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'Mind the Gap': Further Resources in the Production of Multi-unit, Multi-action Turns*

John Local & Gareth Walker

Department of Language and Linguistic Science
University of York

Abstract

Techniques of sequential and phonetic analysis are brought to bear on two sequences of everyday conversation which extend understanding of a previously described practice (the 'abrupt-join'). The findings also provide directions for future analysis.

1 Introduction

In a recent article we documented what we dubbed the *abrupt-join*: a practice for continuing a turn past a point of possible completion (Local and Walker 2004). In that article we showed that the abrupt-join handles a more specific kind of work than straightforward turn-continuation: the abrupt-join was also shown to be a practice which allows a speaker to simultaneously (i) preempt the action made relevant by the talk leading up to the abrupt-join (e.g. preempting more on-topic talk, or a new topic/sequence start-up, by a co-participant), and (ii) change the sequential trajectory of the talk-so-far with the post-join talk. Fragment 1 provides an exemplar of the practice; the site of the abrupt-join is indicated by the ▶ symbol.¹

^{*}Thanks to Leendert Plug for comments on an earlier version of this article. Correspondence: lang4@york.ac.uk (Local); gw115@york.ac.uk (Walker).

¹An extended, turn-by-turn account of this instance was presented in Local and Walker (2004: 1377–1380), hence the brief description afforded to the particulars of this fragment here. Transcriptions are presented in modified orthography adopting the conventions described in Local and Walker (2004: 1400–01).

(1) Heritage.I.18-122s

```
Ile:
              [well anyway that's up to you when you come .hh uh:: uh we'll put
 1
 2
              a key under under the mat
 3
      Jan:
              a:lright then
 4
              (0.4)
 5
      Jan:
              [okay ]en ah- I'll have a (.) good
 6
      Ile:
 7
      Jan:
              look tonight for the for the other key I'm sure it's
 8
              on[e of
 9
      Ile:
                [uh- oh- cuh Edgerton says you've got it
10
              you've got o[ne (yes)
                           [in one of the handbags I'm sure I've got one but
11
      Jan:
12
              [I ca:]n't look for it now=
13
      Ile:
              [ye::s]
              =[no:]
14
      Ile:
15
      Jan:
              =[huh .hu]hh
16
      Ile:
              o[kay
               [I've got to run
17
      Jan:
18
              (.)
19
      Ile:
              alright
              .hh okay▶how're you feeling
20
      Jan:
      Ile:
              oh I feel fine
21
22
              (1.0)
23
      Ile
              absolutely fine
```

Having made arrangements for Jane to let herself into Ilene's house while she (Ilene) is out — by using a key which Ilene will place under the mat — the call appears to be heading towards closing at line 20: Jane's "okay" 'projects no further talk, aligns with the production of the ongoing closing sequence, and makes relevant the production of a first terminal component [e.g. "bye"; see Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Button 1990] from Ilene' (Local and Walker 2004: 1379). However, rather than yield her turn and allow for the production of this — or indeed any other — talk from Ilene, Jane proceeds immediately into a solicitous enquiry ("how're you feeling", line 20) which 'drastically shifts the course of the on-going talk and accomplishes another move out of closing which Jane orients to by producing an appropriately fitted, if somewhat restrained second pair part response' (Local and Walker 2004: 1379). The point of contact of the two turn construction units (i.e. of "okay" and "how are you feeling") is the site of the abrupt-join.

As part of our analytic account, we documented the phonetic design features of abruptjoins, which include

- 'turn final' pitch characteristics of the talk preceding the abrupt-join;
- an audible step-up in pitch and loudness from the last syllable of the talk preceding the abrupt-join to the first stressed syllable of the talk following the abrupt-join;
- a noticeable, highly localised speeding up on the last syllable of the talk preceding the abrupt-join, this speeding up not being maintained into the talk which follows;

- an absence of glottal or supra-glottal 'cut-off' at the end of the final temporally compressed syllable;
- the production of post-join talk in particularly close temporal proximity to the pre-join talk without any kind of 'gap' in which a co-participant might start up talk, this close temporal proximity manifesting itself through the encroachment of phonetic properties of post-join talk on pre-join talk, and/or the maintenance of voicing across the join between the two units.

Each of these key features can be observed in the talk at line 20 of Fragment 1. For instance, we notice

- a step-up in pitch from the stressed first syllable of "okay" to the first stressed syllable of the next unit ("how"), the step-up measuring 8.9 semitones (ST);
- increased loudness maintained throughout "how";
- the production of "kay" at a dramatically faster rate than Jane's preceding claim that she is in a rush ("I've got to run", line 17), which measures 5.8 syll/sec, as opposed to 16 syll/sec for her "kay"; her following 'how are you feeling' is noticeably slower than her temporally compressed second syllable of "okay";
- close temporal proximity of the compressed syllable and the post-join talk, manifesting itself through the encroachment of glottal friction from the beginning of "how" into the production of the final vowel portion of "okay".

In this short article we focus on two sequences (presented as Fragments 2 and 3 below), each of which contain turns built in such ways that they resemble turns built with 'canonical' abrupt-joins in certain important respects. There are similarities between the cases we discuss here and those built with 'canonical' abrupt-joins in terms of

- sequential distribution (i.e. they are deployed at topic/sequence boundaries);
- turn construction (i.e. there is a grammatically/pragmatically complete unit on either side of the join, and the talk following the join solicits talk on the new topic from the co-participant); and
- phonetic design (including, but not limited to, temporal compression of unit-final syllables leading up to the join, step-ups in pitch, and step-ups in loudness).

However, the cases which we discuss here differ from the 'canonical' abrupt-joins with respect to certain features of phonetic design (i.e. the presence of dramatic pre-join 'reduction/deletion' in the target turn of Fragment 2, and the occurrence of an inbreath between one turn component and the next in Fragment 3). The variation in phonetic design which we observe has implications for future research and suggests certain directions which that research might usefully take; some of these issues are outlined in Section 3.

2 Analysis

Transcriptions of the two sequences which we will focus on are presented as Fragments 2 and 3. Fragment 2 is taken from the start of a telephone call between Tony and Marsha (the separated parents of Joey) concerning Joey's recent arrival at Tony's home; Fragment 3 is taken from the start of a telephone call made by Gordon to Ken, which involves discussion of arrangements for events to take place later that day. The turns in which the joins of particular interest occur are indicated by arrows in the margin.

(2) MTRAC.60.1.3-3s

```
((telephone rings; receiver lifted))
              hello
 1
      Mar:
              hi Marsha
 2
      Ton:
 3
      Mar:
 4
      Ton:
              Joe got here I just wanted to let you know he uh
 5
              [(
              [oh thank you for calling
 6
      Mar:
 7
              he stepped out of the house longer (than) - I thought he was gonna
      Ton:
 8
              be back in and I would remind him to call but uh apparently he
 9
              was going with Ilene to the movies or something like that I
10
              didn't check (with him)
              ih huh huh .hhhhhh she call(s/ed) him every night
11
      Mar:
12
              (0.6)
              (.)
13
14
      Ton:
              huh
              she call(s/ed) him every ni:ght
15
      Mar:
16
      Ton:
              (oh) really
17
              (0.3)
18
      Mar:
              and he was out evry night
19
              ((0.4s in which Marsha laughs quietly))
20
              tha:t's uh (0.9) they're really quite a nice couple
      Ton:
21
              that's what everybody says I haven't met her but I .hhh I guess
      Mar:
22
              I- I will
23
      Ton:
              yeah probably you will
24
              .hhh ah that's so nice of you to call Tony I appreciate it what
      Mar:
25
              time did he get on the plane
26
      Ton:
              uh::: (0.2) I don't know exactly I think it was around three
27
              o'clock or something of that sort
```

(3) Holt.SO88.1.9-12s

```
((telephone rings; receiver lifted))
    1
                  north cadbury four three seven eight two=
         Ken:
    2
          Gor:
                  =.p hello Ken
    3
         Ken:
                  hello
    4
         Gor:
                  !pt .hhhh eh:m (.) I just phoned to find out what's happening
    5
                  about tonight hh .hhh[hhh
    6
         Ken:
                                        [I haven't got a clue
 Ι
    7
         Gor:
                  .hh wu- what time you going over hh .hhhhh=
                  (0.2)
\Pi
    9
                  w-well to get there at seven so I'll probably leave here about
         Ken:
II 10
                  (0.3) six thir[ty
III 11
         Gor:
                                 [six thirty so quite early really
   12
         Ken:
                  yes
```

```
13
      Gor:
              .hh[hhhh
14
      Ken:
                 [yes
15
      Gor:
              hn: so I'll have to hhhh .hh eat before then .hh you're not-
              (0.3) I don't suppose going into Yeovil .hhhh u:m (0.4) !pt (0.6)
16
17
              (0.4)
18
              as a matter of fact: I- (0.5) just said to Mum I think I will go
19
      Ken:
20
              into Yeo[vil this afternoon cos I've g]ot nothing=
21
      Gor:
                       [.h h h h h h h h h h h h h ]
22
      Ken:
              =be[tter to[do
```

In Fragment 2, following Tony's account of Joey's arrival and his current whereabouts in the talk transcribed at lines 4 to 10, talk turns to Joey's blossoming relationship with Ilene. Marsha announces that although she has not yet met Ilene, she expects to ("I haven't met her but I .hhh I guess I- I will", lines 21 to 22); Tony responds with an agreeing "yeah probably you will" (line 23). At the conclusion of Tony's agreement, Marsha produces talk on a new topic by offering an appreciation of Tony having called: "ah that's so nice of you to call Tony I appreciate it" (line 24). On approaching a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion towards the end of this talk, rather than relinquishing the turn she continues into more talk on another new topic: "what time did he get on the plane" (lines 24 to 25). There would seem to be good reasons why Marsha might elect to continue her talk at this point. One reason Marsha might choose to continue talk concerns the issues of what might consitute the next topic, and who will initiate it: by continuing into more talk without delay, Marsha secures for herself the space in which to initiate next topic, by way of her solicitous enquiry concerning the timing of Joey's arrival ("what time did he get on the plane").²

In summary, Marsha's target turn is composed of two discrete grammatical units (one on each side of the join), the talk leading up to the join is on one topic while the talk which follows is on another, and the unit after the join launches a new topic, by way of a WH-interrogative (a construction shown to be prevalent following abrupt-joins in our original data-set). Each of these features can be observed in the turns built with 'canonical' abrupt-joins which we have previously described.

Similarly, the target turn of Fragment 3 shows marked resemblances with the turns built with 'canonical' abrupt-joins. Beginning at line 7 is what can be considered a three-part enquiry sequence. Part I (labelled 'I') consists of the first pair part enquiry as

²A further reason for the continuation of talk at this point might relate to potential difficulties in securing a response to it. The talk leading up to the point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion (i.e. "ah that's so nice of you to call Tony") is a redoing of an earlier appreciation ("oh thank you for calling", line 6) which — rather than receiving any kind of overt acceptance from Tony — is followed by an account from Tony of why Joey has failed to call Marsha. That this appreciation was not overtly receipted by Tony adumbrates the possibility that the reissued appreciation will also fail to secure overt receipt. By moving without delay into further talk following the appreciation, Marsha avoids the occurrence of any kind of gap in which a response from Tony might be noticeably absent (cf. Schegloff 1995).

to when Ken intends "going over" that night; part II (labelled "II") is Ken's response; and part III (labelled "III") is Gordon's receipt of Ken's response (by repetition) and associated 'mulling over'. This [acceptance]+[mulling over] from Gordon, along with both participants' withholding of extended talk (lines 12 to 14) suggests that some sequence/topic might have been talked to completion, attendant on it being the possibility of moving on to some new topic/sequence (cf. the possibility of moving on after the first turn component in Fragment 1). Gordon continues talk on those plans momentarily with his rumination "hn: so I'll have to hhhh .hh eat before then .hh" (line 15), and following this point of syntactic and pragmatic completion — at which either speaker might legitimately start up talk on a new topic — Gordon continues into talk which is topically disjunctive from the prior talk about that evening's arrangements, with an enquiry about Ken's intentions for that afternoon (lines 15 to 17). Gordon's turn at lines 15 to 17 is much like that of the target turns in Fragments 1 and 2 (and the turns built with 'canonical' abrupt-joins presented in Local and Walker 2004) in that a unit of talk approaches possible syntactic and pragmatic completion, with the talk following the join soliciting talk on the new topic/sequence.

With regard to features of phonetic design, the target turns of Fragments 2 and 3 exhibit a number of striking characteristics around the joins between the pairs of units (i.e. joining "I appreciate it" and "what time did he get on the plane" in Fragment 2, and between "so I'll have to hhhh.hh eat before then" and "you're not..." in Fragment 3) which are consonant with the characteristics of 'canonical' abrupt-joins. For instance, in both cases we find

- 'turn-final' pitch characteristics of the talk preceding the join;
- an audible step-up in pitch and loudness from the last syllable of the talk preceding the join to the first stressed syllable of the talk following the join;
- a noticeable, highly localised speeding up towards the end of the talk preceding the join.

In Fragment 2 we can observe a fall in pitch from 359 Hz to 235 Hz (7.4 ST) over "preciate it"; following this local minimum there is noticeable rising pitch (to 375 HZ: a rise of 8.1 ST) which reaches its maximum in the vocalic portion of "what"; there is a comparable maximum on the following word "time". These auditorily observable features are represented in the F_0 trace (the dotted line) in the upper part of Figure 1.³ There is also an abrupt drop-off in loudness over the last 25% of "iate it" (coincident with an audible lip closing gesture which serves as the phonetic exponent of the "it" syllable),

 $^{^{3}}$ The left hand y axis is scaled to indicate the lower and upper limits of the speaker's pitch range, as established on the basis of a representative sample of conversational speech; it is also presented logarithmically to take into account the non-linear percept of pitch.

followed by a noticeable step-up in loudness onto "what" (reaching its maximum towards the end of the initial labial-velar approximation). These auditorily observable features are reflected in the intensity trace (the solid line) shown in the upper part of Figure 1. Close temporal proximity of the post-join talk with the pre-join talk manifests itself through the continuation of voicing from just after the medial fricative $[\int]$ of "appreciate" up to the end of "what" Again, Figure 1 provides corroborative acoustic evidence for these claims: the waveform shows continued periodicity through this portion, while the F_0 tracker continues to find voiced frames.

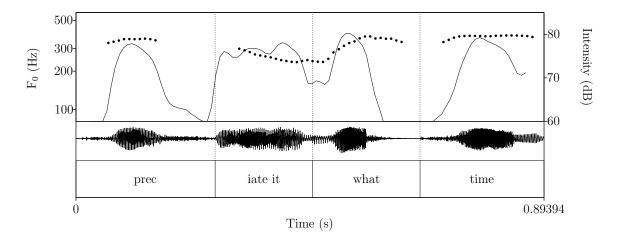


Figure 1: Labelled speech-pressure waveform, F_0 trace (dotted line), and intensity trace (solid line), of part of lines 24 to 25 of Fragment 2

Similarly, in Fragment 3 the end of the pre-join talk ("...eat before then") shows an F₀ peak on "then" of 126 Hz, which falls to low in the speaker's range. The following stressed "not" has a high-point of 220 Hz: a step-up of 9.6 ST from the final pre-join stressed syllable. Also, a decrease in loudness is evident over the pre-join "eat before then", which is followed by an increase in loudness on the following "you're", this increase being maintained on "not". The final stressed "then" is produced at a greater rate of articulation than the talk which precedes it: stressed syllables up to that point have a mean rate of 4.8 syll/sec; "then", however, is produced at a rate of 7.4 syll/sec.

Despite the similarities between the joins in the target turns of Fragments 2 and 3 and the 'canonical' abrupt-joins, there are also striking differences (one in each case) which set these cases apart from those cases, and warranted our not including them in original core data-set. The differences are the nature and extent of 'reduction/deletion' in the case of Fragment 2, and the presence of an inbreath intervening between the two units in Fragment 3.

In Fragment 2 "...iate it" is realised as a vocalic portion, with rounding towards its end, along with retraction of the tongue body (these last two characteristics presumably the result of anticipating the following "what", therefore projecting the production

of more talk); the articulatory characteristics can be rendered in IPA conventions as [euw].⁴ Although the putative 'reduction/deletion' which we observe in this case was not present to the same degree in the abrupt-joins previously described, the function of the 'reduction/deletion' in this case seems to be the same as that of the temporal compression in our original corpus. That is, the 'reduction/deletion' gives the sense of talk being speeded up as the production of "preciate it" takes less time than might be expected. Furthermore, and as with the temporal compression observed previously, this 'reduction/deletion' would seem to make it very difficult for a co-participant to locate a point at which their talk can be legitimately begun; likewise, the maintenance of voicing across the join works to close the gap in which a co-participant might begin their talk.

At this point in our investigations the nature of the relationship between cases which exhibit this degree of 'reduction/deletion' and our 'canonical' abrupt-joins is not obvious. It may be that the join in the target turn of Fragment 2 is an extreme case of the abrupt-join, beyond which talk towards the end of a turn constructional unit is either elided completely, or else is used as both the end of one unit and the beginning of another.⁵ However, those kinds of TCU-final resources may turn out to have rather different uses in interaction from the 'reduction/deletion' we observe in the target turn of Fragment 2, and from the temporal compression we observe in 'canonical' abrupt-joins.

In the target turn of Fragment 3 an inbreath occurs between the two components (i.e. between "so I'll have to eat before then" and "you're not...") which is not something which occurs in our corpus of 'canonical' abrupt-joins. However, this inbreath has a number of salient phonetic design features which make it unlike other inbreaths in talk-in-interaction.⁶ First, the inbreath is produced in particularly close temporal proximity to both what precedes it and what follows it (see the labelled waveform in Figure 2). The switch from egressive airflow (for voicing associated with "then") to ingressive airflow for the inbreath is very rapid; likewise, the shift from ingressive airflow to egressive (for the post-join "you're") is very rapid. Second, the inbreath is noticeably loud and accomplished with a markedly sudden intake of air (cf. the inbreath which occurs later in the turn) — the inbreath can be loosely described as 'abrupt' or 'emphatic'.⁷ Third, although glottal stops occur around the beginnings and ends of inbreaths (see e.g. Local

⁴A citation form of this part of 'appreciate it' might be something like [eit^hrt^h].

⁵Consider the following, taken from Schegloff (1979: 275):

⁽⁽A has had a claim of hers called an exaggeration))

A: DON'T SAY that I'm exa-just say that I'm a liar.

Both elision (of [əɹeɪtʰ], or similar) and the deployment of phonetic resources (i.e. the production of [ʤ], or similar) in such a way that they form both part of what preceded and what follows seem to be at work

⁶Readers with access to the audio recording of this interaction are encouraged to compare its design with that of Gordon's inbreath transcribed in line 16 of Fragment 3.

⁷Drew and Holt (1998: 507–08) make a similar observation, noting that such 'emphatic inbreaths' are 'characteristic of a disjunctive next move'.

and Kelly 1986) they don't occur in this case.

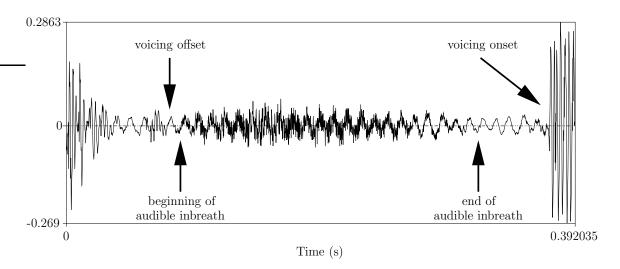


Figure 2: Speech-pressure waveform of the inbreath in line 15 of Fragment 3 and its joins with preceding and following talk.

It would seem that the combination of temporal compression of the final syllable ("then") and the proximity of the inbreath to the surrounding talk both work to 'close the gap' in which Ken can begin his talk. As in the 'canonical' abrupt-joins, one function of the step-ups in pitch and loudness on the talk following the join seems to be the marking out of the talk on which it occurs as something 'new', and set apart from the talk leading up to the first point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion (cf. Couper-Kuhlen 2003).

In summary, we have shown two cases where turns are built such that they share certain key characteristics with turns built with an abrupt-join, those characteristics including aspects of sequential distribution, turn construction, and phonetic design. In addition, the joins (like 'canonical' abrupt-joins) seem to be designed to abrogate the possibility that a co-participant might start up talk by 'closing the gap' between the two units through temporal compression and close temporal proximity of the second unit to the first. The joins between the two units of talk have been shown to be similar to the 'canonical' abrupt-joins in terms of features of phonetic design, but with important differences in each case (i.e. the dramatic 'reduction/deletion' in the target turn of Fragment 2, and the presence of an inbreath intervening between the two units in Fragment 3).⁸

⁸However, those differences (i.e. between the joins in the target turns of Fragments 2 and 3, and the 'canonical' abrupt-joins) are perhaps not as absolute as they might seem: the dramatic 'reduction/deletion' in Fragments 2 may be one technique for speeding up, while the inbreath in Fragments 3 has a particular 'abrupt' quality.

3 Implications and future directions

We have, we hope, provided some orientation for future work on the resources and practices which speakers have available to them in order to build a turn at talk past a point of possible pragmatic and syntactic completion, through exemplification and preliminary examination. There are also certain theoretical and methodological implications of what we have shown.

First, in considering Fragments 1 to 3, can we observe a 'many-to-one' mapping, such that there are three phonetic realisations of a single practice (i.e. the abrupt-join)? Such issues would presumably be of central importance to the establishing of some kind of formal 'phonology for conversation'. Given that the joins we have been concerned with in Fragments 2 and 3 appear to have the same sequential distribution and interactional function as the abrupt-joins ultimately we might be forced to consider them to be different forms of a single more abstract object. We leave this for future work. For now, we recognise the similarities and attendant on that, the possibility that there are practices related — to some extent — to the abrupt-join; there are almost certainly others (e.g. 'rushthroughs'; see Schegloff 1982 and the discussion in Local and Walker 2004).

Second, we have shown one of the uses of 'reduction/deletion' in interaction, through the application of participant-driven analytic techniques. It seems clear from the target turn of Fragment 2 that 'reduction/deletion' is something which can be invoked late in a turn to affect turn continuation. It seems to us that searching for the interactional function of phenomena such as 'reduction/deletion', in situations where those phenemona are deployed by interactants in order to achieve their own interactional ends, should be considered a desideratum for contemporary linguistic phonetic research. For us, observing and/or quantifying over certain kinds of 'reduction/deletion' effects in spontaneous speech without attempting to relate them to their function(s) in interaction necessarily only gives a partial account of those effects.

Third, we suggest that the phonetic characteristics of inbreaths could profitably be inspected more carefully for their role in interaction. We also suggest — on the basis of the phonetic design of the inbreath in Fragment 3, and other inbreaths which we have encountered — that we might entertain the possibility that the different phonetic designs of breathing which are apparent in talk-in-interaction might be ordered with reference to interactional exigencies and structures.

⁹Schegloff (1996) has for instance pointed to the possibility that 'a hearable "deep" inbreath at the pre-beginning of a turn or a TCU can foreshadow an "extended" spate of talk to come' (Schegloff 1996: 105).

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