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## **On the design and use of pivots in everyday English conversation**

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### **Abstract**

In everyday English conversation, talk can be produced such that it is simultaneously a grammatical ending of what precedes it, and a beginning of what follows (e.g. “that’s *what I’d like to have* is a fresh one”). A range of features of phonetic design (including pitch, loudness, duration, and articulatory characteristics) are shown to be deployed in systematic ways in order to handle the dual tasks of avoiding the signalling of transition relevance at the end of the pivot, and marking out the fittedness of the pivot to both what precedes and what follows. Turns built with pivots are found to be most often engaged in assessing, enquiring, or reporting, though their more general application as a practice for the continuation of a turn past a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion is emphasised.

### **Keywords**

phonetics; grammar; syntax; conversation; turn continuation

### **Biographical note**

Gareth Walker is Research Associate in the Department of Language and Linguistic Science at the University of York (UK). His main research interests are auditory and acoustic phonetics, Conversation Analysis, and the interface between these modes of enquiry. Recent research topics have included turn beginnings and endings, and a variety of practices for continuing a turn past a point of possible completion.

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# On the design and use of pivots in everyday English conversation

## 1 Prologue

It is well known that certain features of phonetic design, grammar, and action regularly coincide at points in conversation where speakership can change from one interlocutor to another (see e.g. Ford & Thompson 1996; Local, Kelly, & Wells 1986; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1996; Wells & Macfarlane 1998; Wells & Peppé 1996). An example is shown in Fragment 1.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Holt.U88.1.6-17s  
1 Gor: do you want to come up  
2 Jan: I'd like to come up yeah

It is the coincidence of features of phonetic design, grammar, and action which mark out Gordon's talk at line 1 as possibly complete and transition relevant. For instance, his talk ends with a large fall in pitch on "up" which terminates low in his pitch range, and there is a clearly audible release of his bilabial closure at the end of "up", which is also characteristic of treated-as-complete turns at talk (Local et al. 1986; Walker 2004b).<sup>2</sup> His talk ends at a point of grammatical completion: "do you want to come up" is a complete sentence. "Do you want to come up" also implements a complete action: an enquiry, request, or invitation (or some combination of these). That Gordon's talk is possibly complete and ends at a point of transition relevance is evidenced by Jane starting up her response ("I'd like to come up") without delay after Gordon has finished speaking.

The production of more talk by a current speaker following a point of possible completion typically requires some kind of work (Schegloff 1987a: 104; see also Local & Walker 2004). Through careful analysis of naturally occurring interaction we are beginning to understand more fully some of the ways in which linguistic resources can be used to continue talk past a point of possible completion, and some of the specialized pragmatic uses to which these practices are put (see e.g. Auer 1996; Local & Walker 2004; Walker 2004a). This paper describes certain design features and interactional uses of a practice for continuing talk past a point of projectable completion in English conversation which is yet to receive sustained conversation-analytic attention (see Norén 2003 and Scheutz 2005 for accounts of related phenomena in Swedish and German respectively). In that the practice described here provides for the smooth and immediate continuation of talk, it contrasts with previously described practices where the relationship between one unit and the next may be characterized as disjunctive in some way. For instance, Local & Walker (2004) document the *abrupt-join*: a practice for building a particular kind of multi-unit, multi-action turn involving, among other phonetic characteristics, a disjunctive step-up in pitch and loudness from one unit to the next. A number of other studies deal with *increments*: grammatically fitted continuations of a turn-constructive unit (TCU; see Schegloff 1996) which may occur following a period of silence (Auer 1996; Ford, Fox, & Thompson 2002a; Schegloff 1996, 2000; Walker 2004a).

## 2 An initial sketch of the practice

There are occasions in talk-in-interaction where some piece of talk is produced such that it can be interpreted not only as a possible end of one grammatical unit (e.g. phrase, clause, sentence), but also as a possible beginning of a next unit. Examples are shown in Fragments 2 to 4; the talk which can be interpreted as both a possible grammatical ending and a possible grammatical beginning—the *pivot* (Schegloff 1979: 275–6; see also Sacks 1992: 146 and Kitzinger 2000: 186)—is presented in bold.<sup>3</sup>

- (2) NB.IV.3-185s; PIV005

((talk has been about colours of dresses which Lottie and Emma have seen on a recent shopping trip))  
 1 Lot: [any ]  
 2 --> Emm: [but I]('d) l:ove **the bone** was so:: beautif eh the pink  
 3 was exquisite

(3) NB.IV.4-718s; PIV014

((talk has been about buying a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner))  
 1 Lot: so I went down there and got a- (.) Rancho a fresh one  
 2 (0.6)  
 3 --> Emm: oh that's **what I'd like to have** is a fresh one

(4) Frankel.T.C.1.1-422s; PIV006

((talk has been about the terminal illness of an acquaintance's mother))  
 1 Ger: well  
 2 (0.3)  
 3 --> Shi: (yeah I have to-) anyway it's a hunk of **shit** goes on I  
 4 don't have to tell you

In Fragment 2 “the bone” (the pivot) can be understood as the end of one unit (“I('d) l:ove the bone”) and the beginning of another (“the bone was so:: beautiful”): “the bone” has what might be considered *leftwards interpretation*, i.e. it is part of what preceded it, and simultaneous *rightwards interpretation*, i.e. it can be parsed as part of what follows it. It is convenient to divide turns built with pivots as comprising (minimally) a *pre-pivot*, a *pivot*, and a *post-pivot*.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Fragment 2, the pre-pivot is “I('d) l:ove”, the pivot is “the bone”, and the post-pivot is “was so:: beautif(ul)”; in Fragment 3 the pre-pivot is “oh that’s”, the pivot is “what I’d like to have”, and the post-pivot is “is a fresh one”; in Fragment 4 the pre-pivot is “it’s a hunk of”, the pivot is “shit”, and the post-pivot is “goes on”.

Taking as a starting point the outcomes of the limited previous work on pivots in English talk-in-interaction (Schegloff 1979: 275–6; Sacks 1992: 146; Kitzinger 2000: 186; in addition, Lambrecht 1988 provides an account of some of the formal grammatical properties of related phenomena), the following research questions are addressed in what follows: (1) what are the phonetic design features associated with pivots and the turns which they are used to build? This question breaks down into two further questions: (a) how is the signaling of transition relevance avoided at their ends? (b) which features of phonetic design are implicated in signaling the fittedness of each component of turns built with pivots (i.e. the fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot, and of the post-pivot to the pivot)? (2) do pivots have a recurrent function and/or sequential distribution in conversation, aside from their facilitating the continuation of talk past a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion?

This paper forms part of a larger, ongoing attempt to document the linguistic competencies displayed by ordinary people while engaged in ordinary conversation (see e.g. the papers in Couper-Kuhlen 2004; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996; Ford, Fox, & Thompson 2002b). The paper has the following structure: section 3 describes the data-set for this study, and the methodology which was employed; section 4 outlines some of the most prominent features of phonetic design; section 5 describes and exemplifies three characteristic turn-types in which the practice is deployed; section 6 provides a summary of the paper and sets out some of its main implications for future analytic work, including the insights it provides into the online processing of discourse by participants aiming to fulfill their own social-interactional needs.

### 3 Data and methods

In order to give as coherent a sense of pivots as is practicable in one paper, the descriptions of phonetic design and pragmatic uses of pivots are illustrated through the discussion of a small number of instances. However, the analysis is constructed on the basis of a larger data-set of 33

instances, drawn from audio recordings of approximately 11 hours of everyday telephone conversations involving friends and family members, and recorded in Britain and North America.

It is convenient to divide the analytic approach taken into two strands: one which deals with interactional aspects of the talk, and another which deals with its phonetic design (for an overview of principles and procedures, see Local and Walker 2005).<sup>5</sup> Analysis of interactional aspects of the talk follows the principles of Conversation Analysis (CA; for an overview, see Drew 2004 and references therein; see also Goodwin & Heritage 1990; Levinson 1983). Analysis of phonetic design is carried out in a parametric fashion (Abercrombie 1964; Kelly & Local 1989a) employing impressionistic acoustic and auditory phonetic techniques.<sup>6</sup> In the sections which follow the analysis of aspects of the phonetic design of the practice will be provided before the analysis of the uses of the practice in interaction. The reason for this is that in this case, the phonetic design is a criterial feature of the practice. That is, pivots are identified—in part—by their phonetic design: the phonetic design must be such that the candidate pivot has both leftwards interpretation and rightwards interpretation.

Establishing criteria in this way, i.e. in part on the phonetic design of talk, reflects the simultaneous availability of a range of resources (e.g. phonetic design, lexis, syntax) to the participants in interaction. It seems to make sense, therefore, that certain practices are identified (at least in part) by their phonetic design. Indeed, this is reflected in other studies combining techniques of phonetic analysis with the sequential analysis of talk-in-interaction where one criterion for the inclusion of instances in a data-set is the phonetic design of talk (e.g. Couper-Kuhlen 2003; Local & Walker 2004; Ogden, Hakulinen, & Tainio 2004).

#### **4 Phonetic design**

The descriptions of the phonetic design of pivots, and the turns which they build, will focus initially on Fragments 2 to 4. The phonetic design of pivots would seem to be directed at handling at least the following three tasks: avoiding the signaling of transition relevance towards the end of the pivot; marking the fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot, in order to allow leftwards interpretation of the pivot; and marking the fittedness of the post-pivot to the pivot, in order to allow rightwards interpretation of the pivot. The discussion which follows is organized around these three tasks.

##### **4.1 Avoiding signaling transition relevance at the pivot-end**

Co-participants typically (i.e. in all but two cases in the data-set) do not start up their own talk following the pivot. Rather, they wait until the end of the post-pivot talk or later to begin speaking, which suggests an orientation to the absence of transition relevance at the end of the pivot. It is this orientation to the absence of transition relevance at the end of the pivot which first alerts us to the possibility that pivots represent one practice for continuing talk past a point of possible syntactic completion. Given that pivots end at points of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion, phonetic design is the only set of resources for signaling that the talk is *not* coming to an end. One striking feature of pivots is that the constellations of phonetic events routinely associated with the signaling of transition relevance do not occur at their ends. This section deals with how the phonetic markers of transition relevance are avoided, informed by the findings reported in previous work on transition relevance in English talk-in-interaction (e.g. Ford & Thompson 1996; Local et al. 1986; Walker 2004b; Wells & Macfarlane 1998; Wells & Peppé 1996).

There are three features of pivot-ends which seem to be relevant to the avoidance of signaling transition relevance.<sup>7</sup>

First, those pitch configuration which are commonly associated—when combined with certain other features—with transition relevance (e.g. falls terminating low in the speaker’s range, or rises terminating above the middle of the speaker’s range; see Ford & Thompson 1996; Local et al. 1986; Walker 2004b; Wells & Macfarlane 1998; Wells & Peppé 1996, for instance), are typically absent from the end of pivots. Figure 1 presents an  $F_0$  trace of the pivot and surrounding talk from Fragment 2 (further  $F_0$  traces and speech-pressure waveforms of instances presented in this paper are collected together in the Appendix).  $F_0$  is the acoustic correlate of perceived pitch. The  $F_0$  trace in Figure 1 is scaled logarithmically on the y-axis to take into account the non-linearity of human pitch perception, whereby equal changes in absolute frequency are perceived as greater changes at lower frequencies; the y-axis represents the upper and lower limits of the speaker’s pitch range, established on the basis of  $F_0$  measures for one minute of representative conversational speech from Emma.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE. FILE: walker-figure1.eps]

The figure shows that the pivot (“the bone”) is produced with rising-falling pitch, and the point at which this fall terminates can be measured as 189 Hz. It can be seen that this fall does not terminate low in the speaker’s range (cf. the designed-to-be and treated-as complete utterances in Ford & Thompson 1996; Local et al. 1986; Walker 2004b). Other designed-to-be and treated-as complete turns regularly exhibit much lower terminal pitches. For instance, the next point in Emma’s talk which is treated as complete (ending with “exquisite”, line 3) terminates at 130 Hz: some 6.5 ST lower than the end of “bone”.

Second, turn-final slowing down has been associated with the end of turns (e.g. Local et al. 1986; Ogden 2001; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks 1977). However, final slowing down is routinely absent from pivot-ends, which regularly exhibit the kinds of durational characteristics of other medial tokens by the same speaker. So, for instance, in Fragment 2 the duration of the medial “love” measures 593 ms, whereas the pivot-final “bone” (which, like “love” has a consonant-vowel-consonant phonological structure) has a duration of 506 ms: that is, rather than being longer than the medial “love”, which would be indicative of turn-final slowing down, here is in fact a slight speeding up. Likewise, in Fragment 3 the pivot-final “have”, which is stressed, measures 303 ms, while the preceding stressed syllable (“like”) measures 384 ms. The significance of these measures is that they demonstrate that pivots do not routinely exhibit the kinds of turn-final slowing down which other studies have reported as being associated with turn-endings: it should be noted, however, that pivot-ends do not exhibit the kinds of dramatic shortenings observed in other practices (e.g. abrupt-joins; see Local & Walker 2004). One plausible explanation for producing pivots with durational characteristics which are comparable with other medial tokens, is that speakers are claiming the legitimacy of their continuation. One function of the temporal compression in abrupt-joins is to pre-empt another’s starting up: in doing so, attention is drawn to that very possibility. By avoiding this temporal compression in the shift from pivot to post-pivot talk, speakers do not so much display a pre-empting of transition relevance; rather, they produce talk as if transition relevance was not even a possibility.

The third feature of phonetic design which militates against the possibility of a co-participant beginning their talk at the end of the pivot is the close temporal proximity of the post-pivot to the pivot. Across the collection, close temporal proximity of the post-pivot talk to the pivot is regularly apparent, which serves to compress the space at the end of the pivot in which a co-participant might start up their talk. In Fragment 2 this close temporal proximity, and resulting compression of the transition space, is achieved through the continuation of voicing from the pivot (“the bone”) into the post-pivot (“was so:: . .”). In Fragment 3 creak phonation for the pivot-final “have” continues up to the beginning of the post-pivot “is”. In Fragment 4 this close temporal proximity manifests itself through a velar closure at the end of “shit”, rather than an alveolar one, in anticipation of the

velar closure at the start of “goes”. Furthermore, this oral occlusion at the end of “shit” is released into the vowel of “goes” without delay.

In summary, constellations of phonetic features which have been identified as signaling transition relevance are absent from pivot-ends. These features are: absence of pitch configurations which signal transition relevance; absence of final slowing down; and close temporal proximity of the post-pivot to the pivot. Each of these aspects of phonetic design are dealt with in turn. Avoiding the production of pivot-ends with the phonetic features which can signal transition relevance is essential for the success of pivots as a practice for turn continuation, as pivots end at points of plausible syntactic and pragmatic completion.

#### **4.2 Phonetic markers of the fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot**

In addition to avoiding the signaling of transition relevance, the phonetic design of turns built with pivots must be such that the pivot has possible leftwards interpretation (i.e. the pivot is fitted to the talk which precedes it) and possible rightwards interpretation (i.e. the post-pivot talk is fitted to the pivot). The phonetic resources implicated in this task include pitch configuration, loudness, articulation rate, and certain other features.

Pivots are produced such that they begin within what can be described as the *pitch trajectory* of the end of the pre-pivot.<sup>8</sup> That is, there are no pitch disjunctions marking the boundary between the pre-pivot and the pivot (cf. the pitch disjunctions described between units in Local & Walker 2004 and Couper-Kuhlen 2003, which are involved in the marking of new topics/sequences).

The F<sub>0</sub> trace in Figure 1 illustrates the point. The final syllable of the pre-pivot (“love”) exhibits rising-falling pitch; the pivot (“the bone”) begins in this trajectory, with the unstressed “the” being produced in the same part of the pitch range as that in which “l:ove” ended. There is also no indication of a pitch disjunction between “the” and “bone”: although “bone” reaches a much higher pitch than “the” (in part due to “bone” being a stressed syllable), it begins in the same part of the pitch range as “the” ended.

The production of pivots in the pitch trajectory of the pre-pivot brings off the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] talk as being all of a piece (cf. the relationships between turn components in turns built with abrupt-joins; see Local & Walker 2004); indeed, this effect is contributed to by each of the phonetic resources described in what follows.

As with the pitch configurations of pivots, the loudness characteristics of pivots mark them out as being of a piece with the pre-pivots: pivots are produced such that there is what might be described as overall loudness matching of the pivot to the pre-pivot. That is, relative to the loudness of the pre-pivot, there are no disjunctive step-ups or step-downs in loudness on the pivot (cf. Local & Walker 2004).

As with the pitch and loudness characteristics of the pivot, pivots are produced such that there is overall articulation rate matching of the pivot to the pre-pivot. For instance, in Fragment 3 the metrical feet involving the pre-pivot and pivot are measurable at between 1.5 and 2.0 feet per second (fps), with a mean articulation rate of 1.7 fps.<sup>9</sup>

Further observations can be made alongside those concerning pitch, loudness, and articulation rate. Also contributing to the sense of the pre-pivot and the pivot being of a piece is that hiatuses (e.g. glottal or supra-glottal occlusions) do not occur between the pre-pivot and the pivot. Rather, particularly close temporal proximity of the two components is routinely observed. One way in which this close temporal proximity manifests itself is through the continuation of phonation across

the join between the pre-pivot and the pivot. This absence of glottal and supra-glottal occlusions prevents this point in the construction of the turn (i.e. the join between the pre-pivot and the pivot) being heard as a point of self-repair where one line is aborted in favour of another (Jaspersen 1998, 2002). So, for instance, the talk in Fragment 2 comes off as “I(’d) l:ove the bone was so:: . . .” rather than “I(’d) l:ove- the bone was so:: . . .”.

This section has described how particular features of phonetic design are used to mark out the pivot and the pre-pivot as being of a piece, rather than two separate pieces linked by the possibility of being parsed (grammatically) as part of the same unit. Focusing on the same parameters as this section, the next section will explore the second of the tasks for features of phonetic design: how those features may be used in signaling that the post-pivot and the pivot are fitted together.

#### **4.3 Phonetic markers of the fittedness of the post-pivot to the pivot**

As with the markers of fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot, the features of phonetic design which mark the fittedness of the post-pivot to the pivot involve pitch configuration, loudness, articulation rate, and certain other features. Each of these feature-sets is described in turn in what follows.

In the same way that pivots are produced in the pitch trajectory of the pre-pivots, post-pivots are produced in the pitch trajectory of the pivots, marking out the two parts as being of a piece. Again, this characteristic is illustrated in Figure 1. It can be seen that “bone” (which occurs at the end of the pivot) has a rising-falling pitch contour, and that “was” (which begins the post-pivot talk) is produced in the pivot’s pitch trajectory, with a falling pitch from the point in the speaker’s range at which “bone” ends.

With regard to loudness, the loudness characteristics of the post-pivot are matched to those of the pre-pivot. There are no disjunctive step-ups or step-downs in loudness from the first part (the pivot) to the second part (the post-pivot) in the data-set.

As with the matching of post-pivots’ pitch and loudness characteristics to those of the pre-pivot, post-pivots are fitted to pivots with respect to articulation rate. For instance, in Fragment 3 the metrical feet involving the pivot and the post-pivot are measurable at between 1.5 and 2.2 fps, with a mean articulation rate of 1.9 fps.

It was shown that typically hiatuses do not occur between pre-pivots and pivots. Likewise, hiatuses do not occur between pivots and post-pivots: there are no silences, or glottal or supra-glottal occlusions which might suggest self-repair (see Jaspersen 1998, 2002). Rather, we find that like the placement of the pivot relative to the pre-pivot, there is particularly close temporal proximity of the post-pivot talk to the pre-pivot, involving such features as continued phonation across the join (which is suggested by the continued periodicity in the speech-pressure waveform of Figure 1, between “bone” and “was”, and in the success of the  $F_0$  tracker being able to locate voiced frames across this join), and double articulations (as in Fragment 4).

The production of the pivot in particularly close temporal proximity creates the sense of the post-pivot being of a piece with the pivot, while also compressing the space in which a co-participant might be able to start up their talk.

The preceding sections have shown how a range of phonetic parameters are involved in marking the fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot on the one hand, and of the post-pivot to the pivot on the other. Features of phonetic design which are implicated here include features of pitch, loudness, articulation rate, and absence of hiatuses between the three components. It would seem that all of

these features are deployed in ways which emphasize the fittedness and coherence of the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex and the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex.

#### 4.4 Summary of the phonetic design of pivots

Certain features of phonetic design have been shown to be deployed around pivot-ends in order to abrogate the transition relevance suggested by the possible syntactic and pragmatic completion which accompanies the end of the pivot. For instance, the pivot regularly does not end with the kinds of pitch and durational characteristics associated with other designed-to-be and treated-as complete utterances; also, the post-pivot is produced without delay, following the pivot, and may result in assimilation of pivot-final articulations in anticipation of the post-pivot. One outcome of the analysis of phonetic details of these turns has been the demonstration of the appositeness of Sacks' claim that "[y]ou end up having done in effect two sentences, but *there's never been a chance for a hearer to find a first possible completion of the first.*" (Sacks 1992: 146; emphasis added).

Features of phonetic design, including pitch configuration, loudness characteristics, articulation rate, and other articulatory details have been shown to be implicated in marking out the fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot on the one hand, and of the post-pivot to the pivot on the other. These features of phonetic design—which result in an integration of the units, rather than a separation—facilitate the leftward-interpretation and rightward-interpretation of the pivot.

Having described and exemplified the main features of phonetic design associated with pivots and the turns which they build, one further issue requires discussion before moving on to outline some of the uses of pivots in interaction in the next section. The pivots which have been presented up to this point ("the bone", Fragment 2; "what I'd like to have", Fragment 3; "shit", Fragment 4) all have particular syntactic features in common. First, in the contexts in which they occur, none of them could be interpreted as standalone grammatical entities: they can only be understood as part of larger structures, i.e. in conjunction with the pre-pivot, or with the post-pivot. Second, it is just as possible to interpret them as part of the talk which preceded them, as it is the talk which follows. So, for instance, it is not possible to segment "the bone" only with the talk which precedes it, or only with the talk which follows it, as each would result in constructions which are ungrammatical in their contexts of occurrence: [I'd love the bone][\*was so beautiful]; [\*I'd love][the bone was so beautiful]. That is, in cases such as those in Fragments 2 to 4, the pivot is a necessary part of both the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex, and the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex. In these cases, then, syntax alone seems to suggest the pivot interpretation.

However, there are other cases in the data-set—some of which appear in Section 5—where the syntactic make-up of the constructions does not suggest a pivot interpretation, or at least does not suggest it as strongly as cases like those in Fragments 2 to 4. Consider Fragment 5:

- (5) NB.II.5-23s; PIV017  
(*Emma and Lottie have been discussing recent driving conditions*)
- 1 Lot: yeah I know it but you know it wasn't (b)e- it wasn't  
2 bad here it a:11  
3 --> Emm: that's what Gladys just tells me but it's bad **inland**  
4 it's terrible you only have about a block visibility  
5 it's just (.) awful:  
6 (0.7)  
7 Lot: yeah

In this case, the candidate pivot ("inland", line 3) could be segmented with what precedes it, and not with what follows, without making any aspect of the structure ungrammatical: [it's bad inland][it's terrible]. Similarly, "inland" could be segmented only with the talk which follows, not

with the talk which preceded it, without making anything ungrammatical: [it's bad][inland it's terrible].<sup>10</sup>

The ability to segment the candidate pivot in one or the other direction, and not necessarily in both directions, might lead us to wonder whether these instances are in fact pivots at all. However, it is important to recognize that any utterance in talk-in-interaction has both a phonetic design *and* a syntactic form, and these features are simultaneously available to participants in both designing and interpreting talk (see e.g. Ford, Fox, & Thompson 1996; Selting 2000). In cases such as Fragment 5, and other cases in this paper where it would appear that the pivot need not be interpreted—from the point of view of syntax—with both what precedes it and with what follows (cf. Fragments 2 to 4), there is nothing at the level of sound organization which promotes the segmentation of the candidate pivot in one direction rather than the other. That is, there is no more reason to segment the candidate pivot with what preceded it, or with what followed.

Turning to Fragment 5 in detail: given the phonetic design of the talk in question, “inland” can legitimately be considered a pivot: the phonetic design of “inland” is consonant with that of the pivots in Fragments 2 to 4 described above, i.e., (1) “inland” does not end with the phonetic characteristics which signal transition relevance (e.g. the rising-falling pitch on “inland” terminates 14 ST above the speaker’s baseline pitch, and 10.2 ST above the point at which “awful:”, line 5, terminates and which marks the end of Emma’s next designed-to-be and treated-as complete utterance, which also exhibits rising-falling pitch); (2) the pivot begins in the pitch trajectory of the pre-pivot, and the post-pivot begins in the pitch trajectory of the pivot (see the relevant  $F_0$  traces in the Appendix); (3) there is matching of overall loudness and articulation rate across the components, and all voiced portions have modal voicing; (4) the alveolar closures at the end of the pre-pivot and pivot are released without delay into voicing for the vowels which begin in the following components. In short, the candidate pivot in Fragment 5 exhibits features of phonetic design which compare favourably with those identified on the basis of cases such as those presented in Fragments 2 to 4 above. The phonetic design *combined with* the syntactic fittedness (if not dependence) of “inland” to both the talk which precedes it *and* the talk which follows it facilitates the interpretation of “inland” as both the final element in one grammatical unit, and the initial element of another, i.e. as a pivot.

The next section provides an account of some of the uses of pivots in interaction. In doing so, it draws on a collection consisting of both types of pivot, i.e. the type exemplified by Fragment 5 (where the pivot is syntactically fitted to talk on either side of it, though not necessarily dependent on it), and the type exemplified by Fragments 2 to 4 (where the pivot is grammatically fitted to talk on either side of it, and is dependent on it). In each case, a combination of the phonetic design of talk and its syntactic organization permits both leftwards *and* rightwards interpretation of the pivot. In summary, for the purposes of this paper pivots are identified on the basis of both syntax *and* phonetic design.

## **5 Uses of pivots in interaction**

Having set out the features of phonetic design routinely associated with pivots and the turns which they are used to build, this section sets out to demonstrate some of the uses to which pivots are put in talk-in-interaction. It should first be noted that there does not seem to be anything shared by all cases in the data-set in terms of the exigencies dealt with by the pivots other than the facilitating of turn-continuation past a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion. For instance, it seems *not* to be the case that all pivots fend off projectable disagreement from a co-participant. Rather, the driving force(s) behind turn-continuation via a pivot are best seen as particular to each individual case, even though these driving forces may occur in multiple instances. The pivot,

therefore, is a practice whose domain of operation is rather generally “turn-taking in talk-in-interaction”.

However, within the current data-set certain kinds of actions regularly crop up within turns built with pivots. Approximately half of the turns built with pivots in the data-set implement assessments of some kind; most of the remaining half of the data is split, roughly equally, between enquiries and reports.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the cases in the data-set implement one single action.<sup>12</sup> That is, the action implemented by the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex and the action implemented by the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex is the same. In this regard turns built with pivots are distinct from those built with abrupt-joins: in turns built with abrupt-joins, the unit on each ‘side’ of the join implements a different action, with the abrupt-join marking a change in the sequential trajectory of the talk (Local & Walker 2004).

## 5.1 Assessments

This section focuses on those cases in the data-set where the turn built with a pivot implements some kind of assessment. In these cases, typically both the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex and the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex implement assessments. Fragments 6 and 7 (part of which was presented as Fragment 5 above) provide exemplars of turns built with pivots which implement assessments.

### (6) Kamunsky.III-570s; PIV004

*((talk has been about Rob, whom Alan has invited to a party which he is organizing, but whom Maryanne --- who has also been invited to the party --- hardly knows))*

1 Ala: he'll get to know you (won't[ ] ihh  
2 Mry: [(he is like he's the only  
3 nice person)  
4 Ala: he's okay  
5 (0.7)  
6 Mry: (yeah/but) he's okay  
7 Ala: well he's quiet but he's okay  
8 --> Mry: yeah that's what **everybody tells me** he's really quiet  
9 Ala: mmhm

### (7) NB.II.5-2s; PIV015

*((Emma has called her sister, Lottie, on returning from her second home to her home on the coast, near where Lottie lives))*

1 Lot: hello=  
2 Emm: =are you answering the pho::ne  
3 (0.2)  
4 Lot: hah .hh I was just gonna call you ehh  
5 [huh huh  
6 Emm: [I just got he:re  
7 (0.5)  
8 Lot: reall[y  
9 Emm: [oh it's been so foggy we didn't come do:wn oh it's  
10 so foggy Lottie all our way (off/all) our way it's terrible  
11 (0.4)  
12 Lot: no kidding  
13 Emm: yeah we came down Rosemea:d real slo:w  
14 (0.8)  
15 Emm: .hh oh [yeah they w]arned you to stay away  
16 Lot: [ (mm::) ]  
17 Emm: from them (0.4) five ten miles on the freeways last  
18 night you know so  
19 (0.2)  
20 Lot: yeah I know it but you know it wasn't (b)e- it wasn't  
21 bad here it a:ll  
22 -->Emm: that's what Gladys just tells me but it's bad **inland**  
23 it's terrible you only have about a block visibility

24           it's just (.) awful:  
 25           (0.7)  
 26    Lot:   yeah

In Fragment 6 the continuation which is facilitated by the pivot works to resolve an ambiguity in the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] talk. In her talk at line 8, Maryanne offers an assessment of Rob which reciprocates that made by Alan in the previous turn (“well he’s quiet but he’s okay”, line 7). Maryanne’s assessment comes to a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion at the end of “yeah that’s what everybody tells me”. Although it is possibly complete at this point, it is also ambiguous in terms of what exactly Maryanne is responding to with her assessment: she could be either responding to Alan’s assessment of Rob as quiet, or as okay. Indeed, given that Maryanne’s assessment immediately follows Alan’s assessment of Rob as “okay”, it might be expected that Alan would treat Maryanne’s “yeah that’s what everybody tells me” as agreeing with that part of his assessment, rather than with Rob being quiet (this would be consonant with Sacks’ observations regarding “contiguity” in conversation; Sacks 1987). However, Maryanne uses a pivot in order to produce talk which works to resolve this possible ambiguity, and make it clear that she is responding to Alan’s assessment of Rob as quiet. Maryanne uses the final stages of her possibly complete “that’s what everybody tells me” to get into “everybody tells me he’s really quiet”—which resolves this ambiguity, making it clear that she is offering explicit agreement with the first part of Alan’s assessment (“he’s quiet”), rather than the second. In this way, then, the pivot can be seen to be used to pre-empt a possible misunderstanding of Maryanne’s talk by Alan, a misunderstanding which may be considered all the more likely given that the relationship between Maryanne’s assessment and the talk which precedes it doesn’t accord with the kinds of preference for contiguity in conversation recorded by Sacks (1987).

Fragment 7 also shows a continuation of a turn which implements an assessment, though the motivation for the continuation would seem to be rather different from that in Fragment 6. Fragment 7 is taken from the beginning of a telephone call between Emma and her sister, Lottie. Near the beginning of the call, Emma provides an account for why she hasn’t called Lottie sooner: she has only just arrived at home, due to adverse weather conditions.<sup>13</sup> Despite Emma’s claims concerning the nature of the weather, Lottie’s responses to Emma’s talk would seem to be rather limited in terms of aligning with Emma’s plight, Emma’s newsmark (“really”, line 8) notwithstanding. For instance, Emma’s initial “I just got here” (line 6) is greeted with silence (line 7), and there is further silence following “we came down Rosemead real slow” (line 14). Following a further short silence (line 20) comes further mitigated agreement from Lottie: “yeah I know it but you know it wasn’t (b)e- it wasn’t bad here it all” (lines 21 to 22). One possible interpretation of Lottie’s turn is not only as a mitigated agreement, but also as a complaint: by emphasizing that the weather isn’t bad where she is (which was Emma’s destination) there may be a suggestion that had Emma made more of an effort to overcome the difficulties with the weather at her other home, then the remainder of the journey would have been plain sailing. Emma responds first with an agreement of sorts, invoking the view of a third party (“that’s what Gladys just tells me”, line 23)—before restating the weather conditions where she has been (“but it’s bad inland”, line 24). She then uses the end part of this syntactically possibly complete unit (“inland”) as the first part of what follows: “inland it’s terrible”. In doing this, Emma is getting herself the space in which to do an upgrade on her first assessment, shifting her description of the weather conditions from “bad” to “terrible”. The significance of this continuation into the upgrade is that it strengthens her case for not having begun her journey to the coast, and is offered in the face of the implication from Lottie that at least the final part of the journey would have caused Emma no problems at all. That is, *irrespective of* the weather conditions at her destination, the conditions at her point of departure were sufficiently hazardous to warrant the postponement of the journey.

It would seem, therefore, that the driving forces behind the continuations in the target turns of Fragments 6 and 7 are rather different. In Fragment 6 the continuation is effected in order to prevent misunderstanding, while in Fragment 7 it works to prevent misalignment.

Fragment 8 includes a third case of a pivot building a turn which implements an assessment, though which seems to be different from the turns built with pivots in Fragment 6 and 7.

- (8) Holt.U.88.2.2-660s; PIV033  
*((talk has been about Ben, a mutual acquaintance of both Leslie and Kevin))*
- 1 Kev: you know certainly: (.) last time I saw him uh for his  
 2 (0.4) after his retirement he seems to have uh: (1.0) uh:  
 3 (0.4) be benefiting (0.3) benefitting from the uh (0.2)  
 4 the experien[ce  
 5 Les: [y:es that's right I'm sure  
 6 --> **it's a weight off his mind** I'm sure .hhhhhh  
 7 (0.5)  
 8 Kev: still  
 9 (0.7)  
 10 Les: mm[:  
 11 Kev: [(I just) wish I'd:: uh (0.3) taken up teaching as  
 12 uh (0.3) Claydon said I ought to have done

Following Kevin's assessment of Ben's welfare (lines 1 to 4), Leslie offers agreement ("yes that's right", line 5) and then offers her own assessment. On reaching the first point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion in the course of that assessment (i.e. at the end of "I'm sure it's a weight off his mind") Leslie elects to continue her talk, electing to do so by reusing the end part of this talk as the start of more talk, creating "it's a weight off his mind I'm sure". This turn is the only instance in the current data-set which has the same lexical items ("I'm sure") as both the pre-pivot and post-pivot talk. As it is the only case of matched pre-pivot and post-pivot talk in the data-set, any analysis of its function will be necessarily speculative though certain relevant observations can be made by setting this case against analyses of other phenomena. Clift (2001) and Heritage & Raymond (2005) have shown that the differential placement of identical lexical items or strings within a TCU is responsive to different interactional exigencies: Clift (2001) found that placement of "actually" initially or finally in a TCU had different uses and consequences in talk-in-interaction; Heritage & Raymond (2005), working with a collection of second assessments found (amongst other things) that by placing an agreement token (e.g. "yes") after a confirmation upgrades the right to assess some particular referent.<sup>14</sup> Given, then, that (i) the placement of identical lexical items at different points in a turn at talk may be consequential for the interaction and (ii) that by using "it's a weight off his mind" as a pivot with "I'm sure" as both the pre-pivot *and* the post-pivot, the talk in Fragment 8 may indicate that pivots can be used not only to continue a turn at talk past a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion, but also to effectively reposition some element (in this case "I'm sure") elsewhere in a turn at talk.

As a final remark concerning Fragment 8: from the point of view of the syntactic-pragmatic organisation of this sequence, it is possible that the candidate pivot comes about through a kind of elaborate coincidence, whereby the first "I'm sure" (line 5) coheres with the preceding "y:es that's right", the second "I'm sure" (line 6) coheres with "it's a weight off his mind", and there may or may not be coherence between "it's a weight off his mind" and the preceding "I'm sure". Under this organisation there would be no pivot. However, the phonetic design of this talk not only promotes a hearing of "it's a weight off his mind" as a pivot, placed between the two instances of "I'm sure", but also promotes a hearing of "yes that's right" and the following "I'm sure" as distinct units, without the kind of coherence which holds across "I'm sure it's a weight off his mind I'm sure". Two features which mark possible turn completion at the end of "that's right", and which mark a break between this and the following "I'm sure", are (i) a large final falling pitch on "right" measuring 12.8 ST, ending low in the speaker's pitch range, and (ii) audible aspirated

release of the final alveolar closure of “right” (Local, Kelly & Wells 1986; Walker 2004b). In addition, there is a step-up in pitch from the end of “right” to the beginning of “I’m” which measures 7 ST; as described in Section 4 above, no such disjunctive step-ups are observed between components of a pivot construction. No such break is evident between “I’m sure” and the following “it’s a weight off his mind”, where voice phonation is maintained between “sure” and “it’s”, and “it’s” is produced in the pitch trajectory of the “I’m sure” (see Section 4.2; see also the F0 trace and speech-pressure waveform in the Appendix). Similarly, there is no break between the candidate pivot, “it’s a weight off his mind”, and the following “I’m sure”: the final closure of “mind” is released without delay into the following word, there is laughter evident (though not transcribed) across the whole of “mind I’m sure”, and the end of the pivot and what follows are produced in the same part of the speaker’s range (though the presence of laughter prevents reliable measurement). In sum, “I’m sure it’s a weight off his mind I’m sure” exhibits exactly those phonetic characteristics evident in the cases of pivot constructions discussed in more detail in Section 4.

Inspection of the turns built with pivots in Fragments 6 to 8 suggests that turn-continuation is sought through the deployment of a pivot for a variety of situation-specific reasons (to pre-empt a possible misunderstanding in Fragment 6, misalignment in Fragment 7, and to reposition talk in a turn in Fragment 7), even when the base action-type of the turns being built is consistent across the instances (i.e. they are all assessments). This would suggest that the most felicitous way to handle continuations through the use of a pivot is on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, this is how the following sections will proceed, dealing in turn with enquiries, reportings, and hybrid turns built with pivots.

## 5.2 Enquiries

This section deals with some of the cases in the data-set in which the turn built with the pivot is implementing an enquiry. Fragments 9 and 10 exemplify a turn-organisation in which the pivot facilitates a shift from an enquiry into a candidate answer. In the analysis which follows an attempt is made to unpick the significance of the continuations for the interaction.

### (9) Heritage.V.2.6-133s; PIV009

*((Ilene, whose husband is about to become mayor, is arranging a party))*

- 1 Ile: it’ll be the la:st time for a year because you have to  
 2 be apolitical when you’re a may:or  
 3 (0.3)  
 4 Joy: yeah oh I see you don:t[uh  
 5 Ile: [no you’re not u:h .hh  
 6 anything I’m I’ve got to resig:n from the uh .hh  
 7 Conservative Women’s Association the committee  
 8 (0.2)  
 9 --> Joy: why **is that** because you’ve got tuh be (ree uh)=  
 10 Ile: =we mustn’t be political  
 11 (0.4)  
 12 Joy: oh I see no of course you must[n’t  
 13 Ile: [you’ve got to be a:ll (.)  
 14 pa[rties  
 15 Joy: [open min[ded  
 16 Ile: [yeah

### (10) TG-489s; PIV029

- 1 Ava: you know it just doesn’t seem worth it hh  
 2 Bee: mh .hhh what about uh:: (0.9) oh you go f:- you  
 3 --> how many days **you go** five days a week ri[ght  
 4 Ava: [yeah  
 5 Bee: oh (god)

In Fragment 9 the pivot (“is that”) is used to continue into a candidate answer to the first pair part enquiry formed by the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] (“why is that”). The continuation is also a pre-emption of

possible problems of alignment which could ensue from her enquiry (cf. the discussion of Fragment 6 above). Joy has called Ilene to find out what might constitute appropriate dress for a house-party which she (Ilene) is organizing. Referring to the throwing of the party, Ilene announces that “it will be the last time for a year because you have to be apolitical when you’re a mayor” (lines 1 to 2), which she follows up by saying that she will have to resign from the committee of the Conservative Women’s Association (lines 5 to 7). In response, Joy issues the syntactically and pragmatically well-formed enquiry “why is that” (line 9), which makes relevant an answer from Ilene. However, in her preceding talk, Ilene has made the reason for having to resign pretty clear: she must be apolitical. This makes Joy’s enquiry an inapposite one, and, moreover, may suggest a lack of attentiveness on her part to what Ilene has been saying. By recycling the end of her enquiry as the first part of a follow-up which demonstrates some understanding of Ilene’s situation, she manages to side-step the possibility of Ilene coming in at the end of Joy’s enquiry and responding in a way which may suggest misalignment arising from Joy’s inapposite enquiry.

In Fragment 10 a pivot is also used in order to move from an enquiry into a candidate answer, though in this particular case the motivation for preventing a co-participant starting up their talk following the enquiry and constructing that particular [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex is arguably less clear than in Fragment 9. The fragment is taken from a call in which two female friends are “catching up” after a break in their communication (Schegloff 1996: 57; this instance is also given some discussion in Schegloff 1979: 277 and Schertz 2005: 103). Following various repairs and restarts (“what about uh:: (0.9) oh you go f:- you”, line 2) Bee issues the possibly complete enquiry “how many days you go” (line 3), referring to Ava’s attendance at college. However, rather than leave space in which Ava can provide the relevant response, Bee uses the end of this syntactically possibly complete unit as a pivot into a next syntactically possibly complete unit which incorporates a candidate answer to the enquiry (“you go five days a week right”, line 3). This candidate answer is also a version of the claim Bee was beginning to launch with “what about uh:: (0.9) oh you go f:- you” (line 2), but which she aborted in favour of the enquiry “how many days you go”. Although the motivations for the turn continuation facilitated by the pivot in Fragment 10 may not be quite as clear as in Fragment 9, a plausible account of this case can be offered by appealing to notions of participant alignment, as in Fragment 9. By shifting from the enquiry into a candidate response in Fragment 10 Bee claims a particular kind of knowledge about her co-participant’s life: that Ava goes to college five days a week.<sup>15</sup> These pivots are being used to ensure that some bit of talk (i.e. the [pivot]+[post-pivot]) gets said by making the end of one syntactically possibly complete unit the start of the next, abrogating the point for which a co-participant will be monitoring in order to launch a responsive action.

### 5.3 Reportings

This section deals with some of the cases in the data-set in which the turn built with the pivot forms part of a reporting. For the purposes of this investigation, a turn can be considered a reporting if its main business is the imparting of information as fact, rather than opinion, and where that imparting of information is not in service of some other action (e.g. complaining, requesting, offering).

Fragments 11 and 12 each provide an instance of a reporting being built with a pivot.

(11) NB.IV.10-1298s; PIV010

1 Lot: you know I won’t have the Christmas  
 2 [party  
 3 Emm: [well you know that’s Bud’s fault  
 4 (0.2)  
 5 Lot: no:: it isn’t uh that’s juhah duh I’ll: (.) I’ll get  
 6 --> the (.) Christmas present **next Monday** I’ll drive out  
 7 there and give them to Agnes  
 8 (1.9)

9 Lot: en:: eyou know:  
10 (.)  
11 Lot: I'll tell her I'm going away or something  
12 (Emm:) (mm)  
13 Lot: ((*sniff*))  
14 (.)  
15 Lot: [so  
16 (Emm:) [(oka)y]  
17 (0.3)  
18 Lot: I'm [not gonna  
19 Emm: [well don't be broken hearted  
20 (0.4)  
21 Emm: I'd as soon forget the whole thing myself:  
22 Lot: yeah

(12) SBL.2.1.3-30s; PIV030

1 Jo: we were in Northern California up (0.3) wehhh (0.6) way  
2 up in the mountains too  
3 (0.3)  
4 Cla: .hh oh well we went up there oh:: about thr- .hhhh I'd  
5 --> say **about three weeks ago** we was up at Mariposa  
6 .hh[hhh  
7 Jo: [uh huh  
8 Cla: and up in the mother lo:de country and we  
9 we[nt all through=  
10 Jo: [yeh  
11 Cla: =those ghost to::wn[s (.hhh)  
12 Jo: [oh: I see well we were up uh .hh into  
13 Red (0.4) Red Bluff

Fragment 11 is taken from a call in which Lottie's cancellation of her Christmas party is discussed: Lottie is now in the process of making alternative arrangements for the delivery of a Christmas present. By using a pivot ("next Monday", line 6) Lottie gets from talk concerned with the timing of her buying the Christmas present ("I'll get the (.) Christmas present next Monday") into talk about the delivery of the present ("next Monday I'll drive out there and give them to Agnes").

Fragment 12 is taken from a call which took place on the same afternoon as Jo returned from her vacation. Immediately prior to Fragment 12, Claire has asked her where she went on her vacation. Following Jo's announcement ("we were in Northern California up (0.3) wehhh (0.6) way up in the mountains too", lines 1 to 2), Claire—rather than eliciting further information regarding Jo's trip, which she has already described twice as "wonderful"—offers a reciprocal reporting. On reaching the first point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion in her talk ("we went up there oh:: about thr- .hhhh I'd say about three weeks ago", lines 4 to 5) Claire recycles the end part of this syntactically possibly complete unit to continue her own reporting ("I'd say about three weeks ago we was up at Mariposa", lines 4 to 6). It would seem, given that Jo has only just returned from her trip, that she (Jo) would have primary rights to provide an account or description of her trip. However, Claire does not collaborate in this, electing to launch her own reporting rather than eliciting information from Jo. It is perhaps this "right" of Jo's that motivates the deployment of the pivot in Claire's turn: she may be having to work particularly hard at the end of her first unit ("we went up there oh:: about thr- .hhhh I'd say about three weeks ago") in order to secure the space in which to continue, in the face of Jo's enhanced rights to tell a story. In this case, that work is done by the pivot, to ensure that Claire's reporting gets to be continued past its first point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion.

#### 5.4 Hybrid turns built with pivots

Up to this point, the turns built with pivots have been engaged in either assessing, enquiring, or reporting. However, there are cases in the data-set where more than one of these actions is being implemented by a single turn built with a pivot. All but one of these hybrid turns consist of a

reporting followed by an assessment: an example is shown in Fragment 13. Nancy has been describing to Emma an eligible retired army officer who she met at a party the previous night.

(13) NB.II.4-997s; PIV020

1 Nan: he had come down to the uh (.) Reuben E. Lee: .hhhh and  
 2 ah (.) then as a retired uh officer in the (0.2) ah  
 3 marine corps he has un (.) he was showing it to me he  
 4 has a- .hh a pass which allows him for ever and a day  
 5 .hhhh to (.) go to the officer's clubs et El Toro  
 6 (.)  
 7 Nan: o[r Ca:mp Pendle]ton (.) and they have lovely  
 8 Emm: [ m m : ]  
 9 Nan: dinner dances and things like that you  
 10 kn[ow .hhhhh  
 11 Emm: [wonderfu[l  
 12 Nan: [and he said I've never: uh:m (0.3) he said  
 13 I really haven't taken advantage of it  
 14 [.hhh  
 15 Emm: [mm h[m  
 16 Nan: [an:d Helen had told me about this: (.) bitchy wife that  
 17 he had had for so long and apparently she always made  
 18 --> such a scene **every time they went somewhere** I guess  
 19 she drank too much [.hhhh  
 20 Emm: [mm: [hm:  
 21 Nan: [and apparently he just  
 22 simply hasn't (.) been (.) interested [in]  
 23 Emm: [mm] hm[:  
 24 Nan: [doing (.)  
 25 a lot of [dating and (0.2) he said now I might have a:- a  
 26 Emm: [.mhhhhhh  
 27 Nan: reason to  
 28 Emm: hmhh  
 29 Nan: you know  
 30 (0.4)  
 31 Nan: g[et down there  
 32 Emm: [ gee:: wouldn't that [be nice  
 33 Nan: [.hhhh

Following her reporting of the man claiming not to have used his free pass (“he said I’ve never: uh:m (0.3) he said I really haven’t taken advantage of it”, lines 12 to 13), Nancy reports part of a conversation she had with another friend—Helen—about the ex-wife of the man (“Helen had told me about this bitchy wife that he had had for so long and apparently she always made such a scene every time they went somewhere”). Rather than providing space at this point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion for Emma to assess the reporting, Nancy uses the end of this syntactically possibly complete unit (“every time they went somewhere”) as a pivot into her *own* assessment: “every time they went somewhere I guess she drank too much” (lines 18 to 19). In continuing past this point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion, Nancy acquires for herself the space in which she can make an assessment of the man’s wife (previously she has only been reporting the assessment of the wife by a third party), along with a claim as to her inability to control her consumption of alcohol to the point that it may have been the reason that he didn’t get to go anywhere. Crucially, the pivot allows Nancy to circumvent the possibility of Emma derailing Nancy’s shift from reporting to assessing, for instance by Emma making her own assessment of how the wife “always made such a scene every time they went somewhere”.

## 5.5 Summary of the uses of pivots in interaction

This section has provided a flavour of the kinds of uses to which pivots are put in the current dataset. It is appropriate at this point to summarise some of the main points of the preceding descriptions. First, pivots are used to facilitate the continuation of talk past a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion. Second, the precise motivations for continuing past that point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion—and the extent to which those motivations are

visible to the analyst—vary. It would not seem to be the case that the continuation is effected for the same reason (e.g. to pre-empt problems of understanding, or of alignment) in all cases. However, in many cases, it is possible to identify a particular interactional exigency dealt with by the pivot and the continuation it facilitates. Third, in the current data-set, pivots cluster around particular kinds of activity. These activities are assessments, enquiries, and reportings, and certain combinations of these actions (hybrids).

## 6 Summary and implications

This paper has provided an account of the phonetic design of pivots, and the turns which they build, and particularly how phonetics fits the components of those turns (i.e. the pre-pivot, the pivot, and the post-pivot) together to make coherent composites. An account has also been provided of the uses to which pivots are put in everyday conversation.

Using the research questions set out in section 2 as a reference point, the findings can be summarized as follows: (1) a range of features of phonetic design are deployed in systematic ways, including features of pitch, loudness, duration, and certain articulatory details. More specifically: (a) the signaling of transition relevance at the pivot-ends is avoided by (i) refraining from the deployment of final pitch configurations which characterize other designed-to-be and treated-as complete utterances, (ii) avoiding slowing down towards the end of the pivot, and (iii) producing the post-pivot talk immediately on completion of the pivot (in which continued phonation and double articulations are implicated); (b) pitch, loudness, and articulation rate are all implicated in facilitating both leftward and rightward interpretation of the pivot, i.e. these features are deployed such that they suggest a fittedness of the pivot to the pre-pivot, and of the post-pivot to the pivot. (2) Pivots have been shown to be deployed with greatest frequency in turns which are engaged in at least one of the following: assessing, enquiring, reporting. However, it would seem that these are not the only kinds of turns in which pivots occur.

One issue which has not been addressed explicitly up to this point, and which is worthy of some comment, concerns the syntactic variation observed across the data-set. The first point to note about the syntactic variation observed is that the pivot elements vary with regard to their syntactic complexity. Restricting discussion to the instances which have been presented in this article, there are syntactic structures ranging from a single noun in Fragment 4 (“shit”) to the more complex headless relative clause in Fragment 3 (“what I’d like to have”). Along this approximate spectrum of syntactic complexity are noun phrases (“the bone”, Fragment 2), adverb phrases of different sizes and types (temporal in Fragments 11 and 12: “next Monday” and “about three weeks ago”; locative in Fragment 7: “inland”), and relative clauses (“what I’d like to have”, Fragment 3), to name but a few.

The second point to note about the syntactic variation observed concerns the syntactic function of the pivot element when considered part of the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex on the one hand, and the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex on the other. In some instances (e.g. Fragments 3, 5, 11–13), the pivot element has the same syntactic function in each segmentation. In other cases (e.g. Fragments 2, 6, 12), the pivot element has different syntactic functions in the two segmentations: in Fragment 2, the pivot (“the bone”) functions as an object noun phrase when it has leftwards interpretation, and as a subject noun phrase when it has rightwards interpretation; in Fragment 6 the pivot (“everybody tells me”), functions as a relative clause without a relativizer when interpreted in a leftwards direction, and as the main clause in a complement clause construction when interpreted to the right; and in Fragment 12 (“I want”), the pivot functions as a relative clause without the relativizer to the left, and as a subject-verb complex to the right.

A third feature of the syntactic variation concerns the extent to which syntax alone renders interpretation of some element of the turn as simultaneously part of two structures i.e. as a pivot. As pointed out in Section 4.4, some pivots seem to be identifiable on the basis of syntax alone (e.g. Fragments 2, 3, 4, footnote 11), while others cannot (e.g. Fragments 5, 6, 8–13). As argued in Section 4.4, phonetic design has been taken as one criterion in the identification of pivot constructions. However, the possibility remains that different degrees of syntactic cohesion have a bearing on the organization and usages of the practice. More generally, further work could usefully explore whether the various kinds of syntactic variation in pivot constructions in spoken English (cf. Scheutz' 2005 catalogue of some of the syntactic variation in pivot constructions in spoken German), some of which have been set out here, enter into consistent and consequential relationships with the organization of the interaction. This would almost certainly involve the construction of a larger corpus of instances from English conversation.

Pivots represent one device for continuing talk past the point of projectable, if not actual, possible completion. Insofar as this is their primary interactional function—the evidence for which can be found in the general absence of co-participants starting up in response to the end of the pivot—they can be compared with other previously documented practices for the continuation of talk past a point of projectable possible completion. For instance, abrupt-joins allow for the production of multi-unit, multi-action turns (Local & Walker 2004). The phonetic design of the abrupt-join—which involves, among other characteristics, a step-up in pitch and loudness from one unit to the next—has been shown to emphasize the 'multi-unit-ness' of the turns which it builds. It has been shown that a quite different organisation of phonetic resources is associated with pivots: pitch, loudness, and articulation rate have been shown to emphasize the fittedness and integration of components of these turns. One thing that this phonetic 'packaging' might lead us to wonder is how many TCUs are contained in a [pre-pivot]+[pivot]+[post-pivot] complex? While it seems clear that abrupt-joins are used to join two discrete TCUs, the matter is less clear in the case of the pivots: the syntax suggests that there are two TCUs (the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex, and the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex), but if we take TCUs to be defined by features of syntax, action, and phonetic design (Ford, Fox & Thomson 1996; Selting 2000) we might conclude that there is only one, but one with a syntactic format which deviates from normative expectations of the syntax of English.

While the phonetic features of the pivot construction are quite different from abrupt-joins, certain similarities can be identified between the phonetic design of pivot constructions and increments (grammatically fitted continuations of a TCU following a point of possible syntactic, phonetic, and pragmatic completion). In both pivot constructions and increments, features of pitch, loudness, and articulation rate figure in marking out the coherence of each subsequent element with what preceded it. In the case of the pivot constructions, these phonetic features are among those which mark out the fittedness of the pivot element to the pre-pivot, and of the post-pivot to the pivot. Likewise, these features are among those which mark out the fittedness of increments to their host TCUs (see especially Walker 2004a on this aspect of increments).

The analytic treatment of the phonetic design of talk is treated as a criterial feature of the practice, emphasizing that a range of resources (including phonetics and syntax) can usefully be taken into account in conducting analysis (this is also exemplified by Couper-Kuhlen 2003; Local & Walker 2004; Ogden et al. 2004). It seems plausible that there might be occasions where some stretch of talk may appear (e.g. on a transcript) to involve a pivot, but on encountering the audio it becomes obvious—as a result of the phonetic design of the talk—that there is in fact no pivot. However, if both phonetic and grammatical resources are taken seriously at all stages of analysis such errors can be avoided and, moreover, the analyst can deal with features of linguistic design, be they grammatical or phonetic, in a way which reflects the simultaneity with which they were deployed by the participants.

The identification of a practice through which speakers produce talk which has simultaneous leftwards and rightwards interpretation indicates the apparent grammatical well-formedness of constructions which might otherwise be deemed as ungrammatical. That these constructions are, in some sense at least, well-formed is suggested by participants' ability to respond to these constructions unproblematically: there are no cases of other-initiated repair— e.g. “what?” “huh?” “sorry?” —following turns built with pivots, which would be one kind of evidence for problems in their interpretation. To that extent, these constructions also say something about the online parsing of speech by language users, and particularly about the temporal window which must be involved. To understand a construction involving a pivot, its hearer apparently must use a temporal window which is sufficiently large to encompass a whole unit of talk (i.e. the [pre-pivot]+[pivot]). When that temporal window shifts, its new position must overlap with the old one enough to provide for certain items, i.e. the pivot, to be interpreted twice, as it were: once as part of the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] unit, and once as part of the [pivot]+[post-pivot] unit. If the temporal windows did not overlap in this way, it would surely be impossible to make sense of constructions involving pivots: either the pre-pivot or the post-pivot would be left dangling.

Given the range of phonetic parameters implicated in this practice (pitch, loudness, articulation rate, and certain articulatory features), it emphasizes a point made elsewhere: that a separation of phonetic parameters into ‘segmental’ and ‘suprasegmental’ domains may be an essentially arbitrary one, and not detectable in the deployment of phonetic resources by participants engaged in talk-in-interaction (see also Curl 2004; Curl, Local, & Walker in press; Local & Walker 2004, 2005).

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## Notes

1 Providing written records of spoken material necessarily involves selectivity. Here I give only relatively systematized presentation transcriptions, derived from more detailed working transcriptions (Ball & Local 1996; Kelly & Local 1989a,b). They are prepared in such a way as to balance readability and detail, and to reflect aspects of the sequential organisation of the talk. Turns at talk run down the page with the speaker identified at the left hand edge. The onset of overlapping talk is indicated by left-hand square brackets, “[”]; the end of overlap may be indicated by right-hand square brackets, “]”. Silences are measured in seconds and enclosed in parentheses, e.g. (0.2); a period in parentheses indicates a silence of less than one tenth of a second (100 ms). Audible breathing is indicated by “h”, with each “h” indicating one tenth of a second (100 ms); audible inbreathing is indicated by “h”, or sequences of “h”, preceded by “.”: .hhh. A hyphen, “-”, indicates oral or glottal ‘cut-off’. A colon, “:”, indicates the sustention of sound: the more colons, the longer the sound. Where descriptions are provided, these are placed in double parentheses and italicized, ((*like this*)).

2 For a more thorough-going account of the phonetic features of transition relevance, see e.g. Local et al. 1986; Wells & Macfarlane 1998; Wells & Peppé 1996.

3 I am concerned here only with pivots which lead up to a point of possible grammatical completion: there may be other kinds of pivot. Schegloff (1979: 275) describes “DON’T SAY THAT I’m exa-just say that I’m a liar.” incorporates a pivot. However, the pivot—“j” in Schegloff’s description—does not satisfy the criteria for inclusion in the current data-set, as it does not represent a point of possible syntactic and pragmatic completion. “Pivot” is being used here to refer specifically to talk which simultaneously constitutes the end of one syntactically possible complete unit and the beginning of another, and which exhibits certain phonetic features.

4 The terms “pre-pivot”, “pivot”, and “post-pivot” are *post hoc* analytic terms. They should not be taken as a claim regarding speaker’s planning of utterances. For instance, there is no claim that what becomes a pre-pivot by virtue of a turn’s development is deployed as a pre-pivot at its point of production.

5 Although this division is convenient for discursive purposes, it is worth emphasizing that the analysis of interactional aspects of the talk on the one hand and its phonetic design on the other is carried out in parallel rather than serially. This is one outcome of a belief that phonetic design and function in interaction are inextricably linked and cannot be usefully separated out. See Local and Walker (2005).

6 Curl (2004); Local (2004, 2005); Local & Walker (2004, 2005); Ogden (2004) and Walker (2004a) provide a representative sample of recent work involving a similar combination of techniques.

7 It should be noted that, while each case exhibits at least one of these characteristics, not all cases exhibit all of these characteristics.

8 Whether the pivot is in the pitch trajectory of the pre-pivot is decided on the basis of auditory analysis, supported by inspection of  $F_0$  traces. It is not based on the running of some algorithm on the speech sample, for instance.

9 A foot is a stressed syllable and all unstressed syllables which follow it, up to but not including the next stressed syllable. The higher the fps measure, the greater the articulation rate, i.e. the faster the talk.

10 There is a kind of syntactically intermediate class of instances, where the candidate pivot could be segmented one way, but not the other, without making anything ungrammatical. An example is shown in Fragment 6. The candidate pivot, “everybody tells me”, could be given syntactic interpretation with only what precedes it, without making anything ungrammatical: [that's what everybody tells me][he's really quiet]. However, giving the pivot syntactic interpretation with what follows it would result in something being ungrammatical: [\*that's what][everybody tells me he's really quiet].

11 There is only one instance in the current data-set where the tum built with the pivot is not engaged in enquiring, assessing, or reporting:

Rahman.B.1.12-022s; PIV008

*((Ida has called Jenny to tell her that Ida's new furniture has arrived at a local department store))*

1 Ida: I've just rung to te- eh tell you (0.3) uh the things  
2 have arrived from Barker and Stonehou[se  
3 Jen: [oh:::::  
4 (.)  
5 Jen: o[h can I come round [hh  
6 Ida: [ehm [ye[s please that's] what  
7 Jen: [hah hah ha ha ]  
8 Ida: **I want** you to come rou:n:d  
9 Jen: I'm just having tea now [um:  
10 Ida: [no well yo[u have]  
11 Jen: [is Des] home  
12 Ida: yes he's he[re  
13 Jen: [((cough))

The pivot delivers Ida very precisely into the clear following Jenny's laughter (line 7), allowing the production of the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex in the clear. A possible explanation for this case, then, is that pivots are available as a practice for the resolution of overlap (cf. Schegloff 1987b), as well as for the construction of the kinds of tums described in Section 5. However, resolving overlap is not the only work done by the pivot: the pivot also allows Ida to produce talk which is plausibly some version of that talk to which “the things have arrived from Barker and Stonehouse” was heading, but which was derailed by Jenny's FPP enquiry: “can I come rou:n:d” (line 5). (Ida's aborted start-up at line 7, coincident with Jenny's own start-up, supports the view that Ida may have talk still to produce.) Jenny's FPP having been dealt with (“yes please”, line 6), Ida is in a position now to move away from the adjacency pair, and she does so with a pivot, getting into talk which stands alone and which is not contingent on Jenny's FPP having been issued: “I want you to come round” (line 8). (Note that Ida does recycle “come round” from Jenny's talk which shows attendance to Jenny's talk, while simultaneously moving away from it in terms of sequential organisation.) In the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex Ida displays her desire for Jenny to visit, irrespective of her (Jenny's) prior request to do so.

12 Cases where one action is implemented by the [pre-pivot]+[pivot] complex and another by the [pivot]+[post-pivot] complex are discussed in section 5.4.

13 It seems legitimate to consider Emma's talk as forming an account rather than simply a report as it is triggered by Lottie's “I was just gonna call you” (line 4): presumably Lottie was going to call Emma because Emma had not called her first.

14 An instance of a second assessment can be found in line 4 of Fragment 6, though in that particular case the agreement token (“yeah”) precedes the confirmation (“he's okay”).

15 Indeed, it may be the case that, like Joy in Fragment 9, Ava has access to the information required to respond to the enquiries from a previous interaction.

## Appendix

Below are  $F_0$  traces and speech-pressure waveforms for all instances of pivot constructions presented in this article where the sound quality permits reliable continuous  $F_0$  extraction. The y-axis represents the upper and lower limits of the speaker's pitch range, established on the basis of  $F_0$  measures for one minute of representative conversational speech, and is scaled logarithmically.

[file: walker-app1.eps]

[file: walker-app2.eps]

[file: walker-app3.eps]

[file: walker-app4.eps]

[file: walker-app5.eps]

[file: walker-app6.eps]

[file: walker-app7.eps]

[file: walker-app8.eps]

## **Captions**

Figure 1: Labelled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 2

(figure in file walker-figure1.eps)

## **Appendix captions**

For file walker-app1.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 5 and 7

For file walker-app2.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 6

For file walker-app3.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 8

For file walker-app4.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 10

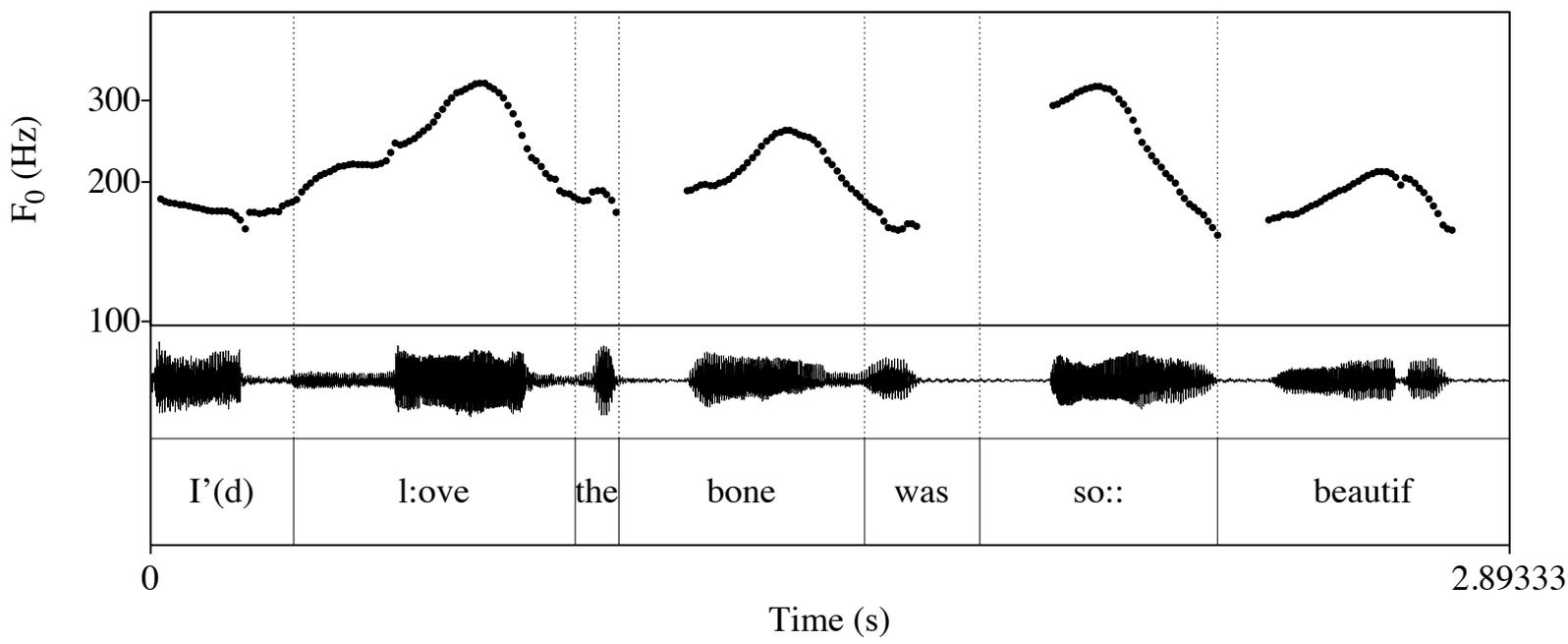
For file walker-app5.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 11

For file walker-app6.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 12

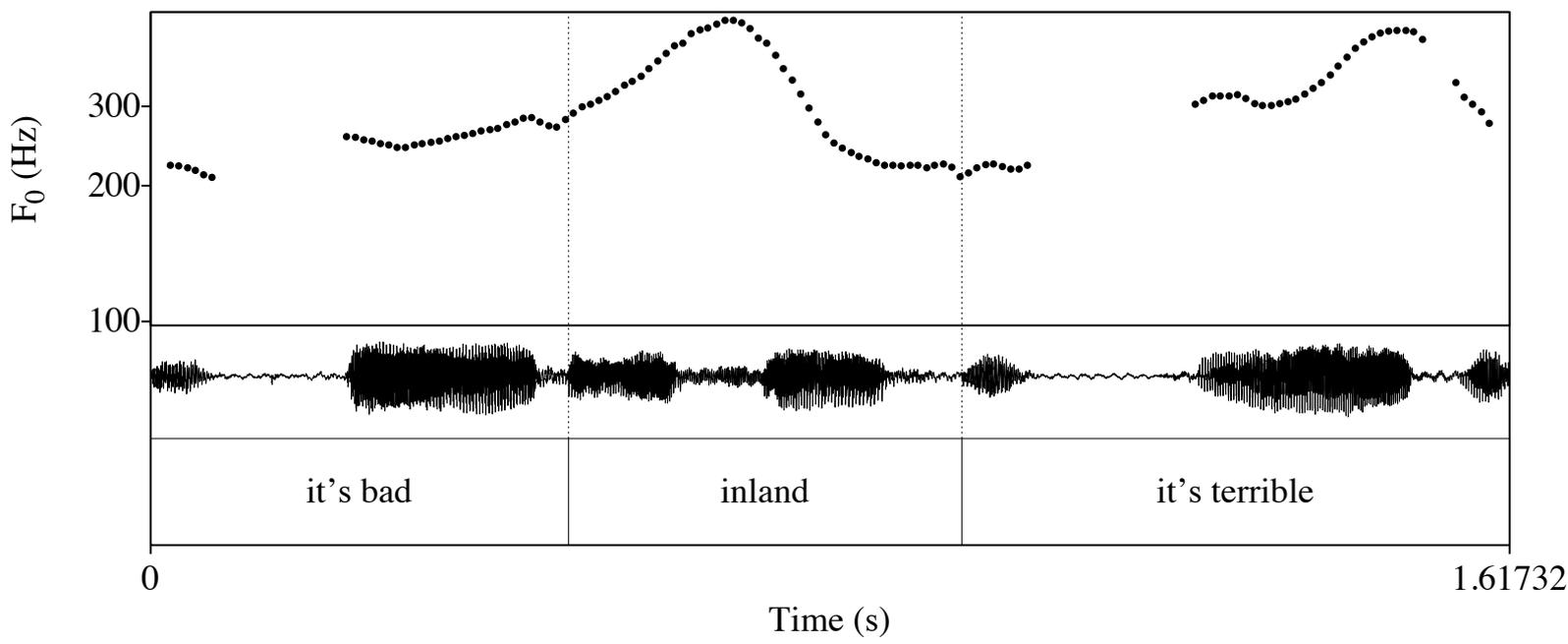
For file walker-app7.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in Fragment 13

For file walker-app8.eps: Labeled speech-pressure waveform and  $F_0$  trace of part of the tum built with a pivot in footnote 11.

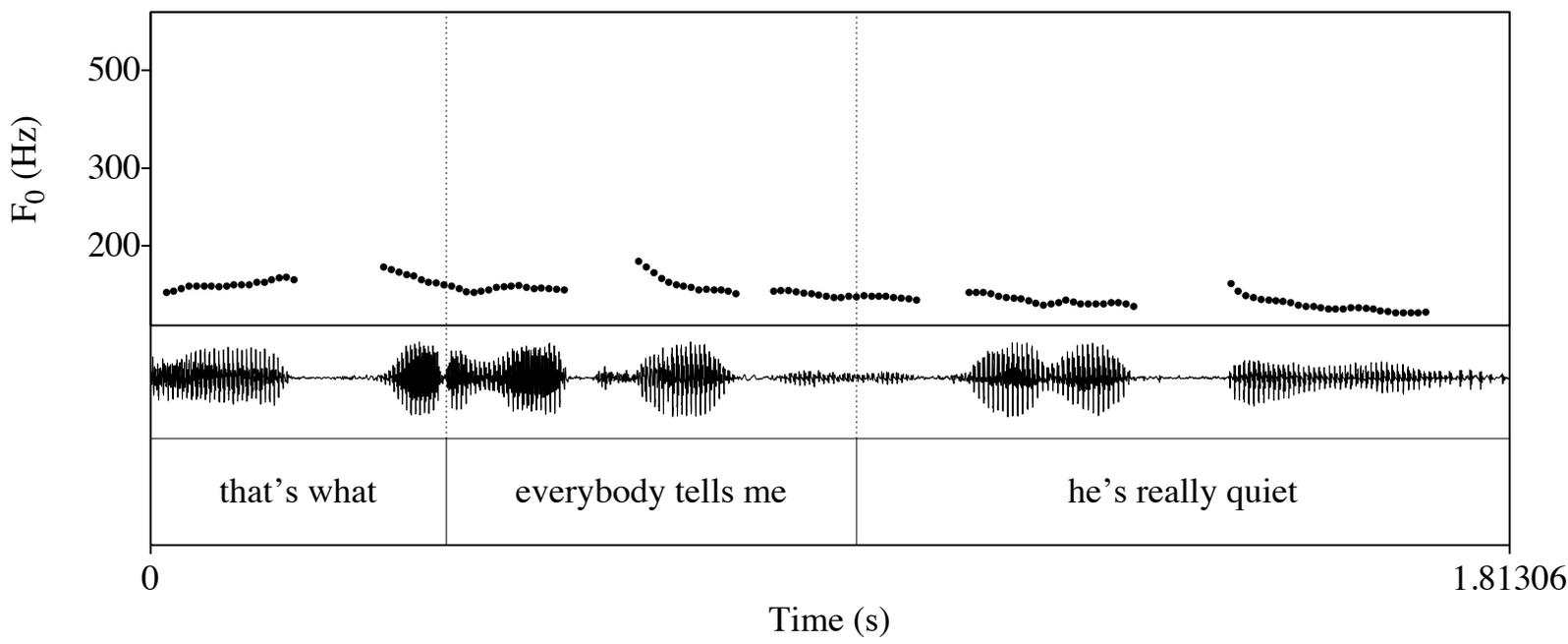
Figure(s)



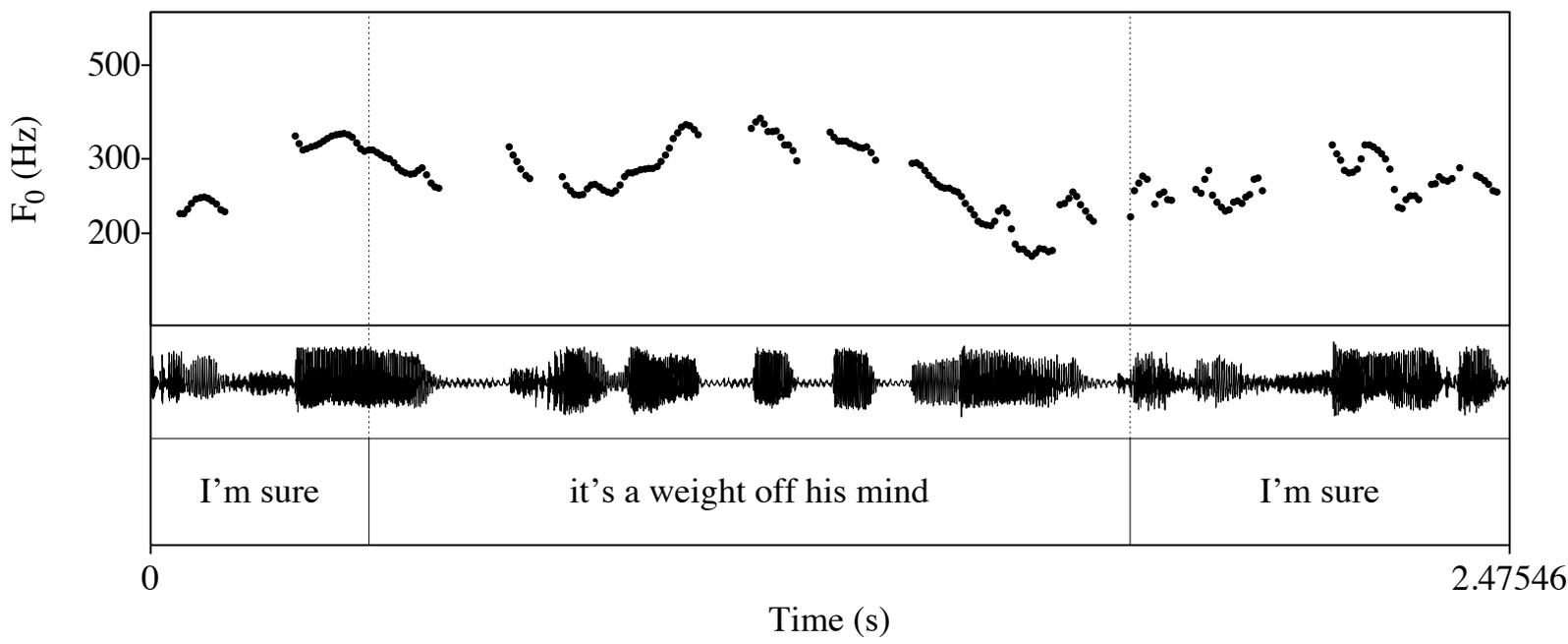
Figure(s)



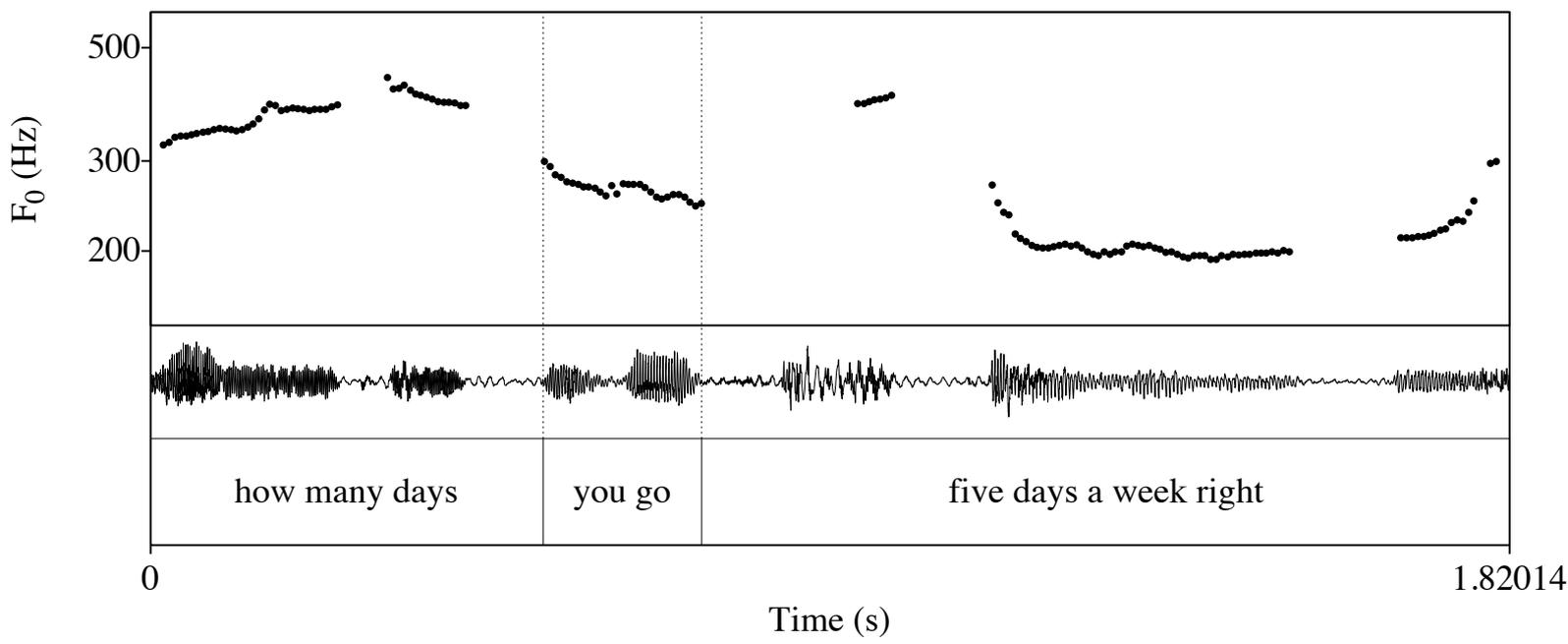
Figure(s)



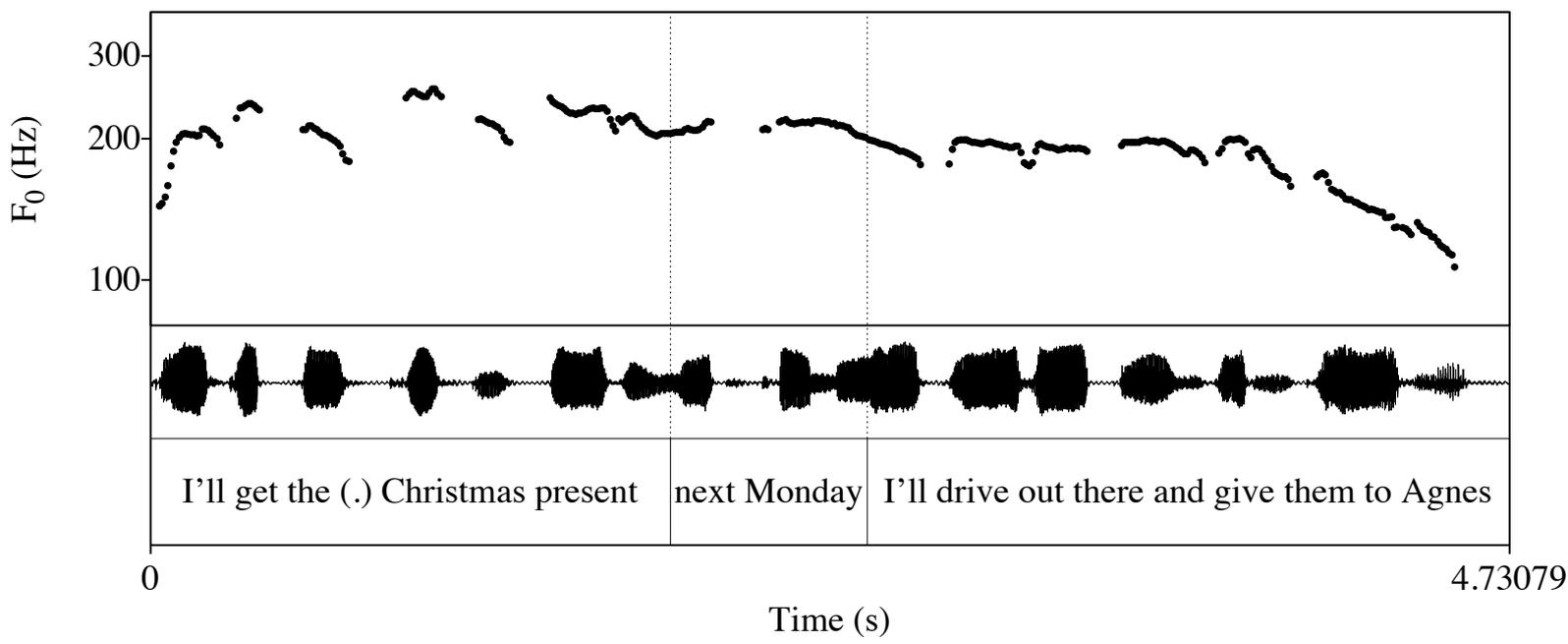
Figure(s)



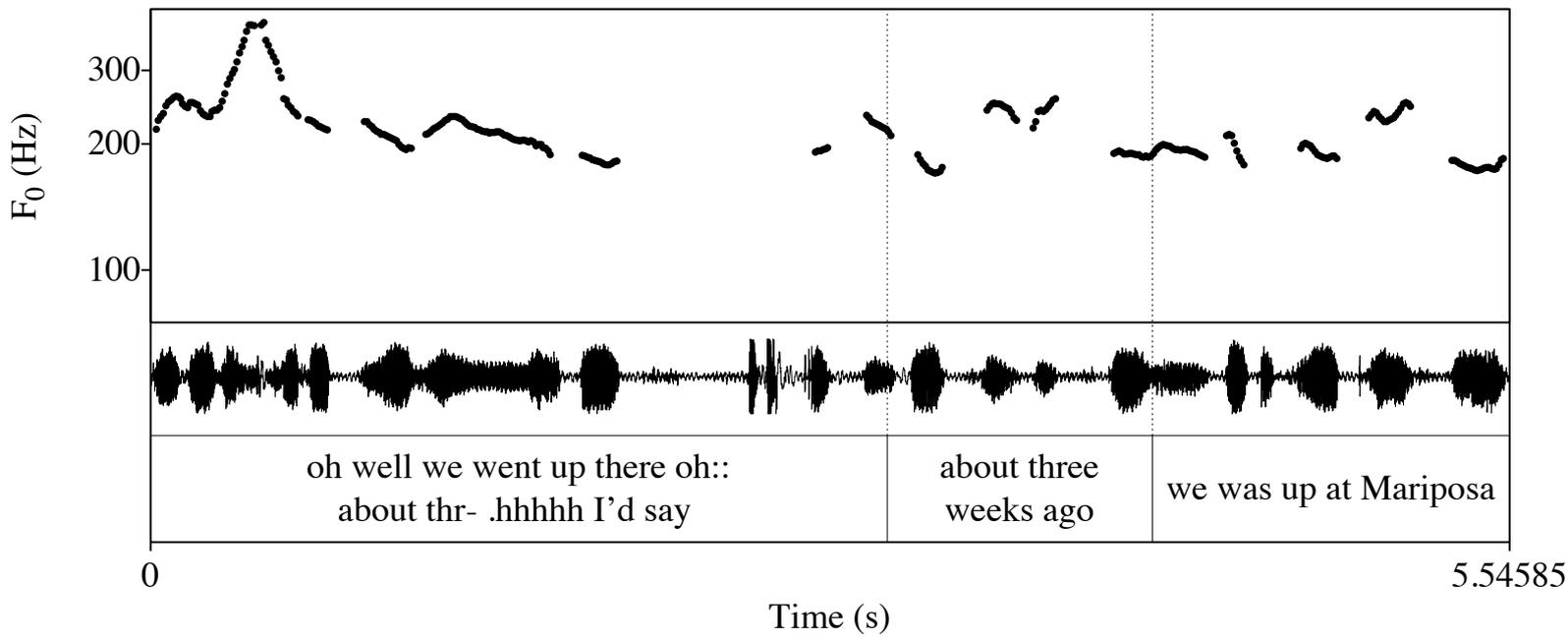
Figure(s)



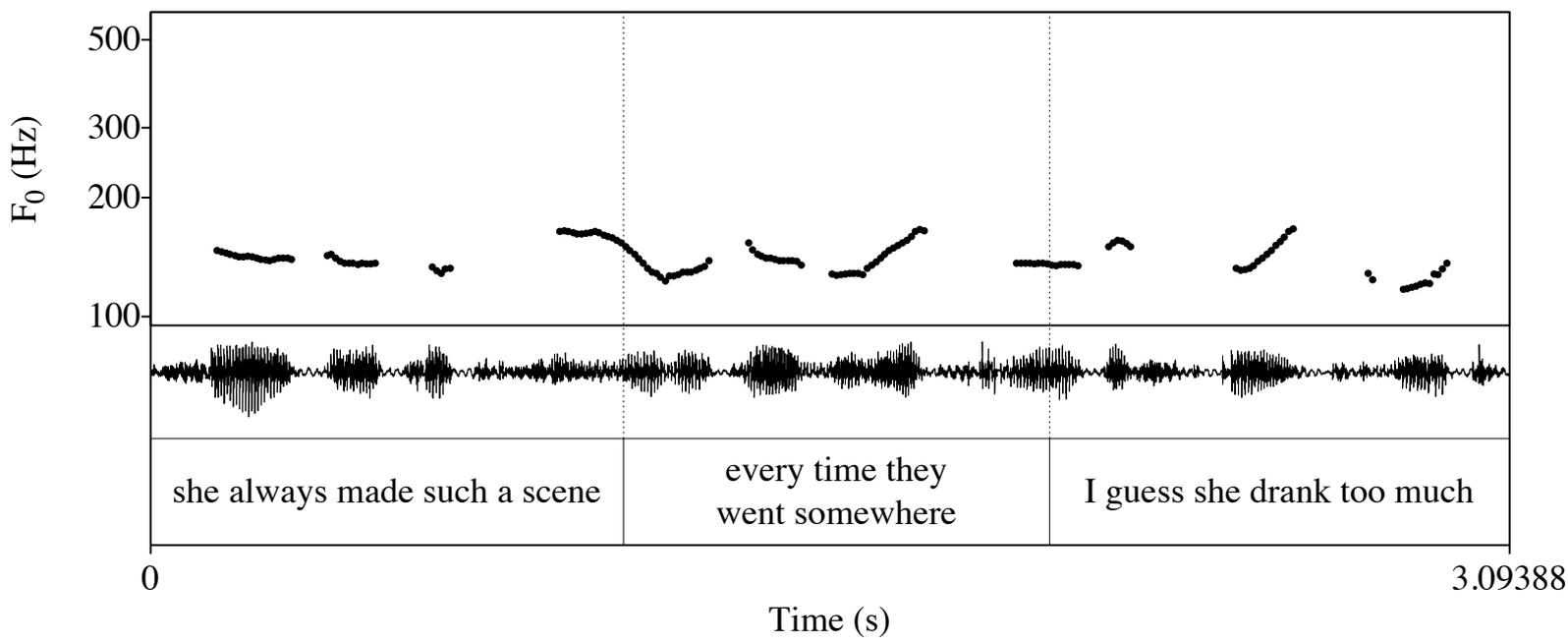
Figure(s)



Figure(s)



Figure(s)



Figure(s)

