

Collaborative Completions in Everyday Interaction: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of conversation analytic research that investigates the phenomenon of interlocutors “finishing each other’s sentences,” termed *collaborative completion*, in everyday conversation. The objective is twofold: (1) by reporting on research that examines the formal features and the social actions of collaborative completions, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of both what this practice looks like and what it can achieve in interaction; and (2) in discussing this particular body of work with respect to the larger topic of how language is studied, the author hopes to demonstrate the power of the CA approach to deepen our understanding of the nature of language and how language is used. The paper first reviews the formal features of collaborative completions, namely its syntactic, paralinguistic, and sequential characteristics. Then, the various social actions that can be accomplished with this practice are discussed. Finally, some important themes and suggested directions for future research are mentioned and contextualized within some of the larger objectives of CA research.

Keywords: *collaborative completion, turn-taking, conversation analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Toward the end of the 20th century, scholars in social sciences such as linguistics, anthropology, and sociology started thinking about language in a new way. Although the structuralist perspective that dominated much of the 1900s posited language as a system of interdependent and interrelated components, linguistic analysis was still limited to the examination of isolated sentences that were studied apart from any context in which they might have been produced. Ferdinand de Saussure himself, whose work provided the foundation for structuralism and modern linguistics, considered language (*la langue*) to be distinct from speaking (*parole*), and proclaimed the objective of linguistics to be “language studied in and for itself” (de Saussure, 1959, p. 232). In essence, the traditional thinking had been that the nature of language could be uncovered without examining language as it was being *used*. However, during the last three decades of the century, scholars began to consider language in the context of naturally-occurring discourse. The study of language became a process in which authentic utterances produced by

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actual interlocutors were analyzed within their original interactional contexts. One outcome of this evolution was that the notion of a sentence, previously thought of as a complete unit of study in its own right, came to be understood as something that was a product of interaction (Goodwin, 1979). Let us consider an example to illustrate this point:

(1)

- A: How old are you?
B: Twenty-eight.

Considered in isolation, B's utterance would not qualify as a "sentence" in the syntactical sense as it solely consists of an adjective — "twenty-eight." Yet, widening the lens and looking at "twenty-eight" as a response to a question about age produced in an interactional exchange, we can see that B's turn would be seen as "whole," *functioning* as the complete sentence "I am twenty-eight."

Another important point to raise is that the study of an utterance in isolation often does little to reveal its actual meaning or what a speaker could be trying to accomplish when producing it. Here is another example:

(2)

- A: Why didn't you go to Sarah's party?
B: I'm afraid of dogs.

By itself, "I'm afraid of dogs" appears to be a simple declarative statement expressing how B feels about dogs. However, when we expand the analysis to see B's utterance as a second turn within an exchange, we notice that it also is a response to a question, specifically A's inquiry about B not attending a party. With this in mind, we can revisit B's utterance and infer that the statement about fearing dogs, when positioned after the inquiry at hand, functions as an account for not going to a party because, ostensibly, there was a dog there.

The shift from studying language in isolation to studying language in context was particularly fundamental to the advent of the field of conversation analysis (CA). An approach that originated in sociology in the 1960s, CA entails looking at naturally-occurring interaction, recorded and transcribed into highly detailed transcripts, in order to uncover the nature of language and how it is used. Returning to the examples above, a couple of the main tenets of CA can be brought to light. In the first example, the idea that a "sentence" is a product of interaction becomes clear as we see how an ellipted turn consisting only of "twenty-eight" can be hearable and function as a "complete" sentence when positioned as a response to a question about age. The second example, on the other hand, sheds light on another important implication, which was that researchers moved from solely thinking about *how* things are done with language to also considering *why* language users do them. This does not mean trying to assess the intention of a speaker or any internal, cognitive processes at play. Rather, it reflects the underlying assumption in CA that we can uncover what speakers are trying to *do* with their talk by looking at the talk as being *contingent* upon the interactional context in which it occurs. Thus, when a statement about fearing dogs is produced immediately after an inquiry about an absence at a party, we can see that it achieves a *social action*, which is to provide the speaker's reason for not attending a party.

While there are a number of ways to demonstrate how the CA approach to analyzing naturally-occurring interaction has so significantly lent to the study of language, one practice that has the potential to be particularly illuminating to this endeavor is the *collaborative completion*, or the phenomenon of two or more speakers working jointly to produce one single syntactic unit.

Put simply, this is the idea of “finishing each other’s sentences.” Described by Bolden (2003) as one of the “most sophisticated examples of coordinated behavior” (p. 188), collaborative completion provides a perspicuous venue to shed light on the powerful perspective that CA affords to our understanding of language and language use. On the one hand, analysis of this practice can provide a concrete context in which to examine both how participants in conversation contingently organize and orient to each other’s talk on a particularly nuanced level. On the other hand, looking at the collaborative completion in context enables us to consider how one interactional practice can be used to accomplish a number of different social actions.

Over the last few decades, the collaborative completion has been investigated and described by a number of CA researchers. The benefit of having a robust body of work on one practice is that not only do we have a remarkably well-rounded picture of precisely what it *looks like*, but the studies together as a whole also give us a sense of what speakers *achieve* when they do it. In an effort to bring to light the intricacies and efficiency of one interactional practice, as well as to demonstrate the strength of CA to look at how language is used, this paper will provide an overview of the research that analyzes collaborative completions in everyday conversation through a CA lens. First, we will review what we know about the formal features of the practice, namely its syntactic, paralinguistic, and sequential characteristics. Then, we will discuss the various social actions that can be accomplished by this act of one participant completing his co-participant’s utterance. Finally, we will delineate some important themes and directions for future research to deepen our understanding of this interactional phenomenon.

A BRIEF PRIMER ON CA TERMINOLOGY

Before delving into collaborative completions, it is useful to first review some turn-taking terminology that is relevant to this practice—terminology which largely originated in a seminal CA article in which Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson first described the organization of turn-taking in English (see Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). First, interaction is organized and interpreted around the production of *turn-constructive units* (TCUs), which are the basic units of conversation. A TCU can consist of a word, phrase, clause, or sentence that, on its own, can accomplish a communicative act (Wong & Waring, 2010). *Compound TCUs* (CTCUs) are TCUs consisting of two or more components that have a grammatical relationship between each other. An example of a CTCU is a conditional sentence in English comprised of a preliminary *if*-clause component and a final *then*-conditional statement component. Another key concept is the *possible completion point* (PCP), or the place at the end of a speaker’s TCU where another speaker may begin to talk. The PCP may also be a *transition relevance place* (TRP), a point projected through syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic resources (Wong & Waring, 2010) that act as cues to help participants recognize possible turn-transition places (Auer, 1996) and potentially jump in to speak. What is important to the discussion here is that, in a collaborative completion, two or more speakers jointly complete one TCU, and the second speaker’s talk begins before a TRP in the first speaker’s utterance-in-progress.

FORMAL FEATURES

The formal features of collaborative completions, or the structural and compositional elements of the practice, have been identified and described in depth in a number of studies over

the years. This section will review the main foci of this work, which includes the syntactic, paralinguistic, and sequential elements of this interactional phenomenon. While we will discuss each set of features separately in the same fashion the CA research tends to do, a relevant point to make here is that these syntactic, paralinguistic, and sequential features can co-occur when a collaborative completion is done.

Syntactic Features

For one speaker to complete another's utterance, an obvious challenge is that the incoming speaker must time his entry into his co-participant's ongoing TCU in a way that produces "clean syntax" (Ono & Thompson, 1996), smoothly continuing the grammatical construction of the talk-in-progress. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that much of the work on collaborative completions has examined the syntactic features of the practice. Some earlier studies (e.g., Lerner, 1987, 1991; Lerner & Takagi, 1999; Local, 2005) looked at the practice in the environment of CTCUs which are characterized by a syntactic relationship between the different components of the TCU as a whole. Here, we will use the conditional *if-x/then-y* sentence as our reference point for a CTCU, however, CTCUs can also be quotations formatted as *x-said-y* or lists of items conjoined with elements such as *and* (Lerner, 1991). The following extract reproduced from Lerner (1987, p. 15) provides an example of the *if-x/then-y* structure:

- (3)
Rich: if you bring it intuh them
Ruth: ih don't cost yuh nothing

In this exchange, Rich first produces an *if*-clause "if you bring it in to them" (originally transcribed to reflect the interlocutor's pronunciation). Our understanding of English syntax tells us that an utterance that begins with the adverbial subordinator "if" establishes a condition and will generally be followed by a *then*-clause, which expresses the result that will happen if the condition is satisfied. In this case, the result is expressed by the second speaker, Ruth, who says "[then] it don't cost you nothing." Lerner's work (1987, 1991, 1996) sheds considerable light on collaborative completions in the CTCU environment. His analyses showed that the particular syntactic features of the preliminary component (i.e., the *if*-clause) *foreshadow* the form of the final component (i.e., the *then*-clause). This means that when a speaker utters an *if*-clause in his talk, the listener gets a clue that a *then*-clause is relevant in the talk-to-come. Lerner (1991) also defined a place of *preliminary component completion* in CTCUs. Similar to the notion of a possible completion point in a TCU, there are places in the syntax-in-progress in CTCUs (e.g., where the *if*-clause ends) which signal the ending of the preliminary component. This is significant because, when a recipient hears his conversation partner reach the end of a preliminary component, he can recognize an opportunity to do an incoming completion. More specifically, the moment the listener hears his co-participant's *if*-clause end, he gets a hint that it is an appropriate time to provide a *then*-clause completion. Together, Lerner's findings highlight how certain elements of the syntax of one speaker's utterance-so-far are a key resource for a second speaker to perform an incoming completion in CTCUs.

While collaborative completions can occur across clauses to produce compound sentences, some research (e.g., Helasvuo, 2004; Ono & Thompson, 1996; Szczepek, 2000a) demonstrates that the practice can be done *within* clauses as well. Helasvuo (2004) studied

conversation in Finnish, a language characterized by a rich inflectional morphology. This means that root words can take a great number of forms due to morphological affixation or vowel change for categories such as gender, number, and person. For collaborative completions, this grammatical system is relevant because the further into a first speaker's turn-in-progress, the more the inflectional information will project and constrain the form of a potential completion by another speaker. Helasvuo found four syntactic arrangements between the first and second speakers' contributions for within-clause collaborative completions. For example, at times, a first speaker produced a subject noun phrase (NP) and transitive predicate verb, and the second speaker produced the object noun phrase of the verb. Other times, the second speaker added an NP to the first speaker's NP to create one compound noun. This finding demonstrated that the practice can occur even at the lexical level. While this study revealed much about the syntax of within-clause completions, more notable was that which was *not* found. For instance, Helasvuo found no examples in which the second speaker produced a predicate following a first speaker's subject NP. She attributed this to a preference for the grouping of the subject and predicate in Finnish, and concluded that there were certain constraints for collaborative completions that seemed to be tied to the syntactic parameters of the language.

Others (e.g., Ono & Thompson, 1996; Szczepek, 2000a) have found similar patterns in both British and American English. In Szczepek's (2000a) analysis of British English, completions were never done across a preposition and an NP, or across a relative pronoun and a relative clause. The following from Szczepek's (2000a, p. 20) analysis provides an example²:

Extract 4

- 4 CE: [you know they eat a tremendous amount of of-
5 SI: [of BREAD.
6 CE: [of bUtter uh produc-

In this exchange, the repetition of the preposition "of" three times in line 4 indicates that CE appears to be searching for a word, ostensibly an NP. CE's utterance leaves off with the preposition, which SI recycles in producing a collaborative completion NP "bread" in line 5. These findings strengthened the assumption that, in everyday conversation, weaker syntactic boundaries such as that between a preposition and an NP do not seem to hold across speaker change (Szczepek, 2000a). Therefore, to effectively complete talk that left off with a relative clause or preposition, the second speaker appears to need to reproduce that element for the completion.

Lerner and Takagi (1999) contributed another important study on the syntax of collaborative completions with their comparison of the practice in Japanese and English. These two languages have notably distinct syntactic structures, with English being a verb-initial language and Japanese a verb-final language. For Japanese, then, doing a completion of an utterance-in-progress presents an added complexity because the verb, which carries much of the intended meaning, does not occur until the end of the TCU. Lerner and Takagi's findings shed light on collaborative completions from a cross-linguistic perspective. On the one hand, there were nuanced differences in the precise syntactic characteristics of the practice between the two languages, and completions in CTCUs with clear syntactic ties (like with *if-x/then-y* CTCUs in English) were less frequent in Japanese. However, speakers of both languages still oriented to the

² See Appendix for transcription notations.

turn-in-progress in the same way, using the syntactic features of the first speaker's turn to do the same act of completing another's talk at an appropriate place in the sequence. This was significant because it provided evidence that attention to components of syntax seems to be used in a universal way for the turn-construction of collaborative completions (Lerner & Takagi, 1999).

Notably, most authors (e.g., Auer, 1996; Mondada, 1999; Ono & Thompson, 1996; Szczepek, 2000a) studying the syntax of collaborative completions have discussed a relationship between syntax and *projectability* in the practice. Regardless of the language being examined or whether the practice occurred across or within clauses, a salient theme in these analyses has been that the syntactic content in the first speaker's talk is fundamental in projecting both the place and the form of the incoming speaker's turn. This point is quite important toward our effort to understand precisely *how* co-participants manage collaborative completions.

In sum, collaborative completions can reflect a number of syntactic arrangements both across and within clauses. However, there may be some constraints, especially at the juncture of weaker syntactic boundaries. More importantly, syntax is a key resource for accomplishing the practice, specifically in the way that incoming speakers look to certain syntactic features of an utterance-in-progress to project both the place and the form of the completion they provide.

Paralinguistic Features

Studies in multiple languages (e.g., Auer, 1996; Hayashi, 2003b; Iwasaki, 2009; Lerner, 1996; Local, 2005; Szczepek, 2000a) have examined the prosodic features of collaborative completions, which include characteristics like pitch, stress, volume, and sound length. Lerner (1996) found speakers often stretched or lengthened sounds as they neared the end of a preliminary component of a CTCU, such as an *if*-clause in English. He claimed that this signaled the impending arrival of the preliminary completion point. Iwasaki (2009) and Hayashi (2003b) found a comparable use of sound stretching in Japanese, except their analyses demonstrated that the lengthening occurred when speakers experienced trouble finding a word. Their work identified this sound feature in the first speaker's talk as a way for him to invite another speaker to complete his troubled utterance-in-progress with the missing word.

Some work has examined how *intonation contour* (i.e., the collection of pitch, tone, and stress features that mark the progress of an utterance) plays a role in collaborative completions. Along with sound lengthening, Lerner (1996) discovered that a first speaker's use of mid-level pitch also signaled the ending of the preliminary component CTCUs. Local (2005) used software to precisely measure the nuanced phonological characteristics of English speakers' speech. He observed that incoming speakers continued and then completed the pitch contours of the first speaker's talk, which meant that, together, the two speakers produced the intonation contour of an utterance as it would typically be produced in single-speaker speech. Szczepek's (2000a) study of the practice also found that English speakers often integrated into and completed the intonation contour the first speaker had begun. On the other hand, some of the research shows that the incoming speaker does not always complete the projected intonation contour. When first speakers are doing word searches, for example, the second speaker may use a rising intonational pattern known as *try-marking* when offering a completion to indicate that they are uncertain whether they are providing the sought-after word (Szczepek, 2000b).

While no studies seem to have focused solely on the pausing features in collaborative completions, most scholars (e.g., Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986; Hayashi, 1999, 2003a, 2003b; Helasvuo, 2004; Kim, 2003; Lerner, 1987, 1991, 1996, 2004; Local, 2005; Mondada, 1999;

Sacks, 1992b; Szczepek, 2000a, 2000b) have pointed to a pause found at the juncture between the first and second components of co-constructed utterances. Lerner (1996) characterized the pause between the components in CTCUs as a systematic, “socially organized site for possible silence” (p. 242), which participants do not orient to as trouble. In contrast, researchers looking at both English (e.g., Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986; Szczepek, 2000b) and Japanese (Hayashi, 2003b) have described how pauses, alongside other verbal features, may signal trouble when first speakers are doing word searches. Overall, whether a pause is a natural component of the structure of a compound sentence, or it is reflective of speakers encountering trouble during a word search, the research highlights the omnipresence of a pause between the first and second speakers’ talk in collaborative completions, which strongly suggests this is another key resource for the practice, specifically in terms of how it provides a point of entry for the second speaker.

Similar to the syntactic characteristics described earlier, the research indicates that paralinguistic features such as prosody and pausing are fundamental for doing collaborative completions, and this seems to hold true across languages. Furthermore, along the same lines as the earlier point that features between the larger syntactic, paralinguistic, and sequential categories can co-occur when this practice unfolds, it is important to note that these individual paralinguistic components are not independent phenomena within the practice, either. In fact, a few authors (e.g., Auer, 1996; Szczepek, 2000a) have explicated the interdependence of the sub-features of prosody and pausing in collaborative completions.

Sequential Features

Because the salient characteristic of collaborative completions lies in the fact that two (or more) speakers jointly accomplish one utterance, it is not surprising that much of the literature focuses primarily on the co-constructed utterance itself, which means that the practice is often talked about as a two-turn event. However, some scholars (e.g., Antaki, Díaz & Collins, 1996; Hepburn, Bolden, & Potter, 2017; Lerner, 1987, 2004; Mondada, 1999) suggest that this view may be limited. In particular, considering the practice as a two-component phenomenon neglects the fact that it is regularly part of a larger sequence, and more can be learned by considering what happens in the *third* turn that occurs after the completion takes place.

Some of Lerner’s work (e.g., Lerner, 1987, 2004) discusses *collaborative turn sequences*, which he points out are those completion events which are “designed to launch a sequence” (Lerner, 2004, p. 255). In his view, a distinction can be made between completions found in co-tellings of stories or co-constructed explanations, and completions in other contexts. A defining characteristic of story co-tellings, for example, is that speakers collaborate to describe an event about which they share knowledge. Hence, when one speaker completes the other’s talk, the accuracy or acceptability of the completion content is likely not in question. In these instances, a first and second speaker typically co-construct one utterance in their co-telling to a third party, and the sequence continues. Thus, examining the practice as a two-part structure in those cases is relevant. In many other contexts, however, the incoming speaker is speaking *to* the first speaker when he completes the TCU, offering a *possible* fit. Here, the completion action often launches a sequence (Lerner, 1987) when, in a third turn, the first speaker orients or responds to the acceptability of the second turn by doing talk that either ratifies or rejects the completion content. Lerner’s analysis of these sequential events suggested that outright rejection in the third turn (i.e., using a “no” token or another explicit form to identify the completion as a misfit) was rare (Lerner, 2004).

The word search is especially relevant to the discussion of how completions can initiate a sequence. Sacks (1992a) described how, in word searches, the completion itself is regularly treated as a “candidate,” which may be accepted or rejected by the first speaker who had encountered trouble finding the word. Goodwin and Goodwin’s (1986) study also highlights the relevance of a third turn in word search completions. In an analysis of their own conversation in English, these researchers discovered that the first speaker typically used a third turn to acknowledge the second speaker’s participation in the search, and to assess whether the second-turn had indeed provided the missing word. Third-turn ratification in their data included affirmative tokens (e.g., “yeah” or “right”) as well as the incorporation of the proffered word in the third turn talk.

Mondada’s (1999) study on French conversation also points to the pertinence of a post-completion third turn. Her data included instances in which second speakers performed completions both with and without shared knowledge of the topic at hand, as well as instances of completions that both aligned and disaligned with the prior talk-in-progress. Examples of disaligning completions were those that started a different topic or displayed disagreement with the first speaker’s talk. Throughout Mondada’s data, the completion content was almost always ratified by the first speaker, which was done through agreement tokens or by repeating and integrating the completion content into the third turn talk. Considering the variation among the completion examples she examined, especially the fact that some instances disaligned with the prior talk-in-progress, the consistent ratification pattern is intriguing.

Studies have shown that completions are not always ratified in the third-turn. Antaki, Díaz and Collins (1996) looked at collaborative completions in British English conversation using a slightly different lens that considered the footing (Goffman, 1981; Levinson, 1988) between the first and second speaker’s talk. Following Levinson’s (1988) framework for footing, particularly his notion of “participant status,” Antaki et al. examined whether completions continued what the first speaker was seemingly going to say on behalf of himself (“author”) or another (“relayer” and “spokesperson”). They discovered that the vast majority of the completions were continuations of the first-turn footing, and these were all ratified in the third turn. The following extract reproduced from Antaki et al. (1996, p. 155) shows how a completion that continues the first-turn footing can be ratified in the third turn:

Extract 5

- A: buckling down to Anglo-Saxon
B: and the history of the language
A: and the history of the language (syllable) yes.

Here, B’s turn “and the history of the language” supplements and extends A’s initial utterance. In A’s next turn, both the complete repetition of B’s utterance and the definitive “yes” function to ratify, or accept, that B’s completion was an acceptable offering for what A was going to say. However, the authors discovered that, in those few instances in their data in which the footing was mismatched, the completion content was typically rejected in the third turn, an action accomplished through negation, with talk such as “I don’t know that that’s true” (Antaki et al., 1996, p. 156) or a simple “no” token followed by talk designed to complete the first-turn in the manner it was purportedly on track to do before the completion was done. Thus, Antaki et al.’s study corroborates Lerner’s (2004) claim that outright rejection of a completion is rare, but it further specifies under what conditions it might occur. Hepburn, Bolden, & Potter (2017) analysis of English and Russian conversation also found examples of completions that disaligned

with the first speaker's talk-in-progress. Termed "subversive" completions, these were instances in which the incoming speaker appeared to intentionally mismatch what the first speaker's talk projected, typically for the sake of doing humor. In this special use of the practice, the first speaker either rejected the completion outright in the third turn, or oriented to its content with laughter.

In summary, it is useful and revealing to look beyond the co-constructed sentence that makes up a collaborative completion to consider the practice as part of a sequence. Looking through this widened lens sheds light on some of the more nuanced connections between the first and second speakers' contributions, as made visible through a third turn.

Summary of Formal Features

We have seen that co-participants are able to do collaborative completions by attending to and using a number of linguistic resources such as syntax and paralinguistic features that help coordinate both the timing and the form of the incoming turn. We also see that, while it makes sense at times to think about this practice as being a two-part structure, it is regularly part of a three-part sequence. Therefore, considering the sequential features of collaborative completions enhances our understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in terms of how participants orient to their sentence being "finished" by another speaker.

SOCIAL ACTIONS

Having unpacked the nuances of how co-participants do collaborative completions, we can see why the practice has been described as one of the "most sophisticated examples of coordinated behavior" (Bolden, 2003, p. 188) in interaction. With this in mind, we will now take a look at what Sacks (1992b) wondered about this practice when he asked "Why in the world would people ever do it? Why would they ever mobilize the energy and resources required to engage in an analysis of [sentence ending] possibilities and then using it to fit a continuation?" (p. 59). In this section, we will discover what this practice can do in interaction by discussing the various social actions participants accomplish when they complete each other's sentences.

Assisting in a Word Search

Several authors (e.g., Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986; Iwasaki, 2009; Lerner, 1996; Local, 2005; Sacks, 1992a; Szczepek, 2000b) have shown that collaborative completions are often done to assist with a speaker's trouble finding a word, trouble which is visible in hesitation signals such as cut-offs, false starts, fillers (e.g., "um" or "uh"), and frequent or lengthy pauses (Szczepek, 2000b). As mentioned, word search completions are treated by both the first and second speakers as a "candidate" (Sacks, 1992a) guess that the first speaker may accept or rejected in a third turn.

Doing 'Being a Team'

In a multi-party context with three or more participants, collaborative completions may lend to the dimensions of a joint story-telling or explanation event. Looking at one impressive instance of *three* boys co-constructing *one* utterance, Sacks (1992a) showed how the practice done in the context of talking to a group enabled the hearers to see that the three boys knew “what’s on each other’s minds,” allowing them to act as a team that is “just doing together to do together” (Sacks, 1992a, p. 147). Other analyses of multi-party contexts (e.g., Falk, 1980; Mondada, 1999; Szczepek, 2000b) similarly show that collaborative completions in this particular social arrangement create a conjoined voice that is “indistinguishable from that of a single-speaker” (Falk, 1980, p. 507), that reflects a sense of co-belonging (Mondada, 1999), or that displays a shared perspective or knowledge (Szczepek, 2000b) to a third-party recipient.

Displaying Alignment and Disalignment

Overall, a good number of the studies on collaborative completions have found that the act of doing a completion is one way for the second speaker to display how they are orienting to the talk in the first turn. Although some researchers talk about these moves differently (see e.g., Steensig & Drew, 2008; Stivers, 2008), for the sake of this review, we will divide what these displays do into two categories: aligning and disaligning actions. Alignment is a term that describes recipient talk that supports the talk-in-progress (Lindström & Sorjonen, 2013). While this can be done through practices such as continuers (e.g., “uh-huh”) when listening to an ongoing turn, alignment within the scope of the collaborative completion relates to second-turn completions that essentially “go along with” the line of activity started by the speaker in the first turn. This includes displaying attention to and understanding of the first-turn content, as well as showing agreement with what the first speaker is saying.

Some authors (e.g., Helasvuo, 2004; Mondada, 1999) suggest that second speakers may do a completion to simply display to their co-participant that they are paying attention. This is unsurprising, since we know that performing a completion requires a great deal of attentiveness to the unfolding talk-in-progress (Bolden, 2003). As we learned earlier, this involves at the very least paying attention to the syntactic and paralinguistic components of first speaker’s talk.

Along similar lines, some research (e.g., Szczepek, 2000b) shows that collaborative completions can be a way for listeners to display understanding of their co-participant’s talk. Here, the notion of “understanding” operates on two levels. On the one hand, considering how an incoming speaker utilizes the first-turn talk as a *resource* to do a completion, merely doing the completion demonstrates he has technically understood that prior talk. On the other hand, the completion can also function to *display* the message “I understand your point,” which contrasts other ways a listener explicitly *says* he understands the talk (e.g., saying “I understand”) once it has been completed. Displaying understanding in this way is particularly relevant when the speaker doing the completion lacks shared background information on the topic at hand (Szczepek, 2000b).

Schegloff (1984) pointed out that collaborative completions are one of many techniques speakers can use to display agreement, and some of the research corroborates this. Both Mondada’s (1999) analysis of French speakers and Szczepek’s (2000b) analysis of English speakers found that second speakers’ completions sometimes aligned with the trajectory of and reflected agreement with the first speaker’s utterance-in-progress.

However, a completion can just as easily *disalign* with the prior talk. Disalignment, unsurprisingly, does the opposite of alignment. Disaligning actions in collaborative completions involve somehow “going against the grain” of what the first-turn speaker is doing with their talk-

so-far. Also in Mondada's (1999) study, completions were found to sometimes divert from the topic or even disagree with an assessment being formulated in the first turn. As discussed above, Hepburn et al. (2017) found that incoming speakers could intentionally disalign with prior talk to "subvert" the action projected in the first turn as a special way to do teasing or humor.

Summary of Social Actions

The act of "finishing another's sentence" has been shown to afford incoming speakers with a robust way to accomplish a number of social actions. These include assisting with a word search, demonstrating they are part of a team, displaying attentiveness, understanding, agreement or disagreement, and even doing humor. This range of actions reflects the phenomenal versatility of this practice in interaction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

On one level, the literature on collaborative completions reviewed here reveals how the detail-oriented, interaction-based approach of CA can uncover much about how, *precisely*, a practice is done, as well as what producing a given practice in interaction can accomplish, in everyday conversation. The overview of the formal features of the practice reinforces Bolden's (2003) assessment that it requires impressive syntactic, paralinguistic, and sequential coordination between interlocutors. We have also answered Sack's (1992) question about why participants would put forth the energy needed for such coordination, as we know that the act of completing another's talk enables co-participants to accomplish an impressive range of different social actions.

On another level, however, this body of work reflects some larger considerations that conversation analysts aim to tackle with their research. For example, it is important to highlight the multilingual nature of this body of research. Although CA researchers have historically been reluctant to use a cross-linguistic approach to thinking about interaction, more recent research has shown that certain practices seem to be universal across languages (Kasper & Wagner, 2014). The studies reviewed here include English, Japanese, Finnish, French, and Russian, and other studies have examined German (Auer, 1996), Korean (Kim, 2003), and Brazilian Portuguese (Vilela & Ranhel, 2017). Thus, the collaborative completion appears to be a universal practice that appears to accomplish similar things across languages. However, although this work has indicated that some similarities are at play, more research needs to be done to shed light on any nuanced distinctions due to differences in language structure, social action, or pragmatics.

Another important implication of this body of work is that it quite effectively demonstrates how exploring a practice like the collaborative completion in the context of naturally-occurring interaction can reveal how language is actually *used*. Examining this practice through the lens of CA brings to light the extent to which participants attend to and use each other's talk as a resource for subsequent talk and action, a factor that is not apparent when we limit ourselves to the study of isolated sentences. Relatedly, this research also embodies a fundamental consideration in the field, what Sacks (1992a) described as "an extraordinary tie between syntactic possibilities and phenomena like social organization" (p. 145), and it offers a unique window into what others (e.g., Mondada, 1999; Ochs, Schegloff, & Thompson, 1996; Ono & Thompson, 1996) refer to as "grammar for interaction." Simply put, this view considers grammar to be a resource for and a product of interaction. Studying practices like the

collaborative completion provides insight into how participants make choices about aspects of language like syntax for the purpose of doing social action with their talk *in situ*.

While this body of literature is relatively comprehensive, the vast majority of the work on collaborative completions in everyday interaction dates back several decades. As a result, the more recent trend in CA of using a multi-modal lens for analysis is visible in only the few studies that consider the role of non-verbal behavior in the practice (e.g., Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986; Hayashi, 2003b; Iwasaki, 2009). Some more recent work in institutional settings (e.g., Bolden, 2003; Koshik, 2002; Radford, 2009) suggests that nonverbal resources seem to be fundamental in the coordination and management of the practice. Therefore, more research should be done to reveal how resources such as gaze, gesture, and even body position play a role in collaborative completions in everyday talk.

Finally, the research on collaborative completions also demonstrates another key assumption among CA experts, and that is that there is a distinction between everyday talk and talk that occurs in institutional settings. It follows that sometimes the use of a particular practice and the social actions it can accomplish can vary between these two contexts. For example, there has been some work on collaborative completions in the classroom. This limited body of research, which focuses mainly on word searches and teachers' *designedly incomplete utterances* (see Koshik, 2002), seems to indicate that some of the formal features and social actions may be distinct in the practice when done in an educational context. The contingency and spontaneity seen in the practice in everyday talk, for instance, may not be as salient in an institutional setting like the classroom. When a teacher trails off partway through a sentence, she is often overtly, through the use of exaggerated sound elongation and pausing, leaving a space for a student to "complete the sentence" with sought-after information. In essence, the environment provided for a completion to occur is *intentionally* created, unlike what we saw earlier in the discussion about word searches. Moreover, the action accomplished by the student in the second turn is a performance of displaying knowledge as opposed to genuinely helping the teacher find a word. Also, some of the syntactic arrangements and paralinguistic features in the institutional context may be distinct (see e.g., Margutti, 2006). Since we know that practices from ordinary conversation are adapted in institutional talk to achieve specific tasks (Koshik, 2002), it would be important to do more research to identify how collaborative completions may differ between ordinary conversation and institutional talk such as classroom discourse. Such an undertaking would not only help us to understand how, exactly, collaborative completions might compare and contrast between institutional talk and everyday conversation, but using CA to uncover the systematic differences in how one practice is used between these two environments could also be a project that has the potential to truly highlight the fundamentality of considering context and contingency when studying language.

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APPENDIX

CA Transcription Notations

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| . | (period) falling intonation. |
| - | (hyphen) abrupt cut-off. |
| <u>word</u> (underlining) | stress. |
| WORD | (all caps) loud speech. |
| (syllable) | non-transcribable segment of talk. |
| [words] | (lined-up brackets) beginning and ending of |
| [words] | simultaneous or overlapping speech. |