HEARING TALK:
ACCOMPLISHING ANSWERS AND GENERATING FACTS

Timothy Halkowski

ABSTRACT

Congressional hearing interaction is routinely treated (by members of the culture as well as social scientists) as either a reflection of the personal characteristics of the participants, or a stage on which social forces do battle over the heads of actors. Likewise, answers are treated as the solitary production of witnesses, via an "interview orthodoxy," (Button 1987). Yet answers in a hearing are interactionally generated. This analysis reveals two "questioners' methods" which shape witnesses' answers and also sustain the interview orthodoxy. These methods are explicated, and argued to be partially constitutive of the Congressional hearing as a social setting.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I investigate how it is that talk *about* a set of events known collectively as "the Iran-Contra affair" was shaped and formed into a written

document which stands to describe and explain the matter. I shall focus on an initial stage of this process: the Congressional committee's questioning of witnesses. The witnesses' answers to committee questions are transcribed and treated (by the committee) as information about the "affair."[1] This information is used as evidence for the narrative description and explanation of the affair within the committee report (cf. Bogen and Lynch 1989).

Yet while witnesses' answers to committee questions are used as evidence in a written report, the details of that evidence's *situated interactional production* are lost (cf. Garfinkel 1967; Smith 1974; Zimmerman 1974; Coulter 1989; Mellinger 1990). The witness is treated as the solitary author of his or her answers, via interactional "practices [which] sustain an interview orthodoxy" (Button 1987, p. 169).[2] It will be our work here to uncover some of those interactional practices as they are employed in the Congressional hearing, to sustain this "orthodoxy." The two questioning practices we shall focus on are "treating a turn-so-far as complete" and "treating a turn-so-far as incomplete." We shall also briefly consider some of the strategic "countermoves" interactants can make to fight this interview orthodoxy. Along the way we shall have opportunities to make some more general observations about the interactional generation of answers within the Congressional hearing "speech exchange system" (Sacks et al. 1974; Halkowski 1990a).

DATA

The data for this study are approximately twenty hours of videotape of the Iran-Contra Congressional hearing. These tapes were transcribed using transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson and Heritage 1984).

As an additional resource, I used more than 800 pages of government transcripts of the Iran-Contra hearings. These government transcripts employed normalizing transcription conventions (as opposed to the detailed conventions from the Jefferson system), but were nonetheless a useful resource in tracking down segments of interaction for detailed analysis.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1987, newspapers, radios, and television programs were filled with talk about the "Iran-Contra investigation." The joint Congressional hearing, which was taking place at that time, was initiated in order to

conduct an investigation and study of activities by the National Security Council and other agencies of the United States Government with respect to the direct or indirect sale, shipment, or other provision of arms to Iran and the use of the proceeds from any such

transaction to provide assistance to any faction or insurgency in Nicaragua or in any other foreign country, or to further any other purpose, and related matters (Senate Resolution 23, 100th Congress, 1st session).[3]

As was the case with some other Congressional hearings (e.g., by the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate Select committee on presidential campaign activities,[4] or the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on the nomination of Robert Bork to the Supreme Court), the Iran-Contra hearings became a "media event," covered in detail by newspapers, radio, and television. While some Congressional hearings attract a great deal of media attention, it should be pointed out that numerous "less-eventful" Congressional hearings occur every day that Congress is in session. Every committee and subcommittee in the Congress holds public or private hearings on issues ranging from economic trade with South Africa to the confirmation of nominees to the Supreme Court.

Despite the ubiquity of Congressional hearings as an aspect of the everyday operation of the Congress, there has been very little sociological research on Congressional hearings per se (but see Molotch and Boden 1985, as well as Bogen and Lynch 1989). Indeed, very little systematic research from any discipline has been done on Congressional hearings.[5]

The Hearing as a "Neutral Conduit"[6]

Recently Alexander put forth analyses of the Watergate and Iran-Contra Congressional hearings (1987, 1989). Alexander argues that these hearings can be viewed as a Durkheimian "civic ritual," which

revivified very general yet nonetheless very crucial currents of critical universalism and rationality in the American political culture. It recreated the sacred, generalized morality upon which more mundane conceptions of office are based, (1989, p. 188).

Alexander begins this argument by stating that

the actual event, "Watergate," was in itself relatively inconsequential. It was a mere collection of facts....Watergate could not...tell itself. It had to be told by society; it was, to use Durkheim's famous phrase, a social fact. It was the context of Watergate that had changed, not so much the raw empirical data themselves (1989, p. 181).[7]

He then argues that these "mere facts" were contextualized as a "political scandal" via the Watergate hearings, in which participants struggled for "moral legitimation,""definitional or ritual superiority, and dominance," (1989, p. 191).

There are theoretical and methodological reasons for questioning Alexander's analysis. A theoretical problem is that Alexander begins his

analysis by employing the commonsense assumptions of the culture as an unacknowledged resource for his theorizing. In referring to "the actual event 'Watergate'," a "mere collection of facts," and "the raw empirical data themselves," Alexander asks us to make the Parsonian assumption that one can (and must) distinguish between society and "objective reality as known and recognized by societal members" (Hilbert 1991, pp. 17-18). Yet Durkheim argued (and ethnomethodological research demonstrates) that *society* "provides for its membership the possibility of reality," (Hilbert 1992, p. 19; Garfinkel 1967). Society does not require Congressional hearings in order to convert "mere facts" into social/moral facts. Rather, *at the point of their constitution* (as well as at the points of their reproduction and transformation) facts *are* social/moral (Garfinkel 1967; cf. Zimmerman and Pollner 1970; Zimmerman and Wieder 1970; Hilbert 1992).

A methodological problem is that Alexander refers to the Watergate hearings as a contest over "moral legitimation," "definitional or ritual superiority, and dominance" (1989, p. 191), yet shows us no evidence for such characterizations. The hearing is used by Alexander as a stage, on which theorized social forces do battle, yet

> social order cannot be addressed without examining how people *actually produce* the order they talk about and take for granted as factual, (Hilbert 1991, p. 10, emphasis added).

Similarly to Alexander, Senators Cohen and Mitchell (1989) used the Iran Contra Congressional hearing as a lay-analytic resource. But where Alexander uses the Congressional hearing as a stage where social forces do battle, Senators Cohen and Mitchell use the hearing as a stage on which personal attributes are displayed, and individual showdowns occur.[8] Regarding Lt. Colonel Oliver North's testimony before the Joint Committee investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, the Senators ask,

> How did a Marine lieutenant colonel capture the nation in a single week, when the events leading up to his testimony had been so damaging to him? We think it was the confluence of four factors: the person, the place, the conditions of his appearance, and television (1989, p. 159).

Under "the person," the Senators list that North is "a man of action," "a stand-up guy," "a man of commitment," "a genuine war hero," and that he had "the guts to tell Congress off" (1989, p. 159). All of these elements are personal attributes, as are the factors that they list under "television" (e.g., his "telegenic face" and "clear grey eyes," (1989, p. 163). "Conditions" treats the arrangements that North's lawyer was able to obtain, such as avoiding a pre-hearing private deposition.

It is only under "the place" that the Senators get to the issue of the organization of a Congressional hearing, and its possible benefits to a testifying witness. They note that in court a witness cannot consult with his or her attorney after a question is asked, as is allowed in a Congressional hearing. They also note that

> In court, a witness must answer questions directly. Statements not responsive to questions are cut off.
>
> In a Congressional hearing, witnesses frequently give lengthy, unresponsive answers that often amount to speeches in their own behalf (1989, p. 161).

Thus, the Senators account for North's ability to be an effective witness in his own behalf by his personal characteristics, as well as the setting.

Both Alexander and Cohen and Mitchell treat the hearings as a neutral conduit for the transmission of testimony and the clash between various people or social forces (Cohen and Mitchell's observations on the difference between a court and a Congressional hearing notwithstanding). Yet the social organization of any interaction can be shown to shape the actions that occur in that setting. As Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson put it,

> The social organization of turn taking distributes turns among parties. It must, at least partially, be shaped as an economy. As such, it is expectable that, like other economies, its organization will affect the relative distribution of that which it organizes. Until we unravel its organization, we shall not know what those effects consist of, and where they will turn up. But, since all sorts of scientific and applied research use conversation now, they all employ an instrument whose effects are not known. This is perhaps unnecessary (1974, pp. 701-702).

It is not only social science researchers who make use of the data that are generated by Congressional hearings, but members of the culture as well. Reporters, members of Congress, lawyers, witnesses, lobbyists, and social scientists make use of the talk generated in Congressional hearings as a resource for their various projects.[9]

In contrast with Alexander (1987, 1989), I make the Congressional hearing *itself* a phenomenon for investigation, so my central research concern is with the interactional achievement of answers in this setting (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970).[10]

ANALYSIS

That which goes on in Congressional hearings is expressly produced "for the record," that is, the governmental and historical record (cf. Molotch and Boden 1985; Bogen and Lynch 1989). Indeed the finished *Report of the Congressional*

Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair is peppered with quotations such as the following:

> North testified that he recalled no such conversation, though he could not rule it out:
> My recollection was that the first time it [the diversion] was specifically addressed
> was during a [later] meeting with Ghorbanifar. It may well have come up before,
> but I don't recall it (Inouye and Hamilton 1988, p. 174).

The report thus uses answers to questions from the Congressional hearing as data or evidence to describe and explain the events known as "the Iran-Contra affair." Yet these bits of talk quoted in the report were produced by people in a particular kind of interaction. Furthermore, this type of "speech exchange system" (Sacks et al. 1974) can be shown to have a powerful effect on *what* gets said, *where* it gets said, and *how* it gets said. To fully understand the data in that report,[11] we must first recognize that it is the product of a particular type of interaction, and then study the social organization of that interaction. Failure to do so will lead researchers to prematurely attribute aspects of Congressional hearing interaction to distal causes (e.g., a struggle for moral legitimation, or personal characteristics), and obscure the in situ, interactional constitution of social phenomena (cf. Boden and Zimmerman 1991; Wilson 1991).

The Interactive Constitution of Answers

The local management of turn size in a Congressional hearing makes the production of questions and answers an *irremediably* interactional task. Consider a turn taking system where turn size is not locally managed, but is instead "prespecified" (Sacks et al. 1974). In a debate, for example, the "pro" speaker may have three minutes to make an argument. At the completion of the three minutes, the "pro" speaker must stop, his turn having ended. Then the "contra" speaker may have three minutes to respond. In a turn taking system such as a debate, the clock determines the size of a speaker's turn.

In a Congressional hearing, by contrast, turn size is locally, and thereby interactionally, managed (as it is in ordinary conversation). An answer issued by the witness is hearably complete when the turn is transferred to the Committee counsel (hereafter, CC). The CC's action (gaining the floor and producing a "next question") is *partially constitutive* of the witness's answer (Button 1987).

With this in mind, let us consider a data extract which will illustrate one way that the questioner (CC) in a Congressional hearing can help to shape a witness's answer.[12]

Segment 1.[13]

	W:	...it was not my indiscretion in that case, it
		was Director Casey's
		((silence))
		Unfortunately.
1 →	CC:	So this business of covert operations
2		reached a point where not only
3		congress was regarded as too
4		indiscreet to be told, but that even
5		the Director of Central intelligence
6		made that list.
7 →		I have no further questions this
8		morning, Mister Chairman.
9	CM1:	Mister Chairman.
10	CH:	Mister Cheney.
11	CM1:	Mister Chairman, I would like to
12		inquire as to the plans for this
13		afternoon. We've now had 21 hours of
14		questioning ((Continues turn))

In the above datum, the CC assesses an immediately prior answer turn (lines 1-6) by the witness. He then passes the floor to the chairperson in lines 7-8. In so doing, the CC produces a characterization of the witness's answer that cannot be corrected or challenged by the witness (cf. Button 1987, p. 169).

<center>Treating a "Turn-So-Far" as Complete</center>

While the above is one method that interactants can use to "shape" how some bit of talk can be interpreted by others, there are yet more fundamental and powerful ways that a speaker's turn of talk can be interactionally shaped. As Atkinson and Drew put it,

> a turn might be recognized to have been completed at a point at which an utterance could count as a[n]...answer; thus next speakers can, and sometimes do, begin their alloted turns at such points, though it may turn out that the current speaker had more to say (1979, p. 66).

There are ways in which this claim can be empirically supported. One such way is to look at points at which a questioner in a Congressional hearing begins a next question, such as in the following example.

Segment 2.

```
1        W:          Thee answer to your question is y:es I can
2                    think of a lot of documents that would cau:se
3                    (0.4) domestic political damage,
4                    (0.5)
5        CC:         =In yo[ur f]iles?
                          [    ]
6  →     W:               [(to-)]
7                    (0.9)
8  →     W:          Not necessarily in my files [ I mean ]
                                                 [        ]
9        CC:                                     [Well lets ]talk
10                   about the ones that were in your files that
11                   you were concerned about sh:redding.
12                   (1.3)
13                   And my question to y:ou is can you think of
14                   a:ny document in your files that you were c-
15                   thinking about sh:redding, (.hh) which would
16                   have caused him more domestic political
17                   damage than one of these diversion memos
18                   reflecting h:is approval.
```

At lines 5 and 9 the CC produces a next question. By producing a "next question" at such points of "possible completion" (Sacks et al. 1974), the CC in effect proposes that the witness's turn-so-far is a complete answer. By treating the witness's turn-so-far as a complete answer, the CC helps shape the length of the witness's answer, and thereby also its content. If the witness continues to speak while the CC produces a next question, then sustained overlapping talk will occur. This makes it less likely that the witness will press on with the turn.

In the above datum, the witness produces an extension of his turn-so-far in line 6, overlapping with the CC's next question. Thus, the witness can be seen to be treating his turn as "not yet completed." But after the production of that one bit of talk ("to-"), the witness drops out of the overlap, allowing the CC to proceed with his next question. (By producing that little bit of talk in the midst of the CC's next question, the witness can display that there was more of the answer yet to come.)

If the witness does not "contest" the move by the CC to produce a next question at some point of the witness's turn-so-far (for example, by speaking in overlap with the CC, pushing on with an answer turn), then the CC's proposal becomes fact, and the witness's answer is complete.[14] But this "questioner's technique" for shaping the answer of a witness is not always successful. Consider the following datum.

Segment 3.

```
 1     CC:    My question was I take it that includes: (0.5)
 2            thuh memoranda with the check mark
 3            (0.4)
 4            opposite (0.3) thee: line apro:ve.
 5            (1.4)
 6     W:     I- e:gh again I do not (.) ahh testify
 7            here nor do I believe I did so earlier (0.6)
 8            that I recall any specific check marks or
 9            initials
10            (0.4)
11            uhh admiral poindexter's habit was to ahh (.)
12            initial
13            (0.2)
14            thee aprove disapru- aprove box
15            (1.0)
16            ahhh acassionally I suppose it would've bin
17            check marked.
18            (.)
19            But I do not reca::ll (.) a specific document
20            coming back wi:th: (1.1) aye jay pee or: ah
21            (0.2) check mark or an are see em on this
22            particular issue.
23            (0.2)
24            nor did a- gain I wanna repeat (0.3) nor did I
25            e:ver see any with thuh president's initials
26            on it.
27 →         (0.5)
28 →   CC:    Well [that('s:)    ]        [(thuh) ]
29               [                ]        [        ]
30 →   W:           [>An it was] not< an [that's]not enti:rely
31            unu:sual
32            (.)
33            mister nields, (0.2) ahh on a number of other
34            activities I would simply be to:ld over the
35            telephone (.) proceed.
36            (0.6)
37            O:r in some cases I would send up messages
38            (0.6) ahh either in the prof system or ahh
39            (0.5) written (0.3) unless otherwise directed
40            I will proceed as follows.
41            (0.5)
42 →   CC:    Well that's thuh whole reason for sh::redding
43            documents isn't it colonel north?
44            ((continues turn))
```

At line 28 the CC attempts to produce a next question, thereby proposing that the witness's turn-so-far is a complete answer. Responding to this, the witness speeds up his talk and keeps the turn (lines 30-31).[15] Then, having succeeded in sustaining his turn as "not yet complete," the witness is able to add to his initial turn so far (lines 6-26), and deal with potential objections as they were "foreshadowed" by the CC's question initiation ("well that's thuh..."). As numerous researchers have shown, "well" is routinely used to initiate disagreeing or "dispreferred" turns (Sacks 1987; Pomerantz 1984a, 1984b; Davidson 1984, 1990). When the questioner in a Congressional hearing tries to produce a next question prefaced by "Well...," but fails, the witness is thereby provided a resource with which to improve the construction of the ongoing answer-turn in anticipation of possible objections.

<div align="center">Treating a "Turn-So-Far" as Incomplete</div>

A questioner in a Congressional hearing (or similar speech exchange system) can affect the shape or length of a witness's answer by a particular *action*, namely producing a next question at a particular point of the witness's turn so far. A questioner may also shape a witness's answer through *inaction*. In this case, the questioner shapes the answer by treating the witness's turn-so-far as incomplete. The questioner's technique for doing this is simple: at points of possible speaker transition, withhold the next question (see Sacks et al. 1974). Because the floor goes back to the CC after the witness answers a question (Halkowski 1990a), it is the CC's production of a next question which *makes evident* the completion of a prior turn as a complete answer. Consider the following example.

Segment 4.

1	CC:	<u>So</u> (1.3) <u>far</u> from telling you (0.5) to
2		s:top sending memoranda up (0.7) for the
3		president's approval (1.7) admiral poindexter
4		was specifically <u>asking</u> you
5		(.)
6		to send memoranda <u>up</u>(h)
7		(0.2)
8		for the president's approval.
9		(1.1)
10	W:	Well egh- (.) <u>again</u> in this particular case
11		that's <u>true</u> mister (.) nields an I don't
12		believe that I have <u>said</u> that admiral
13		poindexter told me to <u>stop</u>.
14		(2.7)
15 →		<u>Did</u> I?

16		(4.2)
17	Q_1 →CC:	Did- <u>where are</u> these memo<u>ran</u>da.
18		(1.9)
19	Q_2→W:	<u>Which</u> memoranda.=
20	A_2→CC:	=The memoranda that you
21		s:ent <u>up</u> (0.8) to admiral poindexter seeking
22		(0.2) thuh president's app<u>ro</u>val.
23		(1.6)
24	A_1→W:	W:ell (.) they're <u>prob</u>ably (in) these books
25		to my <u>left</u> that I haven't <u>looked</u> through yet
26		(.)
27		and I'm gonna- (.) >youknow if< I try to
28		g:<u>uess</u> I'm gonna be <u>wr::ong</u>
29		(0.9)
30		but I <u>think</u> I <u>shred</u>ded most of that.
31		(2.9)
32	→	Did I- did I get 'em <u>all</u>?
33		(.)
34		I- I'm not (.) trying to be <u>flip</u>pant I'm just-=
35		=((audience laughter/ 1.3 seconds))
36	→CC:	Well that was gonna be my very next question.
37		(0.7) colonel north (.) isn't it true that
38		you <u>shred</u>ded 'em.
39		(1.5)
40	W:	I- (.) I believe I <u>did</u>.

At lines 10-13, the witness has just produced what *might* be a complete answer. Schegloff reports on an "answerers' practice" whereby

> "extended" or multi-unit turn answers to questions…show that they are coming to an end by the reappearance in them of elements (e.g., words) from the question to which they are a response (1990, Note 10).

If a witness's turn-so-far comes to a stop at a "transition relevance place" (Sacks et al. 1974), and there is evidence of such "answer-completion marking" by the witness, then we can speak of an answer being possibly complete.

Note in this regard the phrase "telling you to stop" in the question by the CC (lines 1-2). Now consider the answer, particularly the phrase "told me to stop" (line 13). This marking, plus the extended silence of line 14, are evidence that the witness is proposing that the turn-so-far is a complete answer. This silence (2.7 seconds) is *generated* by both the witness not continuing his turn-so-far, and the CC not producing a next question (Sacks et al. 1974). In the turn taking organization for Congressional hearings, the CC asks questions,

and the witness produces answers, after which the turn goes back to the CC. Silence at a possible point of turn transfer is seeable as a "contest," wherein the CC and the witness are each waiting for the other to speak.

At line 15 the witness asks the CC a question, and in so doing, attempts to transfer the turn to the CC. However, the witness in a Congressional hearing does not have the right to issue questions, except to clarify a question asked of him or her (see Halkowski 1990a, and Schegloff 1972 on "insertion sequences"). At line 16, the 4.2 second silence is generated by the witness waiting for an answer to his question, and the CC withholding talk. Then, at line 17, the CC produces a next question, thereby treating the prior talk by the witness as a complete answer. Note as well that initially the CC's question looks as if it will explicitly deal with the witness's "inappropriate" question, but he cuts that question initiation off ("Did-"). After the CC's question in line 17, the witness asks an "appropriate" question (line 19), that is to say, an insertion sequence question. This insertion sequence question is answered (lines 20-22), and then the witness begins to answer the CC's question (line 24).

The witness has just been asked about the location of "these memoranda" (lines 17, and 20-22). In this answer turn (lines 24-30), the witness states "I think I shredded most of that" (line 30). Atkinson and Drew (1979) point out that in British tribunals, as in courtroom talk, lawyers can "mark" some bit of talk by the witness as especially important (for the jury and the judge), by pausing before asking the next question, helping to generate a long silence between an "admission" (for example) and a next question. If this utterance in line 30 can be characterized as an "admission" (an argument that can't be developed here, but see Halkowski 1990a, 1990b), then the CC may be doing such work in line 31.

The witness in this situation can attempt to thwart this marking of his prior answer component. Again, as in line 15, the witness issues a question to the CC. Note that this question (while it is not answered) serves the purpose of "filling" what may have otherwise been a long silence after a possibly damning admission. The witness's question in effect "absorbs" this silence. After the witness's question (line 32) there is a slight silence (again, generated by the witness pausing, and the CC electing not to speak), after which the witness characterizes his prior question (line 32) as not intended to be "flippant" (line 34). Following this, the audience laughs for 1.3 seconds, after which the CC issues his next question (lines 35-36).[16] Thus, the witness, by his question (line 32) and his disclaimer (line 34), is able to "pass the floor" to the audience (the audience laughter in line 35), and fill what otherwise could have been a long silence after his answer that he "shredded most of that." This work by the witness thwarts the effort of the CC to highlight the admission.

In the following segment, the CC is more successful in shaping the witness's answer, via treating the witness's turn-so-far as not yet complete.

Segment 5.

1	CC:	=An your recollection is that you:: (0.7)
2		re<u>ceive</u>d thee approval.
3		(1.8)
4	W:	My recollection is that ah- that thuh <u>three</u>
5		trans<u>ac</u>tions. (.) that I supervised, (.)
6		coordinated, managed, (0.2) were a<u>::ll</u>
7		approved.
8	→	(0.3)
9	→	BY admiral <u>poin</u>dexter.
10	→	(.)
11		I as<u>sumed</u> that admiral poindexter had
12		so<u>licited,</u> (0.2) <u>and</u> ob<u>tained.</u> (0.5) thuh
13		consent of thuh president.
14		(1.0)
15	→CC:	An you <u>shredded</u> documents ( ) there<u>after</u> ( )
16		re<u>lating</u> ( ) to this subject matter (.hh)
17		an I think you're <u>telling</u> us that you do <u>not</u>
18		remember ( ) w(hh)hether ( ) thuh
19		documents that you <u>sh:redded</u> in<u>cluded</u> one ( )
20		with a <u>check</u> mark on it.

In line 7 above, the witness uses the word "approved," which appeared in the prior question by the CC (line 2). This, plus the terminal intonation at line 7, marks the turn-so-far as a possibly complete answer. But the CC does not take the floor at line 8, so the witness's turn-so-far is treated as incomplete.

The witness produces a subsequent turn component, of a sort called a "recompletor" (line 9) because it retroactively treats an otherwise finished prior utterance as "actually unfinished" (Sacks et al. 1974). In this turn component the witness (Oliver North) implicates John Poindexter. This recompletor is also concluded with a terminal intonation, marking it as a possible complete answer turn. But this transition relevance place is also passed by the CC (line 10).

In the witness's third answer turn component he implicates the President (lines 11-13), and *then* the CC takes his next turn (line 15).[17] The CC, by his issuance of a question, treats the prior turn components as a completed answer turn.

In this example, the CC, by withholding a next question at two possible completion slots (lines 8 and 10), declines to treat the witness's turn so far as complete. This inaction constrains the witness, who has the floor until he can transfer speakership to the CC. Thus the witness adds on to his initial answer component until the CC treats his talk as a complete answer.

In the following section, I shall consider one last powerful example of the interactional generation of answer turns in a Congressional hearing.

Sequential Organization of an Extended Answer

We have seen that (and how) a questioner's actions can be co-constitutive of the witness's answer. By withholding speech the CC can help to create a longer answer than if the CC were to speak at the first possible completion point of the witness's talk. When answer turns are seen in this light, each transition relevance place within a witness's turn is a "node" at which point a questioner can either speak (thereby proposing that the turn-so-far is a complete answer) or continue to withhold speech (thereby proposing that the turn-so-far is not yet a complete answer). This organization provides the basis for an even more subtle interactional shaping of answers. Consider the following data.

Segment 6.

	CC:	=are you he:re telling thuh committee. (.hh) that y:ou don't remember. (.hh) Whether on November twenny first there was a document in your files reflecting presidential approval of the diversion.
t1→		(0.8)
	W:	As a matter of fact I'll tell you specifically
a1→		that I thought they were all go:ne.
t2→		(0.3)
		Because by thuh time I was to:ld
		(0.5)
		that some point early on November twenny first
		(0.3)
		that there would be an INquiry.
		Conducted by:: (.) mister meese,
		(0.6)
		I assured (0.3) admiral poindexter
		(0.2)
		incorrectly it- it see:ms,
a2→		that A::LL (.) of those documents no longer existed.
t3→		(0.2)
		and so that is EARly (0.3) on November twennyfirst, (0.2)
		because I believe the decision (0.3) to make an inquiry (.) to have thee attornally- attorney general
		(0.4)
		or mister meese in his ro:le as friend ta thuh

<pre>
                              president.
                              (0.3)
                              conduct a fact finding ex<u>cursion,</u>
                              on what happened in Sep<u>tember</u> an November in
                              nineteen eighty F:I:VE,
                              (0.6)
                              I assured the admiral,
                              (0.3)
a3→   don't worry, (0.4) its a:ll taken <u>care</u> of.
t4→   (0.2)
a4→   CC: You('d) all [<u>ready</u> shredde] d 'em.
                              ('ve)   [   ]
         W: [I thought   ]
                              (0.2)
         W: That's right. ((continues turn))
</pre>

The answer turn by the witness is *bounded* by two transition relevance places (hereafter referred to as "trps"), (t1 and t4), and *contains* two trps (t2 and t3). At the fourth trp the CC speaks, treating the prior utterances by the witness as a complete answer. Note that the second and third trps provide for an analytic division of the answer turn into three parts.

Each of these three parts of the answer ends with a reference to the document(s) asked about in the prior question: "a document in your files reflecting presidential approval of the diversion":

a1   I thought they were all gone.
a2   all of those documents no longer existed.
a3   its all taken care of.

If we recognize the transition relevance places in the answer turn as "nodes" at which the questioner has the opportunity to speak (doing work to constitute the turn-so-far as a complete answer) or not speak (thus working to constitute the turn-so-far as not yet finished), we can notice that after each reference to the "state of the talked-about documents" (**a1, a2, a3**), a trp occurs. These slots are "opportunity spaces" (Davidson 1984) where the questioner *could* begin to produce a next question, thereby proposing that the turn-so-far is hearably complete. As the questioner passes opportunities to speak, each successive reference to the state of the documents is "upgraded" in a particular fashion: the witness claims more knowledge about, and responsibility for, the missing document(s).

a1   I thought they were all <u>go:ne.</u>
a2   I <u>assured</u> (0.3) admiral poindexter
         (0.2)
         in<u>correctly</u> it- it see:ms,
         that A::LL (.) of those documents no longer
         existed.
a3   I assured the admiral,
         (0.3)
         don't worry, (0.4) its a:ll taken <u>care</u> of.

We have evidence of an interrogative procedure whereby the witness offers an initial answer component and then pauses, leaving a slot for the CC to respond by issuing a next question, thereby treating the turn-so-far as a complete answer. If there is no response, then the CC is treating the answer turn as incomplete. (This treatment by the CC puts interactional pressure on the witness, because until the CC responds, the witness is seeably and hearably in possession of the floor.) The witness produces *another* segment, upgrading his (or another's) "culpability" in this subsequent answer component, then leaves another slot for the CC to respond. At some point, the CC treats some *n*th answer component as having accomplished a complete answer, by speaking at the next trp (cf. Davidson 1984; Maynard 1984, pp. 94-98; Sacks and Schegloff 1979; and especially Schegloff 1988).[18]

Because the "facts" of the case cannot be empirically separated from the *way* they are expressed, as pointed out in the discussion of Alexander's analysis (above), this interactional shaping of the answer turn is partially constitutive of the content of answers in this setting. The facts are not so much "reported" in a witness's testimony as they are generated by witness—CC interaction.

CONCLUSION

Examining the interactional management of a witness's turn of talk reveals how social practices yield *substantive* changes in the ongoing turn of a witness. The very substance of an answer is partially constituted by the procedures the CC uses to extend or curtail the length of the witness's turn at talk. In this fundamental way witnesses' answers can be seen as interactionally generated *at their core,* in the *midst* of their production.

Answers in Congressional hearing talk, as they are transcribed, preserved, and used in written documents, are routinely treated as being the sole production of the witness. While such treatment may be ordinary and appropriate for members of the culture, social scientists need to recognize the empirically observable ways that answers are *interactionally* generated. As C. Wright Mills put it,

Rather than interpreting actions and language as external manifestations of subjective and deeper lying elements in individuals, the research task is the locating of particular types of action (1940, p. 912).

Two techniques that questioners in Congressional hearings use which help shape answers are: treating the turn-so-far as complete, thus closing off possible extensions or continuations by the witness; and treating the turn-so-far as incomplete, thus encouraging extensions or additions by the witness. These techniques can affect not simply the length of an answer, but also the very *substance* of an answer. If a witness attempts to introduce defensive material into his testimony the CC can do work to cut that off, (as in segments 2 and 3). Conversely, if the CC holds off on asking a next question, he may get the witness to upgrade admissions of self and other "culpability" (as in segments 5 and 6).

This analysis has some implications for social science research which makes use of interactional data. Congressional hearing testimony (like other interactional data) is routinely treated as either the "public" evidence of personal characteristics (e.g., Cohen and Mitchell's discussion of Oliver North as "a man of action" 1989, p. 159), or a screen on which is projected the battle of social forces (Alexander's contest over "moral legitimation," "definitional or ritual superiority, and dominance" 1989, p. 191). But a Congressional hearing is not a neutral conduit for the transmission (or transformation) of "mere facts"; rather, testimony is generated via the in situ sequential organization of interaction. This same interactional organization generates the "interview orthodoxy," the sense that witnesses are the solitary authors of their answers. Indeed, the accountable production of answers as a *witness's* answers simultaneously serves to help constitute this very social setting (Halkowski 1990a; Boden and Zimmerman 1991).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTES

1. This is not to suggest that all of this information is treated as credible by the committee (see Bogen and Lynch 1989).

2. See Goodwin (1979, 1981, 1984) and Volosinov (1973) for more on the interactive accomplishment of talk.

3. See also House Resolution 12, 100th congress, 1st session.

4. I.E., the "Watergate committee."

5. There are, however, a good many "lay" accounts of how particular Congressional hearings have operated, by both participants in the hearings (Cohen and Mitchell 1988; Dash 1976; Ervin 1980; Hellman 1976; Thompson 1975; Watkins 1969), as well as journalistic observers (Bentley 1971; Draper 1989; Drew 1975; Navasky 1980; Mayer and McManus 1988; Wills 1976).

6. Cf. Maynard (1980), and Marlaire (1990).

7. "But scandals are not objective; they are constructed by their socities" (Alexander 1987, p. 18). Here we see that curious Parsonian division between the factual order (society), and the normative order (morality) (cf. Hilbert 1986, 1991, 1992).

8. In journalistic accounts of "historically significant" Congressional hearings, there is a recurrent discussion of showdowns between questioners and witnesses (see Note 5). Given this condition as part of the routine way that members of the culture locate historic events, a sociological analysis of how participants "bring-off" a Congressional hearing as an interaction can be informative as to how such conflicts are produced, as well as how they can become preserved as "historically significant."

9. See Note 5 for examples of written work in which Congressional Hearing talk is used as a resource.

10. The pun in the title of this work, *Hearing Talk,* is purposeful, and I intend for this noun/ verb ambiguity to serve as a metaphor for the central research question of this paper. While one might think of Congressional hearings as a certain kind of *thing,* I shall draw attention to some of the interactive procedures and methods through which people *accomplish* this kind of event. See Giddens (1979, 1984), Schegloff (1987), and Boden and Zimmerman (1991) for further discussion of the empirical and theoretic bases for such a "respecification" of social context.

11. "Fully understand" is meant in a formal social scientific sense, as opposed to a "lay member's" understanding of the report's contents.

12. In the following data segments, CC = Committee Counsel (Arthur Liman and John Nields), W = Witness (Oliver North), CH = Chairperson (Senator Daniel Inouye), and CM = Committee members.

13. In the data segments, brackets indicate overlapping talk by two or more speakers. Inbreaths are indicated by (.h), exhalations by (h). Underlining is used to indicate emphasis. Capitalization is used to represent loudness. Punctuation is used to indicate intonation, with periods indicating falling intonation, commas indicating "continuing" intonation (i.e., slight rise), and question marks indicating rising intonation. Equal signs signs indicate utterances which are latched," or produced one immediately after the other. Colons indicate a sound stretch, and numbers in parentheses are timed silences. Lastly, an asterisk is used to mark talk that is produced softly and quietly. For a more complete list of transcription conventions, see Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

14. Note that the *intentions* of the witness are not at issue here. Whether or not the witness intends for the turn-so-far to stand as a complete answer, it is the next action of the CC that displays how the turn-so-far is taken. Later we shall see data that show how CC's can treat a turn-so-far as incomplete.

15. Schegloff (1981) has pointed out that speakers, upon approaching a "transition relevance place," can speed up their talk, so as to "rush-through" the trp, and thus keep the "floor."

16. Note that by characterizing his prior utterance as "not trying to be flippant," the witness provides a resource for the audience to *hear* it as flippant. That is, in pointing out that one did not intend for a remark to be taken as humorous, one is formulating that utterance as a "possibly humorous remark." We do not point out for all "non-flippant" statements we make that they are to be taken as not flippant; we do this only in cases where there is some ambiguity, where there is the possibility of hearing a remark as flippant. In this light, the witness can be seen as exploiting the ambiguity of his prior statement, by disowning the possible "flippant" hearing of his question, while simultaneously cueing the audience that a possibly humorous remark was made.

17.   See Segment 6 (below) for another example of how the CC can shape the actual trajectory of an answer turn.

18.   Cf. Davidson, 1984, pp. 126-127, Note 5:

> I am taking these ... phenomena as instances of perhaps a more general phenomenon: the producer of some kind of object, in not getting a desired response at an initial response point, may then do some sort of subsequent versions of or additions onto that object in pursuit of the desired response.

See also Jefferson 1978, and Jefferson et al. 1987. Note that Segment 5 above has a similar structure.

REFERENCES

Alexander, J. 1987. "Constructing Scandal." *The New Republic* 3: 777.

————. 1989. *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Atkinson, J. and P. Drew. 1979. *Order in Court: The Organization of Verbal Interaction in Judicial Settings.* Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.

Atkinson, J. and J. Heritage. 1984. *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bentley, E. 1971. *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts From Hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968.* New York: The Viking Press.

Boden, D. and D. Zimmerman (eds.). 1991. *Talk and Social Structure.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bogen, D. and M. Lynch. 1989. "Taking Account of the Hostile Native: Plausible Deniability and the Production of Conventional History in the Iran-Contra Hearings." *Social Problems* 36(3):197-224.

Button, G. 1987. "Answers as Interactional Products: Two Sequential Practices Used in Interviews." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50(2):160-171.

Cohen, Senator W.S. and Senator G.J. Mitchell. 1988. *Men of Zeal: A candid inside story of the Iran-Contra hearings.* New York: Viking Press.

Coulter, J. 1989. *Mind in Action.* Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc.

Dash, S. 1976. *Chief Counsel: Inside the Ervin Committee–The Untold Story of Watergate.* New York: Random House.

Davidson, J. 1984. "Subsequent Versions of Invitations, Offers, Requests & Proposals Dealing with Potential or Actual Rejection." Pp. 102-128 in *Structures of Social Action,* edited by J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

————. 1990. "Modifications of Invitations, offers, and rejections." Pp. 149-180 in *Interaction Competence,* edited by G. Psathas. Washington, DC: University Press of America.

Draper, T. 1989, January 19. "Rewriting the Iran-Contra Story." *The New York Review of Books,* pp. 38-45.

Drew, E. 1975. *Washington Journal.* New York: Random House.

Ervin Jr., Senator S. 1980. *The Whole Truth: The Watergate Conspiracy.* New York: Random House.

Garfinkel, H. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Giddens, A. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

————. 1984. *The Constitution of Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goodwin, C. 1979. "The Interactive Construction of a Sentence in Natural Conversation." Pp. 97-121 in *Everyday Language,* G. Psathas. New York: Irvington Press.

————. 1981. *Conversational Organization: Interaction between Speakers and Hearers.* New York: Academic Press.

_____. 1984. "Notes on Story Structure and the Organization of Participation." Pp. 225-246 in *Structures of Social Action,* edited by J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Halkowski, T. 1990a. *Hearing Talk: The Social Organization of a Congressional Inquiry.* Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

_____. 1990b. "'Role' as an Interactional Device." *Social Problems* 37 (4): 564-577.

Hellman, L. 1976. *Scoundrel Time.* Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.

Hilbert, R. 1986. "Anomie and the Moral Regulation of Reality: The Durkheimian Tradition in Modern Relief." *Sociological Theory* 4:1-19.

_____. 1991. "Society/Morality and Society/Reality: Garfinkel's Recovery of Durkheimian Equivalencies Suppressed by Parsons." Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Midwest Sociological Society. Des Moines, Iowa.

_____. 1992. *The Classical Roots of Ethnomethodology.* University of North Carolina Press.

Inouye, D. and L. Hamilton. 1988. *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair* (Abridged edition), edited by J. Brinkley and S. Engelberg. New York: Times Books.

Jefferson, G. 1978. "Sequential Aspects of Storytelling in Conversation." Pp. 219-248 in *Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction,* edited by J. Schenkein. New York: Academic.

Jefferson, G., H. Sacks, and E. Schegloff. 1987. "Notes on Laughter in the Pursuit of Intimacy." Pp. 152-205 in *Talk And Social Organization,* edited by G. Button & J. Lee. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

Marlaire, C. 1990. "On Questions, Communication, and Bias: Educational Testing as 'Invisible' Collaboration." Pp. 233-260 in *Perspectives on Social Problems* (Volume 2), edited by G. Miller and J.A. Holstein. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Mayer, J. and D. McManus. 1988. *Landslide: The Unmaking of the President, 1984-1988.* New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Maynard, D. 1984. *Inside Plea Bargaining: The Language of Negotiation.* New York: Plenum Press.

_____. 1990. "Bearing Bad News in Clinical Settings." In *Progress in Communication Sciences,* Volume 10, edited by B. Dervin. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Mellinger, W.M. 1990. "The Production of Organizational Records: The Complaint-taker's Construction of the 'Dispatch Package'." Unpublished paper, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Mills, C.W. 1940. "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive." *American Sociological Review* 5:904-913.

Molotch, H. and D. Boden. 1985. "Talking Social Structure: Discourse, Domination, and the Watergate Hearings." *American Sociological Review* 50:273-288.

Navasky, V. 1980. *Naming Names.* New York: Viking Press.

Pomerantz, A. 1984a. "Agreeing & Disagreeing with Assessments: Some Features of Preferred/Dispreferred Turn Shapes." Pp. 57-101 in *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis,* edited by J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1984b. "Pursuing a Response." Pp. 152-164 in *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis,* edited by J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

_____. 1990. *Interactional Competence.* New York: University of America Press.

Sacks, H. 1987. "On the Preference for Agreement and Contiguity." Pp. 54-69 in *Talk and Social Organization,* edited by G. Button and J. Lee. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

Sacks, H. and E. Schegloff. 1979. "Two Preferences in the Organization of Reference to Persons in Conversation and Their Interaction." Pp. 15-21 in *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology,* edited by G. Psathas. New York: Irvington Press.

Sacks, H., E. Schegloff, and G. Jefferson. 1974. "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation." *Language* 50:696-735.

Schegloff, E. 1972. "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place." Pp. 75-119 in *Studies in Social Interaction,* edited by D. Sudnow. New York: The Free Press.

_____. 1981. "Discourse as an Interactional Achievement: Some Uses of 'uh huh' and Other Things that Come between Sentences." Pp. 71-93 in *Georgetown University Roundtable on Language and Linguistics,* edited by D. Tannen. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

_____. 1987. "Between Macro and Micro: Contexts and Other Connections." Pp. 207-236 in *The Micro-Macro Link,* edited by J. Alexander et al. Berkeley: University of California Press.

_____. 1988. "On an Actual Virtual Servo-Mechanism for Guessing Bad News: A Single Case Conjecture." *Social Problems* 35 (4): 442-457.

_____. 1990. "On the Organization of Sequences as a Source of 'Coherence' in Talk-in-Interaction." In *Conversational Organization and Its Development,* edited by B. Dorval. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Smith, D. 1974. "The Social Construction of Documentary Reality." *Sociological Inquiry* 44 (4): 257-267.

Thompson, F.D. 1975. *At that Point in Time.* New York: Quadrangle Press.

Volosinov, V.N. 1973. *Marxism and The Philosophy of Language.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Watkins, Senator A. 1969. *Enough Rope: The Inside Story of the Censure of Senator Joseph McCarthy by His Colleagues.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Wills, G. 1976. "Introduction." Pp. 3-34 *in Scoundrel Time,* L. Hellman. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.

Wilson, T.P. 1991. "Social Structure and the Sequential Organization of Interaction." In *Talk and Social Structure,* edited by D. Boden and D. Zimmerman. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Zimmerman, D.H. 1974. "Fact as a Practical Accomplishment." Pp. 128-143 in *Ethnomethodology: Selected Readings,* edited by R. Turner. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

_____. 1988. "On Conversation: The Conversation Analytic Perspective." *Communication Yearbook 11,* pp. 406-432.

Zimmerman, D.H. and M. Pollner. 1970. "The Everyday World as Phenomenon." Pp. 80-103 in *Understanding Everyday Life,* edited by J. Douglas. Chicago: Aldine.

Zimmerman, D.H. and D.L. Wieder. 1970. "Ethnomethodology and the Problem of Order: Comment on Denzin." Pp. 285-295 in *Understanding Everyday Life,* edited by J. Douglas. Chicago: Aldine.