

# Introduction

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## **1. Telephone conversations**

Since the end of the 1960s, telephone conversations have been a favourite topic for conversation analysts, starting with Schegloff and Sacks (Schegloff 1968; Schegloff/Sacks 1973). The main reason for this is that it is pure verbal interaction where the elements of body language, gestuality and facial expression that play such a significant role in face-to-face conversation are missing, or rather, can only be discerned, if at all, insofar as they are reflected in the auditory channel.

Telephone conversations are studied first of all because they are conversations tout court and not for their distinctive properties, and analysis of these verbal interactions is facilitated because they are unburdened with non-verbal elements. The detailed study of telephone conversations has served first of all to throw light on certain recurrent phenomena also found in face-to-face conversation, such as the organisation of conversational turns and their management and alternation (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1996), adjacent pairs and conditional relevance (Schegloff 1968; Schegloff/Sacks 1973), and the concept of preference and repair (Levinson 1983; Pomerantz 1984).

### *1.1. Distinctive features of telephone conversations: the opening*

The beginning of an interaction between two or more participants activates a series of contact and answer mechanisms regulated by social and cultural norms. Schegloff (especially in Schegloff 1979: 25 ff.) notes that despite all the analogies between telephone conversation and face-to-face conversation, the opening phase of the call can be differentiated from other interactions where participants can see each other in that there are sequences in calls where the interlocutors identify themselves verbally.

The opening phase of telephone conversations has been carefully studied by conversation analysts as a relatively autonomous phase with a recognizable and precise structural and sequential organisation (see Silverman 1987). Thanks essentially to studies by Schegloff (1968 and 1979), the following structural phases have been identified in the opening of a telephone call:

- 1) *summons/answer sequence* (Schegloff 1968): C sends a signal to R (call signal) in order to begin the interaction; by picking up the receiver and uttering a conventional signal of contact (e.g. *Hello*) R responds and displays a willingness to interact<sup>1</sup>;
- 2) *identification sequence* (Schegloff 1979; Berens 1981 obtains similar results to Schegloff for the German speaking area): the caller and respondent arrive at reciprocal recognition through self-identification or identification of the interlocutor by the voice sample;
- 3) *greeting sequence* (see Schegloff 1979): the participants exchange greetings;
- 4) *'How are you', initial inquiries* (Sacks 1975; Jefferson 1980): the participants exchange more or less conventional formulas about 'how things are going'; this phatic phase of the opening ritual is intended to demonstrate that the interlocutors are interested in the other person;
- 5) *first topic*: marks the transition to the first thematic unit.

Schegloff (1986: 130) stresses the routine nature of the opening phase, generally consisting of a sequence of two or three turns, which comprises either adjacent pairs (e.g. call signal and first turn = *summons/answer sequence*, or the greeting pair), or adjacent pairs + a third turn that concludes the sequence, generally ratification (of the *how are you? – not bad – fine* type). On the basis of telephone conversations in German, Werlen (1984) has shown that the adjacent pairs present in the opening, but also the end of phone conversations can be satisfactorily interpreted as rituals, where 'rituals' are taken to be «formalized expressive acts» (Werlen 1984: 81).

From a functional point of view, the opening of a call must carry out three operations (Schegloff 1986: 113):

- a) establish contact;
- b) (re)establish a relationship;
- c) move towards the first thematic unit.

<sup>1</sup> Schegloff (1968: 1090) stresses that although lifting the receiver establishes the presence of someone at the other end of the line, it does not demonstrate the willingness of R to interact; it will become clear later that in actual fact this interpretation is specific to a determinate culture and cannot be regarded as being universal to telephone conversations.

At least two sequences (summons/answer) are required to carry out phase (a); at a structural level, phase (b) takes three sequences, (1) identification, (2) greeting and (3) 'how are you'; phase (c) effectively begins after the opening phase as such has been completed.

At virtually every point in the course of the opening, each of the two participants in the conversation can interrupt the regular sequential development (see Schegloff 1986: 144) and introduce the first thematic unit, a topicalised conversation focus. Routine openings should not therefore be considered banal repetitions of empty formulas, but the result of conversational work on the part of both participants, who, turn after turn, collaborate to achieve a successful outcome to the conversation by choosing, from a range of existing possibilities, the utterances that correspond adequately to what has been proffered by the interlocutor in the previous turn.

### *1.2. Distinctive features of telephone conversations: the closing*

The openings of telephone calls have been analysed precisely because in this phase conversations seem to share the same underlying pattern before breaking off into a myriad of possible themes. In the closing the reverse process operates, that is, the myriad of possible themes are channelled into the same closing structure (Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 291 n. 3), which is also characterised by a tight order of utterances; to achieve this, use is made of the same type of adjacent-pairs organisation found in the opening phase (Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 297).

The shift from the thematic phase to closing is distinguished by particular markers (Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 299) of the *O.K., see you, thank you, well* type. As the mere presence of these is not a sufficient condition for guaranteeing transition to the end of the conversation, Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 303 ff.) prefer to talk in terms of *possible pre-closings*. Only if the interlocutor accepts the possible pre-closing as such, ratifying it with the conclusion of the adjacent pair and without introducing a new thematic unit, will the conversation actually move into the closure.

The organisation of the closing phase can be illustrated by looking at the following pattern, which adopts the structure proposed by Rainer Rath (1995), who adds some further observations to the analysis presented by Schegloff/Sacks (1973).

- 1) *pre-closing/ratification* ('Gesprächsbeendigungsangebot/Ratifizierung'): one of the two speakers uses specific markers to signal that the conversation could move towards the conclusion; in order for this to happen, it is necessary for the interlocutor to ratify the proposal by using a similar marker.

- 2) *summary/ratification* ('Resümee/Ratifizierung'): one of the parties summarises any agreements that may have been reached in the course of the body of the call, often involving future appointments (including time and place), invitations, etc., or refers to the purpose of the call (see Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 317); a 'coda' is quite frequently inserted here, because the interlocutor may want to correct some aspect of the summary; the correction then also needs to be ratified (see Schegloff/Sack (Rath 1995: 12);
- 3) *thanking/reply* ('Dank/Gegendank'): in the event that the caller has phoned for a specific reason, for instance to solve a problem or effect a service, it is common, after the two interlocutors have reached an agreement in the thematic phase, for the caller to thank the respondent for the service obtained or problem resolved;
- 4) *greetings (to other people)/reply* ('Grüße/Gegengrüße'): if the callers know each other, the call will often contain a sequence of greetings to other known people;
- 5) *leave-taking/reply* ('Verabschiedung/Gegenverabschiedung'): the two interlocutors take leave of each other with a final greeting.

Though they can be observed quite frequently, the adjacency pair of greetings to other people and that of thanking are optional (Rath 1995: 12); furthermore, their sequential order is not fixed, because the pairs can change position (Rath 1995: 12), and the thanking sequence may also precede the summary (Brons-Albert 1984: 6). Other studies have demonstrated that although the closing of telephone calls reveals an underlying structure analogous to that of the opening, it nonetheless possesses a larger number of variants and variables (Button 1990).

In reality, until one of the two interlocutors puts the receiver down, thereby sanctioning the end of the interaction (Bjelic' 1987: 208), it is always still possible to introduce a new theme, even after ratification of the pre-closing (Schegloff/Sacks 1973); in this case, where obviously it is necessary for the two participants to negotiate the introduction of the new theme, which often derives from the development of a topic that has at least been touched on in the thematic section (Schegloff/Sacks 1973: 319, «most closing components have their roots in the body of the conversation»), there is what Rainer Rath (1995: 25 ff., 32) calls «coda insertion» (*Schleifenbildung*).

## 2. Genres of telephone calls

### 2.1. Closeness and distance

One of the differences between face-to-face conversation and telephone calls, as mentioned above, is that the two interlocutors are not in the same place. At a linguistic level, this can involve variations in spatial deixis (Rath 1995: 9, n.1), given that the *here* of R does not correspond to that of C. Another difference is the specificity of the channel, which is limited to the acoustic one. This may also have linguistic consequences, essentially a more frequent use of contact signals (formulas of confirmation and reassurance of presence in the channel), which on the one hand replace body language and facial signals perceived visually in face-to-face communication, and on the other serve to check that the channel is functioning properly (Rath 1995: 10).

There are many different types of face-to-face conversations, and the same is inevitably true for phone calls as well. No systematic classification of phone calls has yet been produced. Rath (1995: 17 ff.) divides them up on a closeness-distance scale (see Koch/Oesterreicher 1985) depending on the relationship between the interlocutors. On this basis two groups can be recognised:

- a) *service conversations* ('Dienstleistungsgespräche'): the two interlocutors do not know each other; C calls R because R represents an institution, body, company or shop from which C wants information regarding a service;
- b) *phatic conversations* ('phatische Gespräche'): the two interlocutors know each other, are friends, acquaintances or relatives; one of the fundamental roles of the conversation is to reinforce and stabilize a social relationship.  
Group b) can in turn be subdivided into two groups:
  - (b1) *purely phatic conversations* ('rein phatische Gespräche'): the sole aim is to reinforce the social relationship;
  - (b2) *phatic conversations with additional purpose* ('phatisch geprägte Gespräche mit zusätzlichem Zweck'): telephone calls between acquaintances or people who know each other well, the main purpose of which is to resolve an issue and which therefore have a practical function in addition to maintaining the social contact.

Due partly to the lack of homogeneity of the relationships included in b), the distinction between (b1) and (b2) is not as clear-cut as the one between a) and b).

The distinction between a) and b) involves differences reflected in the organisation of the phone calls themselves. Service calls, for example, which are directed solely towards optimising the available time and achieving a goal

which must be clear to both speakers from the outset, have specific characteristics that stem largely from the time factor. In these cases, interest in the other person's well-being is regarded as totally inappropriate, and the sequence of greetings is reduced to a minimum (Rath 1995: 31 ff.).

The closing of service calls is characterised by the same criterion of optimisation found in openings, which means that in general it is not necessary to negotiate the ending. The conversation ends when agreement has been reached regarding the service that prompted the call (the service has been activated or an appointment has been made to expedite it) (Rath 1995: 31-2).

The distinction between (b1) and (b2) seems to be reflected in a different organisation of the closing phase; in purely phatic conversations there is generally a complete absence of the summary, which is present, on the other hand, in prevalently phatic calls with an additional purpose. The summary, which serves to check that the right agreements have been made, is in this case normally initiated by the caller and refers to the purpose of the call, summarising its results (Rath 1995: 32).

## 2.2. *Institutional and emergency calls*

In the pioneering works of Harvey Sacks and Emanuel A. Schegloff, conversation analysis focused not only on the analysis of phone calls but also on interactions in institutional contexts (calls to the police or psychological help lines); these studies were initially aimed at identifying, even in these unusual calls, the mechanisms of everyday interaction. Subsequently, conversation analysis looked once again at institutional speech in a wide range of contexts, such as emergency calls (see, for example, Zimmerman 1992 and Monzoni/Zorzi (in this volume)), fire services (*Feuerwehr*) (Bergmann 1993), medical meetings, the law courts, communication in the university (see Ciliberti/Anderson 1999) and school system. In these more recent studies, the focus has been on the distinctive nature of institutional interaction, which is seen as being oriented, at least by one of the participants, towards one or more goals conventionally relating to that institution (see Drew/Heritage 1992). As a consequence, specific inferences are generally associated with interaction within a particular institution. The repertoire of conversational mechanisms used is therefore more limited than in ordinary conversation (Atkinson 1982).

One of the key studies to have examined how the mechanisms of ordinary conversation are adapted in emergency calls is that of Wakin/Zimmerman (1999).

In the analysis of calls to the fire service (*Feuerwehr*) in the German context, Bergmann (1993) notes that from the point of view of adequacy of information, a phone call of this kind could consist of just two components,

identification of the type of emergency and the place where it has happened. Notwithstanding this, the study shows that calls that begin without the canonical sequence of caller self-identification, typical of the opening of calls in German, immediately arouse scepticism on the part of the operator (Bergmann 1993: 304), who, by means of specific questions, tries to establish whether the call is authentic or not<sup>2</sup>. Bergmann cites other elements that may count as ‘proof of authenticity’<sup>3</sup>, for instance a greeting by the caller, the immediate communication of the exact address, the sequential structuring of the opening and closing phase, noting also that, although these elements may be found in innumerable other non-emergency calls, it is only in the context of emergency calls that they assume – and even then only implicitly – the role of a ‘truth test’.

### 2.3. Radio (and TV) call-in programmes

The calls of radio programme listeners (or viewers’ calls to the television) differs from an ‘ordinary’ initial call, because in this situation the communication is not two-way, as in the vast majority of calls, but three-way or multi-way, in that besides the caller and presenter, it also involves other guests present in the studio or linked up by phone (experts, journalists, etc.), and above all the public (Sobrero 1994: 156). The call arrives at the switchboard and only subsequently is it put through to the presenter. As a consequence, it actually has two openings, although only the one with the host of the programme is transmitted live (Bercelli/Pallotti 2002). The ‘public’ part of the call does not therefore have the call signal, so the function of opening the channel is performed by the presenter’s first turn, where a conventional signal such as *Hallo* or a greeting performs the dual task of signalling to the interlocutor that she/he has been put through to the presenter and to the public that the interaction is no longer with the whole audience of listeners but is concentrated on the caller (Ten Have 1999).

Focusing on the opening phase, Bercelli/Pallotti (2002) note in their analysis that in opinion-centred programmes identification of the caller (the presenter does not generally introduce him/herself) and greetings are per-

<sup>2</sup> This is a further demonstration of the particular value ascribed to the self-identification of the caller in German, in that it goes beyond the specificity of personal presentation and serves to establish agreement between the participants regarding the authenticity of the emergency.

<sup>3</sup> Clearly there may be cases where the absence of self-identification and a greeting on the part of the caller, difficulty of expression and lack of precision in giving the address are the result of panic. In this case the operator is in the difficult position of having to decide whether to accept a ‘disturbed’ call as genuine, or continue to ask questions to check the authenticity of the call, thereby delaying the despatch of assistance (Bergmann 1993: 305); see Whalen/Zimmermann/Whalen (1988) for an analysis of a case of this kind, where the operator’s insistence on informational clarity may have tragic consequences.

formed rapidly and often compressed into a single turn, moving immediately to the point of the call. On the other hand, they stress that in entertainment programmes targeted essentially at young listeners, the possibilities of the opening phase are exploited more fully, with some sequences being extended to create the impression of a personal encounter (Bercelli/Pallotti 2002).

Bercelli/Mizzau/Pallotti (2000) have shown that in calls to the radio or television there may also be a further sequence, where the caller *compliments* the transmission or the presenter.

### **3. Telephone conversations and cross-cultural and intercultural analysis**

Schegloff's works on telephone openings (in particular Schegloff 1968, 1979 and 1986) and closings (in particular Schegloff/Sacks 1973) delineated a model which then became 'canonical'. This then served as the basis for cross-cultural and intercultural studies. Cross-cultural studies compare the phases of a call in a particular language and culture with the sequences in another language and culture – often using the sequences identified by Schegloff, with – among other aims – that of establishing whether or not they are universal.

The first cross-cultural study was conducted by Godard (1977), who compared American and French calls; in Godard's view, one major difference was that American openings demonstrate that when the receiver of the call responds, he or she is generally open to interaction, while in France calls are considered an intrusion on one's private space. For this reason callers generally open the interaction by excusing themselves, unless, that is, it is a call between people who know each other well.

This study and the reactions it produced from Schegloff (e.g. Schegloff 1986: 147; Schegloff 2002b) throws light on the different perspectives adopted by conversational analysis and cross-cultural and anthropological linguistic analysis. While for the latter it is essential to highlight the changes from one language to the next, what interests conversation analysts is examining what happens at the level of the organisation of the interaction, in other words at a greater level of abstraction, which can subsume under a single organisational criterion what appears at close hand as two different articulations. In fact, Schegloff (1986: 147) stresses that if differences are noted between one culture and another, from his perspective it is important to examine whether in the organisation of the calls there is some other factor capable of motivating those differences or whether a more general description may not make it possible to see different practices as alternatives, thereby taking them as different expressions of the same organisational criterion. For example, the same considerations (for instance the existence of close relation-



ship between the two participants) that permit the absence of a 'howareyou' sequence in US opening sequences can also be invoked for the absence of excuses for intrusion in French (see Schegloff 1986: 147).

In line with the studies of Schegloff, Theodossia-Sousia Pavlidou compares the organisation of sequences in German and Greek calls, focusing first on openings (Pavlidou 1994) and then on closings (Pavlidou 1997 and 1998). In the study on openings she highlighted how purely phatic sequences are much more widespread and significant for the development of the conversation in Greek. For example, from an examination of the articulation of the 'howareyou' sequence, she concludes that this is a reinforcement of the interpersonal tie for Greek speakers, while for the Germans it is merely a brief 'buffer' to avoid moving immediately to the point of the call, which would go against the norms of politeness.

As Hao Sun (2002: 89) notes in a review of the application of cross-cultural communication studies to telephone conversation, one area that has been the focus of many studies is the very first sequence of the opening phase, the *summons/answer*. If in the United States the response to a ringing phone in a private home is *Hello*, Houtkoop-Steenstra (1991) and Halmari (1993) note that in Dutch and Finnish cultures respectively the first turn of the recipient consists of self-identification by surname. Lindström reaches similar results regarding Swedish, where the first turn of the receiver normally consists of self-identification by surname or even by phone number. Analysing calls in Germany, Berens (1980) confirms the results of Bethge (1974), also revealing that in the majority of calls the first turn of the recipient, the answer to the call, contains self-identification (see also, in this volume, Marui/Schwitalla, Thüne and Varcasia for further details about this first phase in German).

The same variety of approaches can be noted in the caller identification phase. According to Schegloff (1979), in calls between acquaintances, there is a preference in the United States for recognition of the caller by the recipient on the basis of the voice sample; in service and also emergency calls, the identification of the caller can easily be omitted without disturbing the interaction, and indeed this often happens. By contrast, Houtkoop-Steenstra (1991) and Halmari (1993) underline, respectively for Dutch and Finnish, how the lack of self-identification of the caller is only possible between close friends and in other cases is considered a serious violation of politeness norms. The self-identification of the caller plays an analogous role in the construction of interaction in German, as emerges from the above mentioned study of emergency calls by Bergmann (1993) and the study of service calls by Eva-Maria Thüne (in this volume).

The exact opposite seems to be the case for calls in Chinese, in particular between women (Sun 2002), where the identification of the caller is an interactive process of *collaborative identification* or *invited guessing* that fulfils social functions as well as having a function in structuring the conversation.

What happens is that the caller, after having confirmed the identity of the recipient, invites her/him to guess the caller's identity. In reality, the particularity of Chinese lies in the length that such a sequence might last and the frequency with which explicit routines and comments take place (of the kind 'guess who it is?', 'you're good at recognizing people from their voice' or 'so you recognized me from my voice', see Sun 2002, 96–97).

In the present volume a cross-cultural perspective is adopted by Anna Colamussi and Gabriele Pallotti (Spanish and Italian in service calls), Ichiro Marui and Johannes Schwitalla (a comparison between German and Japanese in phatic and service calls), Chiara Monzoni and Daniela Zorzi (English and Italian in emergency calls) and Cecilia Varcasia (German and Italian in service calls), while Fabrizio Bercelli's study concentrates on the articulation of service calls in Italian, noting differences and similarities in relation to Anglo-American calls.

Conversation analysts have only recently begun to conduct intercultural studies, that is, to examine the interaction between native and non-native speakers in a given language and culture (see Schegloff 2000 for a summary of the issues involved). One such intercultural study regarding telephone calls is that of Carmen Taleghani-Nikazm (2002); taking cross-cultural analyses of call openings in Persian and German as a basis and utilising the work of Pavlidou (1994) on the function of 'howareyou' sequences, she examines interaction on the phone, in German, between German native speakers and speakers whose mother tongue is Persian. The 'howareyou' phase is particularly delicate, because speakers with a Persian cultural background tend to use their customary mother-tongue conventions in German as well. This phase is long and involves the caller ritually enquiring about the health not only of the recipient but also their entire family. Such enquiries are generally greeted with amazement and some embarrassment by German recipients, who are accustomed to a different, much briefer and *ad personam* 'howareyou' phase. This tends to cause another conversational problem, because the question is not treated as a distinctive articulation of the 'howareyou' phase, but as a topic of conversation in its own right.

The contribution by Eva-Maria Thüne in this volume is devoted to an intercultural analysis of interaction on the phone between German speakers and Italian speakers who have learnt German as a foreign language.

One fundamental issue for both cross-cultural and intercultural studies is what attitude to take to the 'canonical' models resulting from research based on telephone interaction in the United States (essentially the works of Schegloff 1968, 1979 and 1986 and Schegloff/Sacks 1973). In particular there is the question of whether these should be treated as universals – thereby necessitating the assimilation of the results of analysis regarding telephone behaviour in other languages (see Hopper 1992) – or whether different models are not more appropriate for other languages and cultures. One issue that

needs exploring, for instance, is whether the rule that the answerer speaks first, in response to the call signal, has universal validity (see Schegloff 1968: 70 «A first rule of telephone conversation, which might be called a ‘distribution rule for first utterances’, is *the answerer speak first*»). Schegloff (1968: 1090) claims that although the answerer’s picking up of the receiver establishes the presence of someone at the other end of the line, it does not prove her/his willingness to interact. However, it emerges clearly in the work by Ichiro Marui and Johannes Schwitalla (this volume) that there are numerous cases in Japan where the recipient picks up the receiver and does not say anything. In these cases the caller speaks first, generally using the *mosimosi* formula (‘hello’). It is also quite frequent for the two participants to begin speaking simultaneously, generally with a channel-opening formula.

Another area for investigation is whether in cross-cultural studies it is not more appropriate to emphasize the functional model for telephone openings (see Ten Have 1999), that is to say a) establish contact, b) (re)establish a relationship, c) move towards the first topic, and then insert the structural sequences typical of a specific linguistic and cultural community.

#### 4. Perspectives

As regards the analysis of telephone interaction from a linguistic and conversational analysis point of view (which is the one considered in this work and also in this introduction, where I have not examined the extensive sociological literature that analyses the impact and use of the telephone medium without resorting to linguistic analysis), many cross-culturally oriented studies now exist, as evidenced also by the recent work edited by Luke/Pavlidou (2002).

Greater typological differentiation would be desirable; in reality there is something of a grey area between ‘service calls’ and ‘calls between friends and loved ones’, for example communication between people who have worked for years in different companies (e.g. sales department secretaries) and who frequently exchange service calls. Clearly in such cases, even if the two participants have never seen each other and only communicate for work, their communication will be different from what is considered ‘standard’ service communication, where a private citizen calls a company on a single occasion to obtain information or a service, a situation in which the caller will certainly not expect to be recognized.

The proliferation of call-centres and telephone helplines or help desks suggests this type of interaction merits further study. An initial example is Baker/Emmison/Firth (2001), who examines the regularities found in the opening phases of calls to the helpline of a software company. Potter/Hepburn (*forthcoming*), on the other hand, analyse calls to a national

helpline in the United Kingdom for reporting cases of child abuse (organised by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, NSPCC). The study focuses on the particularity of the first turn of the caller, which in the majority of cases involves the use of expressions like *be concerned about x*, or alternatively is summarized by the operator as the caller *having concerns*. The two scholars examine the implications of this opening format and also suggest further implications for the relationship between psychology, interactions and institutions.

As we have seen, one of the characteristics of telephone conversation is that it is essentially dyadic (with the exception of 'public' calls to the radio or television). In reality this is a *usual* form of telephone calls (see Bercelli/Pallotti 2002: 177), given that this is neither an exclusive prerogative of calls, which could therefore at a pinch be included in the wider and more heterogeneous class of two-person conversations, nor can it logically speaking be argued that telephone conversation in principle excludes conversations with several interlocutors. In recent years various speaker devices enabling multi-person conversation have appeared on the market, and telephone companies now offer special contracts for conversation between a number of interlocutors. However, there is still no specific analysis of the extent of these innovations and whether they have essentially modified the characteristics of telephone communication.

One type of telephone communication that has grown exponentially in recent years is the use of cell phones. The dyadic nature of telephone communication is reaffirmed in this type of communication, the effect of which is that some people, when they receive a call in a public place, behave as if they were alone on the phone with their interlocutor. When, for example, the call becomes a heated argument or lovers' talk, this can cause some embarrassment for people nearby. This occurs because a person using a cell phone, as Schegloff (2002a: 286) notes, is simultaneously in two different places – one is the public and possibly crowded space, the other is what is considered a private, 'on the phone' space.

There are not many linguistically oriented and conversation analysis studies devoted specifically to cell phone interaction. However, it has been underlined by various scholars that the first turn of the answerer almost always contains specification of where she/he is in that particular moment, for example, *I'm on the train* or *I'm on the way to the office*, etc. (see, for example Laurier 2001). There are also other features that distinguish cell phone communication from land line calls, and which make it necessary to rethink the organisation of sequences in this medium. First of all, the cell phone is *personal*, which means that the caller knows in advance that if someone responds, it will be the desired person. This greater certainty on the part of the caller, however, is accompanied by something that reduces the asymmetry between caller and answerer (Schegloff 2002a: 290). The display on all cell

phones indicates the number or even the name of the caller. As a result, provided the caller is part of the circle of acquaintances the answerer maintains phone contact with, and provided the call comes from a cell phone and is therefore individual, the receiver can be certain of the identity of the person he or she is about to talk to, while if the call comes from a land line the answerer may at the most hypothesize that they will be dealing with someone belonging to the restricted range of people who normally use that line. All this causes significant changes in the initial phase of the interaction: for example the sequences devoted to the identification of the interlocutors become superfluous (see Bonomo/Lee 2001). There are not as yet any published studies that analyse the extent of these changes in detail or that explore the possible effects on the entire sequential organisation of the interaction.

Schegloff (2002a: 293 ff.) outlines possible lines of investigation relating to the introduction of displays on land line phones, making it possible to ascertain the identity of the caller (*Caller ID*). First of all, he notes that as soon as these instruments appeared on the market, mechanisms were devised to neutralize them (*Caller ID blocking*), demonstrating that the caller is often aware of the position of advantage (that derives from anonymity) in relation to the answerer and wants to maintain it. Furthermore, to affirm that such a device can fundamentally alter the existing asymmetry that normally exists between caller and answerer is perhaps exaggerated. Apart from the fact that the answerer obviously cannot know the reason for the call, there remains the question of who is using the phone from which the call has arrived. On the other hand, the caller does not know how much the answerer knows. It would be interesting to investigate the form of openings where the answerer has a phone with *Caller ID*, and to see whether or not there is a sequence devoted to the identification of the caller; and, if so, whether and how this is different from sequences where there is no such device.

One area of study which is still somewhat undeveloped, especially in view of its potential for analysis, is that of prosody in telephone interaction (see, however, Ichiro Marui and Johannes Schwitalla's detailed analysis of prosody in telephone conversations in Japanese and German, included in this volume). Because telephone conversation takes place exclusively on the basis of data perceived via the auditory channel, prosody plays a central role, for example in the articulation of feelings and the interlocutor's perception of them. It would also be useful to compare and contrast this with prosody in face-to-face interaction.

## **5. Audio data and transcription systems**

As is well-known, it was clear from the beginnings of modern conversational analysis that linguistic interaction could not be adequately transcribed

using the normal writing system, so various transcription systems were developed in the various research fields. Generally speaking, conversation analysis modelled on the US pattern adopts the system developed by Gail Jefferson (see Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974 and Ochs/Schegloff/Thompson 1996), while studies devoted to the German language commonly use the GAT system (*GesprächsAnalytische Transkriptionen*, ‘transcriptions for the analysis of conversation’, see Selting et al. 1998).

In this work Gail Jefferson’s system is used for the transcriptions in the contributions of Fabrizio Bercelli, Anna Colamussi and Gabriele Pallotti, Chiara Monzoni and Daniela Zorzi, and Cecilia Varcasia. The GAT system is used by Ichiro Marui and Johannes Schwitalla, Bernd Sieberg and Eva-Maria Thüne (see *Appendix* for the transcription symbols).

A selection of the audio data that provided the source for the transcriptions can be found at: <http://lingue.unibo.it/linguaparlata/>.

A few words also need to be said about the criterion adopted in the translation of examples that were not in Italian or English. For reasons of space, but also readability, it has not been possible to opt for what would in some ways have been the ideal solution, that is a word-by-word interlinear gloss followed by a pragmatic translation (in this case every line of original text would have been followed by two lines of translation). Instead it was decided to present first the entire original text (in Roman), followed by the text of the translation (in italics). In order to make clear the correspondence between the sequences of the translation and those of the original text, the turns of C and R have been numbered. These numbers, together with the corresponding symbols, C or R, also appear in the translation<sup>4</sup>. In the translation the individual turns are separated by a double slash //.

As regards the translation itself, an attempt has been made to achieve, where possible, an acceptable compromise between a literal rendering and pragmatic adequacy in the Italian version (see Schegloff 2002b for a discussion of problems regarding the ‘presentation’ of data in different languages from that of the original). In order to make the Italian version conform to the norms governing the organisation of a call in Italian, words – for instance, *Pronto* in the first turn of the recipient or the verb *sono/è* in the self-identification of the receiver – have sometimes been inserted. The words inserted in order to ensure an adequate presentation in Italian are set between square brackets, for instance [*Pronto*]. There may on the other hand be occasions where some words present in the original version would be omitted in an adequate Italian version (e.g. *am Apparat*, ‘on the phone’ in German calls); in these cases the word that would be omitted is set within curly brackets, as in «storm=am=apparat» [*sono*] Storm {*al telefono*}.

<sup>4</sup> This departs from the usual conventions of conversation analysis. Both the Jefferson and the GAT system generally use the continuous numbering of the lines.

## 6. The contents of the volume

The first group of studies focus on the structure of a particular type of call, namely service calls, with particular emphasis on the opening phase in different situational and cultural contexts.

In *Openings in Italian service calls*, Fabrizio Bercelli highlights some of the distinctive characteristics of this typology, for instance the significance of organisational identification, which accompanies and sometimes even replaces personal and categorial identification. In the majority of cases this constitutes the first turn of the recipient, and not uncommonly there is not even a channel-opening signal (*Pronto*) or a conventional greeting. The lack of categorial identification on the part of the recipient in her/his first turn generally gives rise to an obstacle in the course of the conversation; the immediate reaction of callers tends to be to request confirmation that they have dialled the right number. Service calls generally tend to pursue maximum efficiency, often developing simplification and compression strategies. In Italian service calls, the personal identity of the caller is not considered relevant to the course of the conversation, so callers do not generally identify themselves. However, other factors can contribute to slowing down the conversation, such as politeness requirements, including the exchange of greetings. These can be optimised by compressing this sequence together with other phases or other ‘obstacles’, such as the one mentioned above. The analysis of ‘transformed calls’, where a service call becomes – subsequent to reciprocal recognition – a call between acquaintances, clearly shows the difference between the structure underlying service calls and the one for calls between acquaintances. In the calls of the corpus, there is a demonstrable preference for changing the frame as soon as possible.

In the contribution by Anna Colamussi and Gabriele Pallotti, *Italian and Spanish telephone openings*, it emerges clearly that the two Romance languages, despite being closely related from a linguistic typological point of view, elaborate different communicative routines. Besides semantic differences relating to the conventional formulas used (which can never be entirely superimposed), there are some highly significant differences in pragmatic articulations. In service calls, there is a different structuring of the greeting phase; Spanish assigns turns devoted exclusively to greetings, while in Italian there is a preference for compacting this sequence with the following one to make a single turn. The way in which the first topic is approached is also very different; the use of the pre-request is very frequent in Italian calls, but decidedly rare in Spanish ones, where the request is often presented in an extremely concise form, practically just a noun or prepositional phrase, even omitting the verb.

In *Service telephone calls in Italy and in Germany: comparing beginnings*, Cecilia Varcasia reveals that in both cultural-linguistic contexts this type of

call obeys the principle of optimising available time, with frequent occurrences where more than one sequence is compacted into a single turn. This tendency contrasts, however, with another tendency, namely the fulfilment of politeness obligations, for instance through greetings or pre-request forms, found with a similar frequency in both Italian and German. The chief difference regards the caller's self-identification sequence. In German calls this is almost always present, even when the speakers do not know each other, while in Italian calls it is only present where it is functional to the further development of the call.

On the other hand, the contribution of Eva-Maria Thüne, *Service calls in German: examples of communication between native and non-native speakers*, is an analysis of intercultural interaction, where the callers are Italian non-native speakers of German and the recipients are German native-speakers. Through the examination of the opening phase of the calls in a corpus, it emerges clearly that it is not so much linguistic competence in the strict sense of the word that makes the non-native speaker's call more exposed to 'obstacles', but rather lack of awareness of the fact that the pragmatic strategies of the two languages may be dissimilar. In particular, the mechanical application of a strategy typical of Italian service calls, namely the absence of caller self-identification, can be problematic because this is an essential part of the conversation-opening routine in German, whose function is to allow the relationship between the two interlocutors to be established without problems. On the other hand, it is also evident that native and non-native speakers collaborate to develop strategies that guarantee comprehension, for instance dialogic repetition or the caller's habit of categorizing the call as being 'from Italy', in order to appeal for the collaboration of the native speaker on the other end of the line.

*Emergency telephone calls: a comparison between Italian and English* by Chiara Monzoni and Daniela Zorzi focuses on another type of call, institutional calls, specifically emergency calls. Basing their work on a corpus of 118 emergency calls, they analyse the opening phases of calls and the initial request, which they then compare with corresponding data from the United States. The aim of the work is to highlight the strategies of *reduction* and *specialisation* that distinguish emergency calls from 'canonical' openings, and to pinpoint similarities and differences relative to the US calls. What emerges is that there are forms of *reduction* in both contexts but that these are realised in different ways. On the one hand the same interactional function can often be realised through different actions (e.g. the orienting of the operator and caller to the 'emergency call' activity, in English through self-identification of the institution and signals of acceptance of the caller, in Italian through self-identification of the institution and non-reciprocated greetings). On the other hand, the same discursive action may occur in different positions and perform different functions.



The last two contributions do not concentrate on a single type of call, nor exclusively on the opening phase. Rather they examine the different types of interaction on the phone – phatic, phatic with additional purpose, service – examining the ways in which a call can be opened, but also how the speakers move towards closing.

Bernd Sieberg's contribution, '*Estou sim*', '*Pois Pois*', '*Pronto*' and '*Beijinhos*': *telephone communication in Portuguese*, highlights for the first time typical routines and rituals of telephone calls in Portugal. In particular, he notes that the participants in a Portuguese telephone call tend to build a pleasant communicative atmosphere through signals of 'rapprochement', generally positioned at the end of the opening phase in the form of various communicative strategies and linguistic expressions that mark the shift to the purpose of the call. The fact that both the communicative devices and the linguistic expressions corresponding to these elements are clearly identifiable justifies the hypothesis that this should be considered as a phase in its own right within the opening sequence. The closing phase, on the other hand, has a simpler and more stereotyped structure. On the basis of the calls in the corpus, it can be affirmed that in Portugal the participants in a phone conversation perform more discursive work in the opening than in the closing. As a result, in the final sequences of the calls examined, there are no 'coda insertions'.

Rounding off the volume is Ichiro Marui and Johannes Schwitalla's cross-cultural analysis, *A comparative analysis of the openings (and closings) of telephone conversations in Germany and Japan*. From the comparison it clearly emerges that in both the opening and closing phases, German calls reflect a clearly structured and predictable common model, where both the subdivision of caller and receiver roles and the sequentiality are well-defined. By contrast, it is difficult to delineate a typical structure or even the alternation of roles in the Japanese calls. It is worth noting that in the two languages the greater intimacy of a relationship produces the opposite effect; in German the more the interlocutors are familiar with each other, the more the opening and closing phases are extended, while the opposite is true in Japanese. In this language they are abbreviated, to the extent that in Japan it is normal to end a call simply by putting down the receiver. The study also focuses on the prosody of the two languages, in particular the intonational features of certain routines and rituals in Japanese and the articulation of the conventional formula *mosimosi* on various prosodic models, as a function of varying values on the closeness-distance continuum between interlocutors. In German it is sometimes possible to note the use of prosodically expressive forms such as the manifestation of feelings of surprise and joy, forms that can then be 'mirrored' by the interlocutor and therefore exchanged for a number of turns.