expansions that come after a pre-closing can address any of the topics dealt with during the consultation, but the most common ones identified are logistics/bookkeeping, giving advice/tips, and small talk.

The end of the office hour is also the time when either the researcher or the TA gave students a questionnaire to fill out. In addition, occasional references to the camera and to the researcher are found in this part of the consultation, as was the case at session beginnings. These factors, however, seem to be assimilated into the process of ending the session rather than obstructing its course. For example, in session 26 (p. 12), the TA disengages himself from the consultation process after the closing sequence by addressing the researcher:

(Segment 35, session 26, page 12)

S: .hh thank you for all your help Miguel. ((Gathers papers))

TA: You're welcome. ((And stands up))

S: hhh.

--->TA: *J. C. we're done. ((*To researcher--off camera))

R: (Ha ha) ((S smiles, looks at R, then gets up))

(3.0)

By addressing the researcher (L26), the TA fills up the transition space which takes place from the closing of the consultation to the leave-taking of the student, while making himself unavailable to the student for further post-expansion.

Classic closing tokens such as "bye" and "see you" do occur at the finishing business stage of the office hour consultation, but they are not the only form of closing. They appear in eleven of the twenty-one consultations which exhibit an explicit closing turn, and they are initiated by the TA and the S alike. Here is one example of each:

(segment 36, end of session 5)

1   S: Thank you very much.

--->TA: Right. see you*.   ((*S gathers things. TA stares at camera))

(10.0)   ((S keeps gathering things, then gets up and leaves))

Here the TA's closing turn (L.2) gets no visible or audible response from the student, who gathers his things and leaves.

(Segment 37, end of session 22)

1-->S: See you.   ((leaving))

TA: (Bye).

Before ending this section, here is an illustration of how the finishing business stage of consultations is occasionally used by TAs to attempt to improve the general tone of the consultation, in particular whenever there has been some conflict of opinions or interests. A case in point is the end of session 29 (end of page 2 and beginning of page 3):

(Segment 38)

52   (1.0)

S: °Okay.(.) *I guess that's all   ((*S begins to collect papers))

(2.2)

1   TA: °(*All right)   ((*Hand gesture--precedes talk))   **page 3**

(.7)

--->   How did you do over all.

In line 53, the student indicates that he has no more business to consult about and prepares to leave. After a long pause, the TA responds to the student but, instead of letting him go, the TA begins a post-expansion with a question which shows concern about the student's grade. What is significant about the TA's question in line 3 is that, in the taking care of business section of the consultation, the TA refuses to give the student any extra credit for his answers in a previous exam and the student does not seem satisfied with the TA's explanation. In view of that, it is plausible that the TA may be trying to ameliorate the situation by presenting a more sympathetic side of himself to the student. A similar example of this type of phenomenon is found in session 17 (page 3):

(Segment 39)

```
     S:  All right. thanks a lot.
         (.)
--->TA: You don't have that's it?
```

Here the TA offers the student an opportunity to expand his consultation time (L.7) after the student has indicated that he has finished his business (L.5). In view of the fact that the TA is under time constraints, as he indicated to the student by limiting the consultation time to five minutes at the beginning of the session (see segment 4 above), the TA's willingness to expand the consultation can be interpreted as an attempt to ameliorate the situation by showing concern for the student.

Interruptions

Although interruptions do not belong in any of the processes and consultation phenomena presented above, they take place often enough to deserve some attention. They also have the potential of illustrating the extent to which the office hour consultation is a closed or an open event relative to how interruptions are dealt with by the participants in the interaction. As it was mentioned above, interruptions are distinguished from asides in that the latter relate in some way to the general purpose of the on-going interaction, whereas the former do not. In this section, a brief characterization of interruptions will be carried out, followed by some examples from the videotaped data.

Two types of interruptions have been identified in the videotaped data according to subject matter: logistical and small talk. Some of the logistical ones are full consultation sessions themselves. In them, a student interrupts another student's consultation to ask the TA a brief logistical question. Examples of this type of interruption are picking up or checking out a test (sessions 3 and 12), and scheduling a consultation (sessions 14 and 36). (Transcripts of the beginning of session 36 are provided in segment 3 above). In these cases, the new student cuts into the consultation at a turn-taking point in the interaction such as after a silence (eg., segment 3, LL.2-3), and then proceeds to the business of her consultation like in a regular session. It is interesting to observe that no apology is offered for interrupting--a feature which is common to all interruptions in the data, not just the ones described so far. Also, when the interruption is over, the participants return to their business, most frequently with a transition marker such as "okay" (eg. session 12, L.48), or "u:::h" (session 36, L.29), or after a brief pause (eg. session 26, p.5, L.22), and with no explicit reference to the interruption (see segment 40 below).

Other interruptions which have logistics as their main concern are not full consultation sessions. Here is one example:

(Segment 40, session 26, p.5)

```
TA: Let me tell you the:the::::
    *u::::::hh forget a[bout this.    ((*S1 is looking towards S2 who is
```

--->S1: [Tha::nks. /giving her copies of notes))

TA: I would ('ve done) u:::::hhh (*thank-) ((*To S2, softly. Smiles))

S2: Thank <u>you</u>. ((S2 gives TA originals))

(.2)

TA: (Let determine) the:::: the figure (.) ( )

Here the student from the previous consultation (S2) returns to give the student in session (S1) some photocopies and gives the originals to the TA. The transaction begins in the middle of the TA's turn (L.18) and elicits a "tha::nks" token from S1 that overlaps with the TA's turn (L.19). The TA himself interrupts his turn to thank S2 (L.20) and S2 concludes also with a "thank <u>you</u>" token (L.21). It is worth noting that no excuse or apology is offered by S2 when interrupting the interaction between S1 and TA. There are two similar examples in sessions 30 and 34, but they will not be analyzed here for the sake of brevity.

Small-talk interruptions, the second type identified in the data, appear in two forms: short and long. The short version consists generally of an acknowledgment or a greeting directed to someone known who passes by or comes to the office. Here is an example:

(Segment 41, session 26, p.7)

TA: Well th this is a problem of reading. I I I I

(2.0) suppose this is

---> (.3) ((TA waves at someone))

() Hi.

TA suppose this reading is correct. (.2) so it's not true

In this example, the TA interrupts his turn to wave at a passerby (L.46) who responds with a greeting (L.47). The TA then resumes his turn (L.48).

More such cases are found in sessions 15 and 25, for example; where the TA salutes and/or waves at different people during the consultation, interrupting either his turn or the student's (no transcripts provided).

The long version of this type of interruption consists of a short interaction between the TA and someone other than the in-session student. Sessions 25 and 34 each contain an example of this phenomenon (no transcripts provided). In both cases, the TA chooses a moment when the student is taking some time to read her notes silently to initiate talk with another TA who is in the office. When the student is ready to resume the consultation, she simply starts a turn, even if it overlaps the TA's talk and interrupts his turn, as is the case in session 34.

The behavior exhibited in the interruptions described above seems to contribute to the evidence that office hour consultations are indeed open activities which can be interrupted midway. (Other behavior that points in the same direction is the fact that new students felt free to join on-going consultations, something that was observed frequently during the data collection process). Although the cases presented provide some evidence that both the structure and the content of interruptions are regulated, further analysis would be necessary to describe this phenomenon in depth, something which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an analysis of the structure of the office hour consultation. A close examination of consultation beginnings reveals first, a certain degree of informality in the way TAs and students address each other. In addition, it appears that getting the TA's attention (either visually or verbally) is the first step in initiating interaction at the office hour, and, once that is accomplished, the student may proceed directly to pose the question/concern of the consultation.

However, consultation beginnings also seem to be the loci for other possible phenomena such as: negotiating the encounter, expressing need, identifying the business of the consultation, providing background, and having an aside. When the encounter is negotiated, evidence shows that it is the TA who decides how long the consultation may last, thus reflecting certain power asymmetry in the TA-student relationship. Students often express need at the beginning of an office hour consultation in terms of not understanding a problem presented in class or encountered in a test, being unable to solve a problem found in the textbook, and similar ones. This phenomenon reflects what constitutes the essence of the office hour session: the opportunity for students to consult with the TA about matters related to course contents, exams, and other related issues.

In identifying the business of the consultation, it was found that students often propose an agenda for the session that may range from reviewing a number of theoretical concepts to revising the student's answer in an exam. Having done so, many students proceed to offer some background to the issue that brought them to the consultation. These two phenomena appear to focus the purpose of the session, while the second one also helps the TA understand the student's need better. The role of the TA was seen to vary here, some contributing more actively than others in this process of focusing and narrowing down the matter of the consultation.

The specific question or concern of the consultation was always provided by the student, although TA behavior also varied here in the same terms expressed above. TA active involvement in these processes is seen as a highly valuable teaching technique, for it allows the TA to locate the student's need more precisely and thus to formulate a more appropriate response. But this is something that needs to be researched in more detail. The analysis of the last possible component of the initiating business process, asides, showed that these normally refer to issues of logistics, that they may be initiated either by the student or the TA, and that the actions they tend to consist of (moving a chair, getting a pen or a piece of paper, etc.) often overlap with the flow of interaction without disrupting it.

The TA's response to the students' question or concern tends to signal the beginning of the 'taking care of business' section of the consultation, a TA-dominated process. Our analyses show that TAs at this stage may either begin an explanation sequence or probe the student for further background to the question/concern. These behaviors are not without interactional and pedagogical value, something that needs to be investigated further. Finishing business is achieved jointly by the student and the TA, like all other interactive processes in the consultation, but it is the student who indicates that the consultation part of the session is over, i.e., that she has no other business to bring up. It was also found that TAs may try at this point to give some advice or improve the tone of the consultation, for example. Finally, an analysis of interruptions indicated that these tend to be related either to small talk or logistics, and that the office hour consultation is an open activity.

Our analysis of the structure of the office hour consultation may have been too detailed for some and too general for others, but, hopefully, it has contributed to a clearer understanding of an academic event that has great teaching and learning potential. In addition, it is hoped that this knowledge will provide a context for further, more detailed analyses of interaction in this setting.

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APPENDIX 1

Transcription notation

MARKING	MEANING/EXAMPLE
(.5)	-Unfilled pause in tenths of seconds. A micro-pause representing less than .2 seconds is marked (.)
:	-Elongation of vowel sound. Eg. u::h
lll, nnn, etc.	-Elongation of consonant sound. Eg. tennn.
hh	-Hearable outbreath. Eg. hh well you see::
.hh	-Hearable inbreath. Eg. .hh do you have a minute.
Underlining	-Upward-downward inflection within a word; abnormal stress. Eg. <u>To</u>morrow (the larger the underlining, the greater the inflection/stress).
Capital letters	-Loudness (except at the beginning of a turn). Eg. I don't KNow (the more letters are capitalized, the louder the word).
°	-Quiet talk. Eg. °Okay.
?	-Rising intonation. Eg. Today?
.	-Falling intonation. Eg. Now.
,	-Continuing intonation (fall-rise, but lower than ?). Eg. Then,
'	-Glottalization/ellipsis of a vowel sound. Egs. 1) It 'is; 2) B't
-	-Omission of a consonant sound. Eg. late-
[	-Overlapping. Eg. A But you [said B. [I I know.

=	-Latching by another speaker. Eg. A: So how are you= B: =Fi:ne. fi:ne.
<	-Rush through by same speaker. Eg. Take it<if you like
><	-Word/utterance said rushedly. Eg. Da:ve.>oh my go:d<
( )	-Word/utterance not understood by transcriber. Eg. In the ( )
(word)	-Questionable transcription of speaker's word/utterance. Eg. The (derivative) is...
(( ))	-Commentary, gloss, body movement, gesture. Eg. ((Speaker nods)).
*	-Marks the exact point in the utterance where a movement, gesture, noise, etc. occurs. Eg. I *don't understand this. ((*points at notes)).
---->	- Feature of interest to the analysis.

APPENDIX 2

Transcripts-Selected session beginnings

Session #13 (Roberto) **page 1**

((TA looks at new S--off screen--after previous S has left desk)) **1:01:35**

(1.5)

TA: You're waiting for me?

S: Yeah. ((Off screen))

TA: .hh ((Laughs softly))

(13.0) ((TA waiting for S to come to desk. S appears on screen))

TA: Is your pen? ((To previous S--off screen--showing her a pen))

(1.5)

TA: *XXX? ((Previous *S's name))

S12:No.

(.5)

TA: ( )

(.5)

S: Hi. I'm (*) ((*S sits down. Chair noise))

(.5) ((TA nods shortly and smiles))

Uhm what I'm ( ) stuff on the past

test that I got wrong and I never figured out how to do:.

TA: Uhu?

S:->*Quihcklyhh. (.) uhm (.2) on this question uhm ((*Soft laughter))

TA: Wait wa wait.

(.7)

I hhave I hhave the (.) I hhave the:: (3.0) the key of ((TA is

( ) /looking for notes))

(2.5)

°This one. ((TA is looking for notes))

(2.0)

Okay the second one (I think) (.) I remember the second one.

°

Session #17 (Jose) **page 1**

((End of previous consultation. Ss are getting up. TA is sitting down.S17--off screen, sitting at a desk nearby, addresses TA.)) **43:10**

(.2) ((Chair noise))

S:->I *I: may I ask you a few ((*TA looks at S, then at watch))

->quick questions or you [( ) discussion

TA: [U:::h

->Yeah (I noticed. so) five minutes.

S:->Okay. oh that's yeah. that's (enough).

(.2)

(I d) I just u:h (.3) had a question u:h (.5) let me see.

okay on (.) ( )(.) *third preference ( ) ((*Sits))

Session #18 (Jose) **page 1**

((New S off screen Previous S gathers his things. TA stands)) **47:02**

(3.0) ((TA looks at camera, then at new S--off screen))

S: Hi.

TA: Hi.

S:->I've a quick question,=

TA->=Very *quick.because ((*TA checks watch))

([   )   uhu   yeah   if it

S:->   [Okay. uh yeah (   ) *section (   )   ((*S sits down))

Session #26 (Miguel)   **page 1**

S26 had pre-arranged this consultation. She left temporarily, came back, and has been waiting for S27's consultation to be over.

((Both Ss are sitting at desk with TA. S26 is S. S27 is S2))   **1:14:43**

(1.0)

S:->.Hh in the meantime I'll have you do the mister C with me.((Smiles))

TA->Uhhuh,   ((Soft laughter))

S: Okay tell me if I did this right. it's not exactly what you have

Session #32 (Ernest)   **page 1**

((TA is sitting. Researcher talking to S--both off screen.   **50:53**

Beginning but missed opening))

R: (   ) view: yes. *but u:h don't worry. ((*S on screen standing))

this is not gonna be used against

-->   *you. **hu hu hu   ((*TA looks at watch, smiles. **Laughter))

S: I (   ) *XXX **hhhhhhh   ((*TA's name. **Soft laughter))

-->TA: I was about to Lea:ve.

S: An I *([hhhh) I just finished a I just finished a final. ((*Sits))

TA: [Go to the video sto:re,

(.5)

Yeah?

S: (Bod-)

TA: (Yo[u') passed?

-->S: [You p(r)ob(ab)ly can just leave if you want becau:se
-->TA: Ha ha ha ha [ha hahhhhhhh ((TA laughs))
S: [I was gonna (read up on) my book and start ta:lking.

Session #37 (Bill) **page 1**

((Some small talk between S1 and TA precedes this segment))

S1: [Okay. here I go. I've got a lot of questions.
TA: Hhheh heh ((TA laughs))
S1: Number fou:r?=
->TA: =A lot o- questions in an hour and a half to get them down.=
S1: =Yeah we can do it fa:st.<number fou:r?
(.)

Session #39 (Bill) **page 1**

((Beginning but missed opening. TA is sitting, S is standing)) **1:45:47**

(.)
TA: (Let me) look at that <u>qu</u>estion
(4.0) ((S takes quiz out, gives it to TA))
You're being videotaped for a (st) [office hours.
S: [( ) right. cool.
(3.0) ((S has handed TA his test and sits down))
°( ) pretty much (but)
(3.0) ((TA is looking at a particular S answer))
TA: Yeah. (should g) ((S nods and bounces smiling))
(2.0)
So what do you ha:ve.

(.)

S: I have four.=

TA: =(   )four (   ) have six.   ((TA changes S's grade))

(2:2)

Okay.

(.3)

right

(.5)

it's *pretty easy   ((*S stands up))

(.3)   ((From here to end, S is half on screen.At times only head))

S: Okay

(.2)

(So is that) all I need to

TA: Yeah.

S: Do (   ) kay

TA: Forty.   ((TA computing grade))

(.5)

S: (*All right) thanks a lot.   ((Very softly))

TA: Uhum?

(1.3)   ((S putting things away))

Yeah<I don't know why they (.) they graded it that way.

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