ORIENTING TO TOPIC IN CLINICAL DISCOURSE ELICITATION
OF EVERYDAY CONVERSATION

A Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Linguistics

By

Marissa Joanne Fond, M.S.

Washington, DC
April 3, 2013
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ORIENTING TO TOPIC IN CLINICAL DISCOURSE ELICITATION
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Marissa J. Fond, M.S.

Thesis Advisor: Heidi E. Hamilton, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Talking topically, as it is understood intuitively and evoked metadiscursively, requires constructing an intersubjective orientation to talk that must be continually renewed. Analysis of interactants’ ability to orient to topic emergence provides evidence of what is achieved in interaction, as well as why conversational coordination can lapse (Gumperz 1982), resulting in disorientation.

Examination of topic emergence is particularly effective for characterizing the disoriented discourse that often follows from acquired brain injury (Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005), as such discourse-pragmatic impairments are not easily delineated by standard speech-language pathology testing (e.g., of articulation, syntactic complexity, naming); further, the most suitable way to evaluate discourse-pragmatic impairments is through analysis of naturally occurring, dyadic everyday conversation (Cummings 2009). However, the practice of eliciting this everyday conversation presents an inherent contradiction: the intrinsic constraints, goals, and participant roles of clinical discourse elicitation activities used to produce samples of eliciters’ talk are in conflict with the less constrained, more symmetrical features of the everyday conversation activity type sought (Hamilton 1994).

In this dissertation, I first conceptualize the intuitive notion of topic through analysis of a corpus of naturally occurring conversations among peers, incorporating attention to intersubjective concepts, jointly appreciated salient reasons for talk and interaction, and control of the emergence of talk. I then employ this topic framework to examine three types of clinical
elicitation of everyday conversation (participant-managed collection, unstructured interviewing, and clinical protocol), represented in three corpora comprised of speakers with different neurological disorders that commonly result in discourse-pragmatic impairments (stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, and traumatic brain injury).

The analyses demonstrate that the contrasting patterns of topic emergence in the three clinical discourse elicitation activity types reconstruct and highlight the institutional roles, constraints, and goals in each, particularly regarding pragmatic intersubjectivity of knowledge; understanding of the underlying expectations of the interaction, or frame (e.g., Goffman 1974; Tannen 1993); and levels of control that interactants claimed and surrendered throughout. Thus, the resulting discourse samples manifest more features of asymmetrical institutional interaction than of everyday conversation. This finding has implications for the practice of clinical discourse elicitation and the subsequent evaluation and textualization of discourse-pragmatic impairment.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my distinct pleasure to take this all-too-rare opportunity to acknowledge and thank those who have influenced this dissertation and the years of education and experiences that preceded its writing.

First, I want to thank my mentor, Dr. Heidi Hamilton. It has been a privilege to have had the benefit of her attention and guidance throughout every stage and every aspect of my academic life in the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown, and I feel very fortunate to have had my approach to linguistics shaped by her influence. She demonstrates – through her explicit instruction and with her good example – how to think incisively and creatively, write with precision as well as art, teach with sensitivity and generosity, and engage actively with the field of our training while considering our responsibilities beyond its boundaries. I value my time as her student more than I can express, and I look forward to remaining her student always.

Next I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Pamela Saunders, with whom I have worked for these past three years. I appreciate the time and space she made for me in her life as a sociolinguist in the Department of Neurology as she skillfully counseled me throughout my final years of graduate school, providing sound advice and insightful perspective. I am also equally grateful for the opportunity to have collaborated with her on conference panels focused on language and health for the American Association for Applied Linguistics annual meetings. These endeavors, and the colleagues I have met as a result, have enhanced my personal and professional life considerably and will continue to do so.

I also want to thank my committee member, Dr. Natalie Schilling, whose classes in the Department of Linguistics first introduced me to the field of sociolinguistics early on in my graduate education. It has been an honor for me to have benefitted from her keen insights and
expert scholarship, in those classes years ago and in her engagement with my subsequent work more recently. And her comments on this dissertation – offered with generosity and in a spirit of collegiality that I hope to emulate – have made it much stronger.

Finally, I want to thank Dr. Deborah Schiffrin. Her point of view and her guidance were important to the inception of this project, and her comments on my orientation to the idea of topic have been essential to me. And in a broader sense, she continues to mentor me as I engage with her scholarship anew upon each reading. Her work offers approaches to discourse that are original and irreplaceable, and her writing imparts the joy of studying discourse and the great value in doing so. Her profound influence on my thinking is evidenced, I believe, throughout my dissertation, and it will always be present and clear in any work that I do.

In addition to my committee, other professors and colleagues have been influential in my education at Georgetown, and I would like to acknowledge them. I thank Dr. Paul Portner for his role in my development as a well-rounded linguist, and the time and careful attention that he brought to the work that I produced for his classes and tutorials. I thank Dr. Mark Sicoli for his astute comments on portions of my work presented at the American Anthropological Association 2012 meeting. I also want to thank Dean Sue Lorenson and Dr. Alison Mackey for directing the Introduction to Language teams of instructors as we worked to improve the course itself and our individual teaching practices. I value the opportunities I had, through this course, to see the field of linguistics with fresh eyes each semester; I also thank my exceptional co-instructors and talented students. In the Department of Linguistics office, I greatly appreciate Manela Diez and Jennifer Brusstar for making everything run seamlessly. I especially want to thank Erin Esch for so expertly guiding me – and so many others, simultaneously – through the completion of each phase of the degree. And finally, I am indebted to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and
the Department of Linguistics for their financial support, the significance of which I cannot overstate.

I have been fortunate to work closely with advisors and colleagues outside of Georgetown as well, and I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ana López-Sánchez, Dr. Kristine Lundgren, and Dr. Yuling Pan for their distinct professional and personal influences on my life in linguistics. I especially thank Dr. Jill de Villiers for introducing me to the universe of language research, showing me the delight in it, and encouraging my future study.

I am deeply indebted to another group of colleagues who have taught me one of the most important values that I have learned in graduate school. I thank the developers and disseminators of, and contributors to, the publicly available corpora that I drew upon in order to conduct my research. From the TalkBank corpus, I thank Dr. Brian MacWhinney, Dr. John Du Bois, Dr. Mary Oelschlaeger, Dr. Lyn Turkstra, and their collaborators; from the Carolinas Conversations Collection, I thank Dr. Boyd Davis and her collaborators. These senior scholars represent admirable examples of expert research and scholarship with extensive publication records that demonstrate their influence; they are also models of collaborative research and service in a climate that does not always directly reward such generosity. I take away from their example the conviction that I have the responsibility, throughout whatever scholarly life I build, to be equally open and generous with those in my profession. Also, many thanks are due to the participants in this research, who have given so freely and completely of themselves so that all may learn from them and from their experiences.

My friends, who are also impressive colleagues, have challenged me with their energy and intelligence, and made my life in DC richer than I had thought it could be. First, I thank friends who were a year or more ahead of me in our graduate program; I have always appreciated
their example, and their cheerful advice has been invaluable: Anna Marie Trester, Ashley Fidler, Aubrey Logan-Terry, Cala Zubair, Inge Stockburger, Jackie Jia Lou, Jong Un Park, Mika Hama, Rebecca Rubin Damari, and Rebecca Sachs. I thank friends of mine from the earliest days of graduate school whose influence and support have been substantial: Jermay Reynolds, Leslie Cochrane, Michelle Kalinski, Motoko Takada, and Sonia Checchia. And I appreciate the companionship and kindness of the friends I have made since: Amelia Tseng, Daniel Ginsberg, Jessi Grieser, Julie Lake, Kaitlyn Tagarelli, Luke Amoroso, Pat Callier, and Vitaly Nikolaev. And finally, I warmly acknowledge the members of my loosely defined dissertation group; the conversations that were incited by questions in linguistics and developed in every possible additional direction have been very precious to me. Thank you to Anastasia Nylund, Blake Howald, Kerstin Sondermann, Natalia Jacobsen, and Sheena Shah.

My family has always been an unwavering source of encouragement. I thank Elsie Kluchar and Beatrice Fond for their examples of how to do one’s best, with fortitude and grace, when confronted with any challenge. I am very grateful to Aaron Fond and Elizabeth Molacek for their inspiration, generosity, and cheer as we observe the milestones in our family life and in our academic lives. I am very proud to have been traveling with two impressive and driven companions on our routes to the PhD. Finally, I thank Diane Fond and Barry Fond. These pages – any pages – are too small a space to express how deeply I love and admire them, how completely I trust them, and how much I owe them.

Writing this dissertation has illuminated the vastness of all that I, as a linguist, do not yet know. And reflecting on this dissertation has reminded me of my certainty that I do not know who I would be, or what I would accomplish, without my family. I dedicate my work to them.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 ORIENTATION

Every moment of interaction engages the process of locating oneself – physically, mentally, emotionally, socially – with respect to another. Consider the following very short representation of a sliver of elicited and recorded interaction, in which two women attempt to accomplish this. The two women, whom I call Lily and Rose, are in the middle of a conversation.¹

Excerpt 1.1

1   Lily: What’s your degree gonna be in?
2   Rose: Um- communicative disorders.
3   Lily: Oh okay.
4   Rose: ((nods))
5   And I guess uh I- well my passion is in brain- the brain,
6   um so I- I work in the Dumman for brain imaging.
7   Um and it’s really neat I- I trace the amygdala (.)
8   The emotional part of the brain, like the fear center.
9   Lily: Mhm.
10  Rose: Um today I just had one class,
11  um I finished up with my yoga class.

Devoid of any additional background, the exchange may seem unremarkable, if a bit sedate. To review the sequence of actions simply, Lily poses a question to Rose, which Rose answers directly. Receipt and evaluation of this information by Lily is followed by Rose’s elaboration on her answer, to which Lily responds with a backchannel. This is followed by a statement from Rose that appears to diverge somewhat from the content of the previous turns, though the mention of class in line (10) has conceptual links to degree (Sacks 1995; Chafe 1987; 1994).

¹ A longer excerpt that includes this brief segment is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
The provision of more information about this segment will enrich an understanding of these turns, and of how Lily and Rose are orienting to the emergent interaction. To begin with a brief description of the interactants, Lily is a speech-language pathologist with many years of experience in research and clinical practice; Rose is a university undergraduate student who suffered a traumatic brain injury over a year prior to the date of this interaction. Thus, Rose’s disclosure that she is studying *communicative disorders* becomes more interesting as an object of analysis; this is a concept that Rose and Lily could be expected to share given their personal experiences and their knowledge of each other. But Lily does not display, in her brief response (*Oh okay*), any particular recognition of the concept of *communicative disorders* or manipulate it to build rapport with Rose, despite the fact that Rose is a student in Lily’s own professional field. As Rose adds more information, hyperexplaining (Erickson and Shultz 1982) after Lily’s brief response, she offers additional concepts for Lily’s appreciation, such as her interest in the brain and the name of the institution where she works; the brain is Lily’s own sub-specialty. But again, Lily responds with a minimal backchannel urging Rose to continue talking (*Mhm*). Rose, then, abandons her talk about communication disorders and the brain.

Given this knowledge about the two interactants, Lily’s turns in this short segment appear marked; one might wonder why Lily did not share, through her talk, more of an appreciation for or recognition of the concepts that Rose had to have anticipated would be intersubjective. Attention to these features of discourse – concepts that are the intersubjective objects of talk, shared appreciation of the point of the introduction and manipulation of these concepts – forms the basis of *topic*, the complex but intuitive metadiscursive notion that encapsulates one of the ways that interactants orient to interaction with one another. Here, in this excerpt, there seems to be some subtle disorientation to the emergence of topic.
Returning to Lily and Rose, thus far some facets of who they are have been discussed, so let us continue with the question of what brought them to the moment of having this conversation. They are talking together because Lily is in the process of eliciting a sample of discourse, in particular a representation of how Rose participates in “everyday conversation.” For people with traumatic brain injuries, or those with other acquired brain injuries of diverse etiologies resulting in cognitive communication disorders, the ability to communicate and interact in this most basic of interpersonal encounters can be compromised. Thus, the need to diagnose, treat, and study these potential impairments is great. To do so, however, it is necessary to gather data; in other words, one must obtain a sample of everyday conversation.

Cummings (2009), who writes extensively on communication disorders and resultant interactional impairments, highlights the importance of everyday conversation as a valid source of analytical and clinical insights:

The skills that are needed to monitor a listener’s state of understanding in conversation and reformulate a message when a lack of comprehension occurs can only be adequately examined in the interactional to and fro of dyadic conversation. Conversational exchanges are really the only naturalistic context in which a speaker’s ability to represent shared background knowledge within the presuppositions of an utterance can be examined. (2009, 188, emphasis mine)

While she is referring to specific skills and abilities, the significance of everyday conversation has been recognized by language researchers and clinicians looking to answer diverse questions about how interactants relate to one another though language. However, the goal of eliciting everyday conversation leaves one with the paradox of eliciting interaction meant to be natural, and the thorny questions of how to characterize the language that results, in terms of both the elicitation as an activity and the nature of any suspected communication impairment.

This brief excerpt of the interaction between Lily and Rose provides a preview of some of the questions engaged with in this dissertation. In the sections that follow in this introductory
chapter, I outline the two main themes, which inform each other throughout the chapters ahead. First, I describe the primacy and importance of topic as a conceptual framework that interactants and analysts alike draw upon to understand emergent conversation. As Gumperz phrased the issue, analysis of interactants’ ability to orient to topic, by maintaining it and by negotiating changes, “yields empirical evidence about what is achieved” in interaction, as well as “evidence of breakdowns in conversational coordination” (1982, 6). Attention to breakdowns, or what I refer to as disorientation, is particularly relevant in Lily and Rose’s exchange above, and as it unfolds. Second, I discuss the activity type that I refer to as clinical discourse elicitation, specifically the elicitation of samples of everyday conversation from individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders. Topic analysis can be a useful analytical framework to evaluate the discourse of the interactants involved in the elicitation, and it also provides a way to examine the practice of elicitation with a critical eye.

In the next sections, I provide more detailed background on these themes. I turn first to topic, and then to clinical discourse elicitation.

1.2 Topic and Everyday Conversation

Erickson (1982) noted that the English word topic has its roots in the Greek topos, or place, and the etymology illuminates the essence of this idea: that topic is a way that interlocutors align themselves with one another through their use of language to co-create an abstract and transitory place to interact. Talking topically requires constant situating of oneself and others in physical and mental space, constructing an intersubjective orientation to place that needs to be renewed continually as the topic opens, shifts, and closes. A failure to do so – disorientation – can be socially penalizing.
1.2.1 **Topic**

The acknowledgement of the importance of this orientation is so pervasive and intensely intuited that not only is topic a phenomenon that interactants are socialized from childhood to construct in conversation, at first without awareness; but it is also one that has been crystalized into a metapragmatic concept (e.g., Silverstein 1993), used metadiscursively to “talk about talk” (e.g., Craig 1999). Thus, the phenomenon of topic is often an object of discourse, as it is when speakers apologize for deviation from it, using spatial metaphors like *off topic*.

The accessibility of topic, its seeming banality and folksiness, have made it an object of much diverse research. Even a non-exhaustive review of previous work on topic provides a sense of the many different definitions coined and approaches taken, as well as a sense of the very broad scope and potential reaches of the subfield of studies about topic. Topic as an intuitive, pretheoretical notion has an explanatory power that is familiar and easily understood by most people similarly socialized; this makes it a useful and powerful heuristic for investigating other interactional phenomena. However, it is these same characteristics of topic that have given rise to theoretical and operational problems. Distilling the concept of topic into an elegant theory encompassing the myriad linguistic, cognitive, and interactive resources recruited in its construction has proven quite difficult; topic is typically considered either too large or too small an area of study (Ainsworth-Vaughn 1992), “notoriously vague” (Clark 1996, 341) and “notoriously difficult to define” (Perkins, Body, and Parker 1995, 301), and Brown and Yule, in their foundational book on discourse analysis, assert that “formal attempts to identify topics are doomed to failure” (1983, 68). The corollary to this problem is that such theoretical attempts do not seem to capture the true meaning of the pretheoretical concept, and they suffer in the comparison.
What, then, is the way forward? If one places any scholarly value at all in the idea of topic as a metadiscursive, culturally-shared heuristic, then I believe two actions are in order. First, it is necessary to avoid eschewing topic’s intuitive qualities, but instead draw upon them for a data-driven analysis of how topic works in interaction. One can ask what is important about topic as an organizing principle of discourse that interactants draw upon with metadiscursive awareness of its existence and its effects. Second, rather than dismiss topic as a notion that is narrowly defined by culture, we can situate it within culturally-defined contexts of interaction. Schiffrin (1988) noted that while topic is necessarily rooted in the sharing of information or knowledge about content (see also Sacks 1995; Schiffrin 1987), there was a bigger question of topic’s role in social life. The sharing of knowledge, and the way this is achieved, changes in different circumstances. Schiffrin identifies as relevant such questions as how topic is managed in various contexts, how assumptions about what knowledge is accessible and relevant are socially constrained, and how these features are encoded in language and interaction (1988, 15).

1.2.2 ACTIVITY TYPES

To discuss the role of topic in social interaction, and these questions raised by Schiffrin (1988), I construe the mentions of circumstances and context as “activity types” (Levinson 1979; 1992; Gumperz 1982). Simply stated, an activity type is any culturally-recognized activity that is goal oriented, socially constituted, and bounded, with constraints on participants, setting, and most significantly, allowable contributions (Levinson 1992, 69). Investigation of topic necessarily involves the consideration of all of these factors; and the emergence of topic likewise contributes to the construction of an activity as such. In other words, the two co-construct each
other; as Schiffrin phrased it in her discussion of the context-sensitivity of language, “language reflects those contexts because it helps to constitute them” (1987, 5).

To address the linguistic and social-interactional problem of what topic is, it will be useful to develop a principled conceptualization of the idea of topic as it emerges within the activity type of “everyday conversation” (Drew and Heritage 1992) that I briefly introduced above. Everyday conversation is interesting and important for its prosaicness and its familiarity. In our social interactions, we orient ourselves to each other and to our world through language, and conversation is one of our most commonly practiced, pervasive social activities (Goodwin and Duranti 1992) and our most basic resource for conducting social life (Schegloff 1987b). Everyday interaction is a suitable activity type to study in an effort to develop a framework of topic; and from that point, analysis of topic in everyday conversation can enhance our understanding of language and interaction, and how this works in a most fundamental way (Schiffrin 1988).

Everyday conversation is often discussed in the context of the activity with which it contrasts, institutional interaction. It is useful to note the distinction, even though the boundaries between the two are vague and shifting constantly (Sarangi and Roberts 1999). Heritage and Clayman lay out three main characteristics of institutional talk: (1) participants are oriented to goals that are motivated by their institutional identities; (2) there are constraints on what are considered allowable contributions to the interaction; and (3) the interaction involves frameworks and procedures germane to particular institutions (Heritage and Clayman 2010, 34). These characteristics are manifested in conversational practices and phenomena that distinguish

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2 At this point, I want to highlight my mentions of culture as it relates to topic and to activity type. I assume that work on topic must be culturally bounded; indeed, situating topic within context, or activity type, makes this explicit. I do not want to imply that my conceptualization of topic is universal, or a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural metapragmatic concept (see, e.g., Chapter 5 in Scollon and Scollon 2001).

3 Drew and Heritage (1992) also refer to this activity type as “ordinary conversation.”
institutional interactions from everyday conversations, namely the organization and design of
turns at talk, the structure of the interaction as it emerges and as a whole, the participation and
knowledge asymmetries observed, and the emergence of topic.

While investigation of topic is important to a deeper philosophical and psychological
understanding of language in use, including how interactants use notions like topic to make sense
of our linguistic contributions and those of others, it also holds implications for how we
participate in and manipulate social actions. As Schiffrin writes, analysis of topic can elucidate
not only the “linguistic problems” of what discourse is and how it works, but the “social
problems” of what we as individuals and as a society do with language ourselves, and what we
gather from the language of others – “and this is perhaps one of the most basic, underlying goals,
not just of sociolinguistic approaches to discourse, but of sociolinguistics in general” (1988, 15).

1.3 Communication Disorders and Clinical Discourse Elicitation

The activity type of everyday conversation is so integral to social life, and topic is such a
salient metadiscursive concept available to interactants, that any disturbance in one’s facility
with everyday talk can be devastatingly disorienting, particularly if one is aware of a shift from a
former level of competency to a new state of normal in which aspects of conversing prove
challenging or impossible. Communication disorder, specifically acquired cognitive
communication disorder, is inevitably, as Hamilton describes, a very “human problem within
multiple linguistic and social contexts” (1994, 36) and as Crystal (1984) points out, realized in
and through interaction. At this point, I want to provide information on some key concepts,
constructs, and procedures that serve as necessary background on acquired cognitive
communication disorders and related impairments.
1.3.1 ACQUIRED COGNITIVE COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

The phrase *acquired cognitive communication disorders* denotes, through its many modifiers, something rather specific; I will break this description down part by part. A *communication disorder* is, simply, any disturbance in speech and language. This disturbance could be caused by a motor problem, which might result in mechanical problems with swallowing or articulation, or the disturbance could have a neurological cause. Neurological damage can result in difficulty producing or understanding the sounds, meaning, and syntax of one’s native language, as well as difficulty expressing or comprehending thoughts and ideas and how they relate to one another. *Cognitive communication disorders*, therefore, refer not to mechanical challenges but to expression or reception problems that are linked to the complexities of human cognition, such as executive function or language processing. These cognitive communication disorders can be congenital, such as autism spectrum disorders and Down syndrome, or acquired; *acquired cognitive communication disorders* (sometimes called “adult” rather than “acquired”) are disorders that result from a medical condition or external trauma. The range of medical conditions that can result in acquired cognitive communication disorders is wide-ranging and amorphous; they include, for example, cerebrovascular accidents (i.e., strokes), Alzheimer’s disease and dementias of other types, Parkinson’s disease, psychiatric disorders (e.g., schizophrenia), and others. External traumas that cause damage to the brain include closed-head injuries (resulting from, e.g., motor vehicle accidents, falls, assaults, sports-related injuries, combat casualties, and other blunt force traumas) and penetrative head wounds. Thus, individuals with this type of communication disorder experience a change from one characteristic manner of communicating to a different way, though levels of awareness of these
changes vary. One common, yet difficult to identify, change can be characterized in terms of its manifestation in discourse.

1.3.2 DISCOURSE-PRAGMATIC IMPAIRMENTS

Individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders may encounter difficulties with various aspects of language, but certainly, any language impairment will have interactional effects. In the case of some individuals, in fact, interactional challenges may present themselves in the absence of other more discrete linguistic changes. It has been often observed anecdotally that individuals with “pragmatic impairments” (e.g., Perkins 2007) or what I will refer to as discourse-pragmatic impairments,⁴ a term that encompasses various difficulties with the social or interactional use of language above the structural levels of syntax and phonology, graduate from therapeutic rehabilitation (in that they score adequately well on standard language and cognition tests) but continue to suffer difficult and frustrating challenges in everyday life (MacDonald and Johnson 2005). This is because many of their cognitive and communicative impairments are only detectable at some of the most demanding levels of functioning, and outside of a clinical context. In the case of structural or linguistic deficits specifically, those that remain are subtle in that they are often not highlighted by the same tests given to individuals with more profound communication impairments; however, they become very much more apparent in extended interactions, where the memory, attention, inhibition, and organizational

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⁴ The term pragmatic impairment is somewhat controversial, perhaps in keeping with the reputation of pragmatics as the “waste-basket of linguistics” (Mey 2001, 19). While some, particularly in the field of communication disorders and speech-language pathology (e.g., Prutting and Kirchner 1987) consider pragmatic ability an expansive concept that includes paralinguistic features of interaction, others (e.g., Cummings 2008; 2009) take a more classical philosophical view that includes only verbal expression. Because some of the features of how I conceive of topic could be considered outside of the scope of pragmatics, depending on the definition, I use the term discourse-pragmatic impairment to make it clear that I am working with a definition of pragmatics, and discourse, that broadly includes “language in use” (Levinson 1983) and “the use of language in human communication” (Mey 2001).
skills required to maintain coherence and make oneself understood, not to mention understand the communication of others, are taxed.

Coelho, Ylvisaker and Turkstra (2005) concluded, subsequent to a clinically-oriented review of nonstandardized discourse assessments available to clinicians specializing in brain injury diagnosis and rehabilitation, that measures of topic management were particularly effective for characterizing discourse-pragmatic impairments. This is a useful insight, as discourse-pragmatic impairment is indeed a concept that can be difficult to describe and delineate, and as such, many different studies of language in use utilizing many different theories – or proceeding atheoretically – have accumulated in order to flesh out the nascent field (Cummings 2009). Topic encompasses many pragmatic, interactional, and macrosocial phenomena, and so the concept of topic as a framework for examining discourse-pragmatic impairments is promising. However, as discussed briefly above, as certain as we are about our metadiscursive awareness of topic as an intuitive organizing feature of discourse, it is difficult to define and operationalize. This is true not only in the field of communication disorders, but for linguists, sociologists, psychologists, and others interested in language in use. Thus, Cummings’ critique of the field of clinical pragmatics as one that is comprised of “a large, sprawling body of findings that bear little relation to each other and are not even faithful to the pragmatic concepts that they purport to explain” (2009, ix) is perhaps one that requires attention. It reinforces the importance of constructing a topic framework, to make explicit what “normal” topic emergence is before proceeding with exegesis of clinical discourse suspected to be “abnormal.”

However, as could be observed in the interaction between Lily and Rose, the investigation of discourse-pragmatic impairments through attention to topic requires commensurate attention to the activity type of clinical discourse elicitation.
1.3.3 CLINICAL DISCOURSE ELICITATION

In order to diagnose, treat, and understand acquired cognitive communication disorders and discourse-pragmatic impairments, researchers and practitioners (speech-language pathologists, psychologists, neurologists, linguists, and others) have identified the need to set aside, or supplement, standardized clinical testing and experimental paradigms in favor of the close examination of discourse (see e.g., Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005). In the field of speech and language pathology, discourse and pragmatics have been evaluated in patients and research participants for over three decades, and in the intervening years, some characteristics of discourse elicitation have become common. For example, there has been consistent concentration on eliciting various types or genres of discourses, in order to evaluate an individual’s full range of competencies and deficits. As Shadden (1998) extensively describes, four different genres of discourse (narrative retelling, narrative generation, procedural discourse, conversation) contrast with one another in terms of eight variables, including stimulus, cognitive complexity, level of task constraint, instructions, personal relevance, syntactic complexity, anticipated disruption, and personal style. These four elicitation techniques are meant to draw out an individual’s abilities and challenges, in order to help the clinician proceed with treatment or to further scientific study.

Studies and evaluations of sampled discourse fall along a “naturalness-control continuum,” as Ratner and Menn (2000) call it, depending on the research questions and methods under discussion, and there is no single correct method for eliciting language. As they phrase this dilemma, “the more natural a study is, the more it tells you about what people do say (under the circumstances of the particular interaction); but the less it may tell you about what people can say if they need to” (Ratner and Menn 2000, 12; emphasis mine). When Ratner and Menn (2000)
use the phrase “if they need to,” they are promoting the experimental or test environment and constraints as constituting the need engendered within the individual whose language use is under scrutiny; but as Hamilton (1994, 165) has argued, the “need to communicate” is a critical aspect of any evaluation of everyday language, and it cannot be manufactured solely on the researcher’s or clinician’s terms. Thus, it is necessary to clearly examine in any activity type, including the general type of clinical discourse elicitation as well as the sub-types of elicitation techniques, what the goals and constraints are: how “need” is created and managed. Activity type will have an effect on the interaction; thus it should influence topic emergence in the resultant discourse sample. This is one reason why examining topic in a principled way is crucial to understanding not only clinical discourse elicitation, but perhaps more importantly, to understanding what might be considered “aberrant” with regard to discourse.

As Schiffrin points out, “people are socially evaluated and judged depending on their ability to adjust their codes in social circumstances demanding ways of speaking that are relatively decontextualized, i.e. less dependent on shared knowledge, and which make explicit (rather than implicit) their topics” (1988, 15). While she was not alluding to communication disorders specifically, this observation can be construed as applicable to the collection and analysis of discourse data from language-impaired populations; as Shadden, who is indeed talking about communication disorders, states, discourse samples are important because “they will serve as a reference point for determination of treatment goals and procedures (particularly types of task variables), and they will provide baseline data for demonstrating treatment efficacy and for identifying needed changes in treatment focus” (1998, 33). This statement makes the very clear case for the need to critically investigate and understand these important clinical tools and measures.
Therefore, I will integrate the concept of activity type, specifically clinical discourse elicitation, into the discussion of topic and the language elicited from individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders, specifically those resulting from stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, and traumatic brain injury. It is important to examine the processes of clinical discourse elicitation in order to understand what about language and interaction is being measured; any discussion of discourse-pragmatic impairment depends on this understanding. In clinical discourse elicitation there is an inherent conflict in the activity types, between the natural, primordial everyday conversation, and the institutional, goal-oriented elicitation process; this gives rise to a paradox: Can naturalistic conversation be elicited and studied if it is elicited? In the case of clinical discourse elicitation, if a clinician or researcher needs to gather information about an individual’s everyday conversational ability, is everyday conversation reliably the genre of talk elicited in clinical discourse elicitation? Is it possible, practically speaking, to bridge these two activity types? The importance of the answers to these questions lies in many diverse spheres, including the understanding of language and discourse globally, the conceptualization of linguistic and discourse-pragmatic impairment, and the textualization of “disorder.”

Having provided preliminary background on topic, activity types, acquired communication disorders, and clinical discourse elicitation, I turn to a description of the data and analysis methods that I proceed to employ in an examination of the themes of topic and clinical discourse elicitation.

1.4 **Methodology**

While I will provide background on data and methods within each chapter, I offer an overview of the data types and sources (and my motivations for examining them) and a general description of the methodology.
1.4.1 The Data

I examine what I characterize as four distinct discourse elicitation types, three of which are what I have called clinical discourse elicitation. The linguistic data that I draw upon are all recorded dyadic interactions housed in publicly available corpora, all representing attempts to elicit everyday conversation via different methods and for different clinical or research purposes.\(^5\)

To orient the reader to the chapters ahead, I provide general information on the data sets examined in each. In Chapter 3, “Everyday Talk in Interaction: Developing the Topic Framework,” I examine recordings of the most prototypical type of interaction, recorded everyday conversation among adult peers, in order to develop a conceptualization of topic that encompasses the key ways in which this metadiscursive notion functions in this activity type. Recall that because the clinical discourse elicitations are all meant to produce samples of everyday talk, it was important to me to develop a framework of topic by examining the most representative example possible of this activity type.

The next three chapters represent my analyses of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types. Before describing them in turn, I would like to explain two terms that I use throughout these chapters: elicitor and elicitee. In clinical or clinically-oriented research, there is usually an asymmetric relationship between the individual with the communication disorder, who represents the focus of the research, and the clinician or researcher, who is the typical or “normal” communicator\(^6\) with whom the focus of the study interacts in some way. Indeed, this

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\(^5\) For general information on the sources of these corpora compiled in one place, see Appendix A.
\(^6\) I use the term typical interactant, or typical communicator, to indicate a participant in an interaction who has not exhibited, or been diagnosed with, a communication disorder. I want to emphasize that far from serving as an example of perfect, error-free language use, a typical interactant’s contributions will naturally contain many “repairables” or “trouble sources” (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977).
asymmetry is in part produced by the embodiment of these roles and identities (Sarangi and Roberts 1999). However, because this typical participant is sometimes a clinician (e.g., a speech-language pathologist, psychologist, neurologist, etc.) or a researcher, or both, I refer to this person simply as an elicitor, whose role it is to obtain data. In concert with my use of the term elicitor, I refer to the individual(s) with the communication disorder(s) and any other participants as elicitees. I find this to be more accurate, potentially, in that in some cases the individual’s communicative status is not yet defined. What is important, in these cases, is that the individual is of interest to the elicitor for some reason or purpose. Of course, even these terms, elicitor and elicitee, in some sense reinforce the asymmetry between the interactants; they do not mitigate the ascription of professional and “active” roles (elicitor) and lay, “passive” roles (elicitee). Thus, I want to emphasize that throughout these chapters, the utterances of both the elicitor and the elicitee are equally important in any analysis. As Duranti (1986) explains, meaning is created through the mutual dependence between one’s talk and another’s response to it (see also Bakhtin 1981). The two are so intertwined that at times it cannot be determined which interactant is responsible for authoring a given proposition; rather, talk (and specifically topic) is co-constructed. The elicitor and elicitee are both responsible.

Returning to the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, the analyses proceed as follows. In Chapter 4, “Elicitation through Participant-Managed Collection: The Case of Stroke,” the data were collected by conversation analysts, as were the data for Chapter 3, which is why I present this chapter first of the three. The five recorded interactions involve two elicitees; they are a married couple, composed of an individual with aphasia, a cognitive communication disorder resulting from stroke, and his wife, who does not have a communication disorder. What I call participant-managed collection is a clinical discourse elicitation activity that is carried out
in a similar fashion as the collection of everyday talk among peers. Without input or instruction from the elicitor (i.e., the researcher) during the elicitation activity, the elicitees are responsible for the recording of their own interactions. In the second clinical discourse elicitation chapter, Chapter 5, “Elicitation through Unstructured Interviewing: The Case of Alzheimer’s Disease,” the elicitors take part in the conversations. The participants in the ten recorded interactions I examine are all unique dyads, composed of elicitors who are college students, and elicitees who have diagnoses of Alzheimer’s disease (various stages) and life in an assisted living facility. The activity type is what I call unstructured interviewing. There are no formal requirements placed on either participant, beyond a set of prepared prompts that the elicitor may introduce if he or she sees fit during the recorded interaction. In Chapter 6, “Elicitation through Clinical Protocol: The Case of Traumatic Brain Injury,” I examine the most recognizably clinical type of elicitation, what I call clinical protocol. Like unstructured interviewing, this also involves both the elicitor and elicitee in the recorded interaction. In the ten interactions I examine from this corpus, the elicitor is a speech-language pathologist (‘Lily’ in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter), the same in each elicitation, and the elicitees are individuals with traumatic brain injuries. While there are no circumscribed questions to be asked or responded to, there are elicitation-related instructions and constraints that the elicitor aims to follow.

In the table below, I summarize features of the four corpora. I label each one based on the health concern that is its focus and the chapter in which it is discussed. I then list the activity type, or the type of elicitation, followed by the participants in the corpus (i.e., elicitors and elicitees), the number of discrete interactions I examined, and the total number of hours of talk sampled from each corpus (across interactions). I then indicate the type of data available in each
corpus, either audio only (no visual data) or audio and video. This information is discussed and elaborated on in each individual chapter.

Table 1.1. Data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Concern</th>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Elicitor(s)</th>
<th>Elicitee(s)</th>
<th>Unique Interactions</th>
<th>Hours of Talk</th>
<th>Data Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None; typical speakers (Chapter 3)</td>
<td>Recorded “everyday conversation”</td>
<td>None present</td>
<td>24 typical peers</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Audio only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke/aphasia (Chapter 4)</td>
<td>Participant-managed collection</td>
<td>None present</td>
<td>1 individual with aphasia, typical spouse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Audio and video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alzheimer’s disease (Chapter 5)</td>
<td>Unstructured interviewing</td>
<td>10 college students</td>
<td>10 individuals with Alzheimer’s disease</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Audio only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury (Chapter 6)</td>
<td>Clinical protocol</td>
<td>1 speech-language pathologist</td>
<td>10 individuals with traumatic brain injuries</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Audio and video</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, I want to take a moment to discuss my use of pre-existing, publicly available corpora and why I chose this route. In the earlier stages of this study, my plans were slightly different; while I intended to examine topic emergence in interactions involving a participant diagnosed with an acquired discourse-pragmatic impairment, my proposal was to elicit different genres of discourse, including everyday conversation, from a single individual across multiple sessions. I believed that this procedure would allow me some measure of control over the amount and types of data that I would then compare, in keeping with the common clinical practice. I also anticipated that my in-person interaction with the individuals involved would provide me with critical knowledge of the background of the participant’s acquired cognitive communication disorder, and perhaps more importantly, would allow me to probe the participants’ awareness of topic emergence and interpretations of the disorientations on which I
would focus my analyses (see Tannen 2005). As a participant observer, I would be able to draw upon my experience to understand more deeply the behaviors and social actions undertaken by the other participants.

However, finding the aforementioned participants was challenging, as diagnoses of communication disorders are individually identifiable health information and thus protected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy Rule; in practical terms, this meant that it was not permissible to contact an individual with such a diagnosis without written consent from him or her in advance. This situation became an obstacle that I did not anticipate, and so in order to mitigate this access issue, I decided to change the focus of the study slightly and draw upon data from the four corpora outlined above.

This approach had advantages. First of these was that I simply had access to a larger set of data, involving different acquired cognitive communication disorders and utilizing different elicitation techniques. It would have been difficult to have amassed these data individually. Second, and perhaps more compellingly, through these corpora I could examine elicitations that were conducted for purposes unrelated to my interest in topic and clinical discourse elicitation. The primary research endeavors for which these corpora were compiled involved different constraints and different goals than those that I brought to my subsequent analyses. This, I believed, enriched my reflection on these clinical discourse elicitation contexts in some respects, because I had no control over how or why they unfolded as they did. In a sense it allowed me, to paraphrase Sarangi and Roberts, to make the elicitations “strange” – to examine and problematize features of an activity that were not the foci of the individual research programs that produced these corpora (1999, 27). And third, an advantage related to this lack of control

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7 See the final rule published in the Federal Register (2000) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website (http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/) for more information.
8 See Ness (2007) for a more detailed and very useful discussion of HIPAA and research.
was that I found I had fewer preconceived notions of what I expected to learn from these data than I had of data I intended to elicit myself. This way, I encountered questions and developed explanations that I had not anticipated.

This approach inevitably also had disadvantages. While the lack of control offered the advantages I described, it was also a disadvantage, beginning with the formats of the data. Some corpora contained video accompanying the audio, while others did not, and this simple fact constrained my analysis in that I had more information about the interactions in some elicitation types than I did in others. This discrepancy in the format, among other aspects of data collection such as the amount and nature of information released about participants (e.g., diagnostic information, demographics, etc.), the number of participants and unique dyads across corpora, and the length of the interactions in total, allowed me to draw limited comparisons across contexts. Incomplete or inconsistent knowledge on my part was another disadvantage. Because I was not a participant observer in these elicitations, and in fact I did not have any communication with any of the participants, I lost some information that could have validated my analyses; I lacked that source of triangulation. As a result of this lack of knowledge about the participants, I was unable to generate hypotheses about, or draw any conclusions about, acquired cognitive communication disorders or discourse-pragmatic impairments themselves.

Again I emphasize that more detail about each corpus will be forthcoming in its own chapter. However, based on this general description of the data, I will next provide a broad overview of the analytical methods that I employ in subsequent chapters.

1.4.2 Analysis

Gumperz noted that “a single passage can be subjected to multiple forms of analysis” (1982, 6), and Schiffrin (1994) explicitly demonstrates this by examining discourse data through
the use of diverse theoretical frameworks with intellectual roots in a number of disciplines in addition to linguistics. As there is no single method for “doing discourse analysis,” more specifically there is no one way to approach topic and activity types.

My approach in the subsequent chapters draws most significantly on interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and conversation analysis (CA), as well as elements from psychology that are incorporated into these methods. The interactional sociolinguistic method was particularly influential to my thinking across data sets and across chapters; Sarangi and Roberts describe different approaches to the study of talk in workplaces:

The CA approach is drawn on to argue that workplace contexts can only be understood through the fine-grained analysis of talk. The counter argument is that work practices are more than talk and so discourse and conversational analysis need to be embedded within an ethnographic project. Interactional sociolinguistics acts as a bridge builder, combining wider contextual knowledge with linguistic and conversational analysis to illuminate the interpretive processes of interaction. (1999, 13)

While many of the concepts introduced in these analyses draw upon CA traditions, my analyses are also informed by interpretive frameworks that take elements of my knowledge about the interactions into account, with the goal of understanding how interactants create meaning and achieve orientation to topic. As I alluded to in the discussion of the corpora, my analytical approach was also exploratory and partially generated by the data, with two broad notions guiding my focus: the intuitive idea of topic and the concept of clinical discourse elicitation as a set of activity types. I provide further detail about my approaches to each of the corpora in the subsequent chapters.

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9 In so doing, I have conducted my analyses from my own perspective, which includes my interpretations of events and my highlighting of what is important and what is less so. I acknowledge that other perspectives could result in very different analyses and conclusions (see Sarangi and Roberts 1999, 32-33).
1.5 \textbf{Preview of Upcoming Chapters}

This study has two intended audiences: linguists and those interested in the study of language in use, and speech-language pathologists and those committed to clinical research. (A third audience of clinical linguists, researchers who apply linguistic theory to questions in speech-language pathology, bridges the two.) By previewing the upcoming chapters, I hope to orient readers with various backgrounds and perspectives to the organization of the pages ahead, as well as to the stages of the development of the study. Following Chapter 1, “Introduction,” in Chapter 2, “Background: Approaching Topic and Clinical Discourse Elicitation,” I begin with a survey of the vast literature on topic. Because topic is well known and intuitively understood, it is an object of many prior research programs; no discipline can truly count it as its own. Thus, I touch on approaches rooted in linguistics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology to display this diversity. I also review research conducted less about topic as a construct, and more with topic as an analytical tool, in my review of research on topic and communication disorders, from a clinical linguistic and speech-language pathology perspective. This review would be of interest to anyone concerned with topic as a concept and how it has been conceptualized in different ways. Then, to provide additional background, I review the practice of clinical discourse elicitation and the research on this subject, with a nod to activity types and how clinical discourse elicitation fits within that conceptualization of interaction.

In the subsequent four chapters I begin my analyses of topic in various activity types. In Chapter 3, “Everyday Talk in Interaction: Developing the Topic Framework,” I analyze everyday conversation in order to construct my framework of topic. I describe in more detail the data and the analysis methods that I employed in order to develop the framework, and then I explain the resultant framework in depth, with illustrative examples, and conclude with an extended
sequential analysis of a segment of talk. This chapter would be of greatest interest to linguists, more specifically discourse analysts, and does not contain any content related to communication disorders or clinical discourse elicitation.

The next three chapters represent my analyses of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, and roughly follow parallel formats. In Chapter 4, “Elicitation through Participant-Managed Collection: The Case of Stroke,” I begin by providing a brief overview of what stroke is, with particular emphasis on aphasia, the acquired cognitive communication disorder that commonly results. I then describe the corpus of discourse data that I examined for my analysis. Following this background information on the data set, I analyze the emergence of topic in discourse. I break down the clinical discourse elicitation activity type into sub-episodes (see Heritage and Clayman 2010), including setting up the elicitation, the opening turns, the ensuing conversation, and the closing; in this way, I discuss how the sequential unfolding of the activity type interacts with topic emergence. To conclude the chapter, I review the findings and discuss their implications. In the second clinical discourse elicitation chapter, Chapter 5, “Elicitation through Unstructured Interviewing: The Case of Alzheimer’s Disease,” and the third, Chapter 6, “Elicitation through Clinical Protocol: The Case of Traumatic Brain Injury,” I proceed in the same way. My intention in using a parallel format is to better illuminate the differences among them, in terms of the elicitation types themselves and in terms of the nuances of topic. These three chapters would be of interest to applied linguists, and certainly to clinical linguists; they also speak to speech-language pathologists and other clinicians and researchers who are the professionals responsible for working with the individuals who depend on the clinicians’ expertise for diagnosis and remediation. I hope this audience identifies with the challenges of clinical discourse elicitation and can bring to the discussion a clinical perspective that I lack.
Finally, in Chapter 7, “Conclusions,” I begin by reviewing what is important about topic, in itself and as an analytical tool. I then discuss the common threads that could be found in each of the three clinical discourse elicitation activity types, and summarize the ways in which they contrast with one another. Drawing on this summative discussion, I suggest future directions for applied research relating to topic and I offer my thoughts about clinical discourse elicitation as an activity type.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: APPROACHING TOPIC AND CLINICAL DISCOURSE ELICITATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Topic as an area of study is neither new nor obscure. Because topic is a metadiscursive concept that is accessible to interactants, and because it is therefore difficult to ignore topic as a key potential organizing principle of talk and interaction, many have addressed it as a notion that is important to identify, formalize, and in some cases operationalize. But in spite of, or perhaps because of, how intuitively interactants can identify topic and use the term to describe aspects of interaction, it is notoriously difficult to be specific about what topic is (Clark 1996; Perkins, Body, and Parker 1995). This is because topic is a concept that recruits every linguistic feature and every interactional skill in its construction, and there are few if any observable aspects of interaction that would be irrelevant to the notion of topic; however, at the same time, there is no feature, or skill, that defines or delineates a topic in an unambiguous way, at least in spoken language.\(^\text{10}\)

To consider topic a primary and effective framework for evaluating spoken discourse and understanding its structure and function, particularly with the goal of characterizing pragmatic impairment in individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders (Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005), it will be important to sketch out the scope of prior research on topic and understand the different perspectives offered on it. To do so, I will review various approaches to topic that have been influential in how I have oriented myself to this concept. While I divide the approaches into categories to organize the discussion, I want to emphasize that there are many

\(^{10}\) Topic has been addressed with respect to written texts (e.g., Goutsos 1997; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983; Brown and Yule 1983). While this research is relevant and informative to the study of conversation, different questions and problems emerge when working with this genre.
overlaps among them; also, the research reviewed in these sections does not constitute an exhaustive summary, but rather I hope it will provide a sense of the various theoretical orientations to the pretheoretical and intersubjective idea of topic. In addition to social scientific and philosophical approaches, I include a clinical approach at the end of the section to provide background on how topic has been applied as an instrument of investigation in clinical linguistic contexts.

Following the review of research on topic as a concept, I want to provide background on the idea of activity types (Levinson 1992), or the contexts of interaction linked to topic emergence. Arguably it is not possible to have an interaction in which topics are constructed that is not situated within an activity type, and therefore I provide a review of this concept generally and discuss the clinical and research practice of discourse elicitation in particular. While I do not intend to problematize the idea of activity type or attempt to conceptualize it as I do in the case of topic, the review and discussion provides necessary background on the contexts of the analyses in later chapters.

In summary, in this chapter I review some of the foundational literature on topic pertinent to the field of linguistics, which includes research carried out within disciplines as diverse as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and others. I also discuss some of the research in cognitive communication disorders that employs some conceptualization of topic as an analytical tool. Following the discussion of topic, I briefly review the elicitation of clinical linguistic interaction through the lens of activity types. I conclude with a discussion of how these concepts relate to one another, and a look ahead to how I will be applying them in subsequent chapters.
2.2 **Topic**

In this section, I review various approaches to the idea of topic to provide an overview of the field and its diversity and complexity. In that spirit, I begin this discussion with an approach that could be considered fundamental in the field of linguistics. Any investigation of topic that touches on “aboutness” and the role of language in constructing this sense will be better informed by a discussion of sentential topic, or the intersection of “aboutness” and syntactic structure. This approach is the most formal and the most removed from the investigation of the emergence of topic in everyday talk, but it is important to review it to illustrate the breadth of the field of scholarship.

### 2.2.1 Grammatical Approach: Sentential Topic

Though it may seem incompatible with the notion of topic that we understand intuitively and invoke metadiscursively, for researchers concerned with grammar, or syntactic structure, the idea of “aboutness” inherent to topic can be expressed through particular constituents of sentences. This approach, which I call the grammatical approach, is important to note as an example of a way of conceptualizing topic that is quite formal, in contrast to approaches that view topic more holistically. I will review this approach only in brief, because scholars in this school of thought did not make a point of studying language in use, at least in natural interaction; therefore it bears only minimal relation to the approach that I take in this dissertation.

Crystalizing a sense of aboutness in a single sentence was prominently issued by Hockett (1958) who distinguished topic constituents, or what a sentence is about, from comments, or what is said about the topic. These constituents were syntactically governed; in Hockett’s analysis of English, for example, the subject would typically be the topic, and the predicate the comment. The underlying syntactic structure or arrangements of these constituents is also
significant, though there is disagreement on how such rules apply. While for Hockett the subject or agent is the topic, for Halliday (1967), for example, the topic corresponds to the first (i.e., leftmost) element of an English sentence, regardless of the role the element may play. Thus, left dislocation (called *topicalization*) as observed in *A bagel, Joe ate* results in a topic of *bagel* rather than *Joe*.

Lambrecht (1994), however, rejects the idea of topic determined by constituent sequence in favor of a definition of topic that is similar semantically (not syntactically) to a subject of a sentence: “the topic of a sentence is the thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is about” (1994, 118). While this definition, or its spirit, is shared by other linguists, particularly those working on discourse/pragmatic-level problems such as information structure (e.g., Gundel 1988; Reinhart 1980; Vallduvi 1990), the significant feature that I would like to point out about Lambrecht’s definition and other such treatments of topic is that they only apply to the topic of a single sentence, not to a discourse or conversation. Lambrecht and others pointedly restrict their analyses to the level of the sentence, even as these sentences relate to adjacent sentences in a discourse or text, and do not address the idea of topic as something that plays an organizational role in conversation.

This analysis of this type of topic, sentential or grammatical topic, is quite different from the topic of a discourse, conversation, or text. The two distinct approaches share a term (*topic*) and a sense of aboutness that they wish to capture, but otherwise they are concerned with different theoretical questions to the point that it can be misleading to use the same term. While there are connections between sentential approaches to topic and discourse-analytic approaches (see Schiffrin 1992; Strong 2010),¹¹ I will not be pursuing the work of sentential topic any

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further, as I consider it quite a different notion from the type of topic that is the focus of this work. Therefore, I continue the discussion by describing an approach that began to separate the sentential notion of topic from discourse topic.

2.2.2 Interactional Approach: Discourse Topic

In this approach, I introduce work that suggested that the topic of a discourse, whatever the idea of topic may be, is an important construct to study in contrast to sentential topic. What I am calling the interactional approach to topic is perhaps the most amorphous, in that the approaches I review here share elements of cognitive, sociological, and sociolinguistic approaches to topic and would fit within those categories. But I follow the work on sentential topic with this category because this research presented a new point of view on how to study topic; essentially, it considers what happens in interaction, rather than grammar, to be of primary importance to the definition of, and construction of, topic.

I begin with the distinction of the terms topic and discourse topic. Keenan and Schieffelin (1976) recognized that the view of topic as a sentential constituent could not apply to topics of conversation; not only was a conversation made up of more than a single sentence, but topics of conversation require some sustained interaction between at least two individuals. This characterization was so distinct from that of the more pervasive sentential topic approach that they used the phrase discourse topic to differentiate the two. They reject the idea that a topic relates only to the discrete words or sentence spoken or written, and that topic can be identified by a noun phrase constituent of a sentence; instead, they argue that in talk in interaction the topic is essentially the matter that all parties are focused on discussing. In this sense, topic is intersubjective; it is shared in common with all of the participants in an interaction.
However, Keenan and Schieffelin (1976) did not break entirely with previous analyses of topic, in that instead of focusing on a noun phrase that represents the topic of a sentence (as in the sentential approach), they posited that it was in fact a proposition that should be able to encapsulate the topic at any point in a conversation. In other words, for any given section of a discourse, there should be what amounts to a title that can represent the discourse topic at that moment in the emerging interaction. While this proposition-centered analysis has been both supported and extended in other research (e.g., van Dijk 1977) and met with skepticism (e.g., Brown and Yule 1983), its main contribution is an argument for the salience and importance of discourse topic as an alternative way of conceptualizing topic. This is valuable and certainly influential in the study of discourse and interaction, and has been taken up as a basis for other related approaches.12

2.2.3 COGNITIVE APPROACH: ACTIVATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Continuing to focus on topic in discourse, what I call cognitive approaches to topic acknowledge the dynamic nature of language and interaction, in particular as it relates to the emergence of topic; but they highlight how topic is constructed in the individual, private mind, and how psychological processes such as focus and attention relate to topic. While Keenan and Schieffelin (1976) make reference to focus, their perspective on topic was not based in cognitive psychology; researchers taking a cognitive approach, rather, put such concerns at the center of their conceptualization of topic.

In this approach, topic is characterized as a notion that arises from the idea that the activity of one’s mind must be organized in some way; people cannot access all realms of their

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12 Though the idea of topic that I have been discussing and will continue to discuss is properly discourse topic, I will use the term topic in order to maintain the connection to our metadiscursive notion of topic that we use in everyday conversation, and to avoid the impression that discourse topic is somehow a derivative notion based on a more central type of topic.
knowledge, or their physical environment, equally and at the same time or expect their interlocutors to do so. Chafe (1987; 1994; 2003) relates the idea of topic to his model of active and semiactive consciousness, considering an intonation unit or breath unit of talk to be the focus of active consciousness, and topic to be the way in which the semiactive consciousness is organized. This model of consciousness can be analogized to a bulls-eye, where the center is the point of immediate, active consciousness, and the radiating rings represent the semiactive consciousness, which varies in how accessible it is. Chafe defines topic essentially as “an aggregate of coherently related events, states, and referents held together in some form in the speaker’s semiactive consciousness” (1994, 121), holding that certain contributions will be suitably on topic while others will not, depending on where the elements fall within consciousness. Similarly, Reichman (1978) develops a theory of topic that depends on a model similar to active and semiactive consciousness, called context spaces. Brown and Yule (1983, 75) refer to activated features of context, a characterization which is analogous to Chafe’s semiactive consciousness, and elements of Reichman’s context spaces, in the sense that some elements are in focus at a given moment while others are not. However, Brown and Yule discuss this in terms of interpretation, rather than production; this slight difference stems from the scholars’ orientation to the problem of topic and of discourse in general, and in fact both characterizations of activation or focus capture this general idea in complementary ways.

In interaction, as individuals interact and co-construct topics, they bring elements into each other’s consciousness (Chafe 1994), marking these concepts as new or old in accordance with their assumptions about the status of this information in their interlocutors’ minds. Brown and Yule discuss a similar process of sharing knowledge in terms of “presupposition pools” (1983, 79); the speaker must regulate his or her introduction of knowledge in order to fit the
needs of the hearer, and this process expands the interactants’ private presupposition pools as well as a pool that is shared during the interaction. Note that in these definitions of topic and its components, the focus is on the individual’s mind or consciousness in forming a topic. While the dynamic nature of language, and the crucial role of interaction in developing topics, are both emphasized, the cognitive approach to topic characterizes the individual as the primary motivator or constructor of topic, and through interactions, mental bridges are built to others in an effort to bring their unique orientations closer together.

Regarding these orientations, Chafe (1994) argues that any interactional contribution to a topic depends on the speaker’s own point of view, or his or her experiencing of an event or emotion. The point of view most commonly manifested in topic emergence with respect to deictic terms, evaluations of situations, etc., is the speaker’s own; Chafe allows that a third person point of view is possible, but he claims that a first person point of view is much more typical. The implications of the speaker’s point of view for topic development are that it will influence the information in the semiactive consciousness that is verbalized, or essentially highlighted and presented for analysis or reaction by another interlocutor. In other words, this information is material that the speaker has deemed important or interesting in some way.

Brown and Yule discuss the idea of point of view, or what they characterize as “What I think we’re talking about” (1983, 90), as a major feature of their topic framework. This they call “speaker’s topic” (1983, 85-94). In a conversation between two individuals, they argue, there is a topic framework for the interaction, and then each individual has his or her own speaker’s topics. In their interaction, there is a constant, dynamic negotiation of whose topic will align with (or become) the topic of conversation. In some cases, when these topics are incompatible, one
interactant will decide to align with the other speaker’s topic, or more rarely, the two will come
to an impasse that will require a repair of some kind.

What I have called the cognitive approach to topic is important to characterizing the
states of the individual minds of the interactants that come together to talk. But they largely
attribute topic emergence to private, individual motivations (i.e., point of view, speaker’s topic)
that are shared out of necessity to make oneself understood, rather than characterizing topic as
something that emerges through interaction among people. In contrast, Erickson’s (1982)
treatment of topic reflects the role of cognition while promoting the primacy of topic as a
socially-constructed phenomenon; he argues that the interactive construction of topic takes place
in a conversational floor, which he defines as “a sustained focus of cognitive, verbal, and
nonverbal attention and response between speaker and audience” (1982, 47). The distinction is
that in Erickson’s view, cognition is essentially intersubjective; this definition of conversational
floor makes this clear. A floor is one of the many production resources available to interactants,
one of the organizational devices that allows for conversations to be shaped and adapted in the
emergence of a discourse. Erickson explains that, as interaction happens in real time without
opportunity for extended reflection, a floor is a resource for determining what contributions will
be on topic or topically coherent. In essence, the local resource of the floor enables the social
interaction that is necessary for constructing topic; he argues that “without the ratification of
audience response, a speaker has nowhere to go with a topic once it has been introduced” (1982,
47), and this idea of constant ratification or rejection is crucial for a discussion of discourse
topic. This emphasizes the fact that a topic is not the achievement of one speaker alone; rather, a
topic is developed by speakers and listeners with each contribution they make. This theme is
echoed by work on *staging* (see Brown and Yule 1983; Yule and Mathis 1992), or the organization of contextual elements necessary for the contribution of new topical talk.

This idea of topic as an interactional accomplishment, as well as an individual goal, leads to a discussion of approaches to topic that take the sequencing of interactional moves to be the machinery of topic construction.

### 2.2.4 **Sociological Approach: Emergent Topic and Conversation Analysis**

To further discuss topic as an interactional achievement, I pay particular attention to the major early work on topic carried out in the field of conversation analysis (CA), a branch of sociology sometimes called the analysis of talk in interaction (Heritage 2005) due to its focus on the sequential and mechanical detail of individual interactions. There has been a great deal of interest in CA on how interactants talk topically and how the machinery of conversation is appropriated to meet this goal, even though conversation analysts were hesitant at first to address this construct due to the difficulty in defining it. Also, as Sacks (1995, 752) described, “content considerations” necessarily forced a shared focus on sequential actions as well as meaning. I will begin this discussion with Sacks’ (1995) early lectures on topic, because despite his reservations, the lectures clearly lay out a vision for the CA approach.

In considering why conversations would have what we understand as topics, Sacks claims that the systematic reason for this could be what he calls “tying structures” (1995, 540). Tying structures, similar to cohesive devices (Halliday and Hasan 1976), fit utterances together sequentially. These structures, from a CA perspective, allow interactants to do the work of showing that they understand the contributions of others, and showing that they require the same from their interlocutors. The social influence of tying structures is so strong that, as Sacks explains, interactants much prefer to “fit” their turns into what they perceive as topical talk rather
than sequentially contribute every mentionable item they had brought to the interaction (see also Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Fitting utterances into a larger topical organization provides a driving reason for the contribution, or an answer to the question why that now? (Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

Sacks claimed that “topic carriers,” i.e., nouns and verbs, are useful points to examine topic (1995, 753), and so I will provide two of his examples to illustrate this. The first is the second pair part of an adjacency pair, the answer to a question (Sacks 1995, 752); the second is a first pair part which initiates a topic (Sacks 1995, 758).

Example 2.1

1 When can we see it.
2 I’ll tell you, uh the woman who lives there now, uh will be there for a while […].

Here, it in line (1) refers to a house that has been advertised for rent. In line (2), the referring term the woman who lives there now is a very particular way to characterize a person; the question one might ask is what purpose this phrase has, as opposed to any other descriptor. Sacks argues that this phrase ties directly to the first pair part, most basically in the use of there to refer to it, but also in terms of the topic. The use of the phrase the woman who lives there now is related to the topic in that what the two interactants are discussing is the potential rental of the house; so the woman in question’s most topical identity at that moment is as the current (and not future) tenant. As Sacks notes, she is subsequently referred to in other ways at other points in the conversation when the topic might have been different.

A second example, I was at County Line yesterday (Sacks 1995, 758), is similar in that it centers on a reference to a noun; it demonstrates how choices in referring terms guide potential next turns, and thus build a topic. Emphasizing that place names are particularly useful in an
examination of topic, Sacks uses this hypothetical example to show how referring terms restrict categories, or “co-class memberships” (1995, 758). Here, the use of County Line, which Sacks describes as a beach in California where people go surfing, means that subsequent contributions should pertain to the superordinate class category of surfing, but should not refer to other activities. Put another way, an interactant could say Oh yeah? I hate surfing or I went surfing in Florida, but he or she could not say I had my house painted yesterday (and be talking topically). On the contrary, if the original utterance had been I went surfing yesterday then subsequent contributions could include I had my house painted yesterday because the larger class category is something like activities.

These examples show how interactants influence what contributions fit into topical talk, and how they read the influences present in the interaction. They also illustrate the mechanisms by which interactants engage in “topic shading,” or “the fitting of differently focused but related talk to some last utterance in a topic’s development” (Sacks and Schegloff 1973, 305). This describes a situation in which a topic isn’t explicitly closed down and a new one is initiated, but rather a conversation flows from one topic to the next. This is similar to what Hobbs (1990) described as topic drift.

Picking up on this theme of sequence, the CA perspective is that any analysis of topic must keep in mind that topics are “progressively realized” turn by turn, and one cannot examine “future” turns in a conversation to interpret an earlier one (Schegloff 1990). This sequencing, in turn, is one of the main sources of coherence in conversation; interactants will look for topicality, or coherence between turns, with such focus that the sequential structure of talk produces topic. Indeed, if coherence is not immediately apparent, interactants will suspend judgment until later in the conversation in order to determine the intent. Similar to Sacks’ (1995) argument that tying
structures give rise to topic, Schegloff (1990) argues that adjacency pairs do the same. In keeping with the CA focus on sequence, and why that now, much of the CA work on topic involves opening (i.e., initiating) and closing (see Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Maynard 1980; Drew and Holt 1998; Button and Casey 1984) as well as the subtler process of topic shading (see e.g., Schegloff and Sacks 1973). How best to stake out the boundaries of topics is still an open question.

At this point, I hope that the nature of research and scholarship on topic appears to be in some ways fractured, with representatives of different disciplines promoting different perspectives, but also coherent, in that there are common themes that surface in each of them. Keeping this in mind, I continue by discussing a proposal to integrate various strands of research on topic as a unit (and what happens in between the purported boundaries of the unit), to richly characterize topic in a way that seems simultaneously rigorous and intuitive.

2.2.5 Sociolinguistic Approach: Integration

To review what I call the sociolinguistic approach, I focus on the work on topic by Schiffrin (1988; 1992). I refer to it as integration because her approach explicitly draws from a variety of perspectives on topic, and in fact, she notes that topic is difficult to conceptualize because many researchers do not communicate with one another about what core concepts are important in an analysis of topic.

In an effort to reconcile previous work on topic from a variety of disciplines with a sociolinguistic approach, Schiffrin (1988) defines five types of topic: entity, proposition, text, speaker, and interactive. Entity, proposition, and text constitute different levels of the message or code that is central to topic; that is, topic is encoded in grammar, as was argued by those working on sentential topic. Speaker topic represents what the speaker intends to talk about, or what he or
she thinks is being talked about; this concept draws upon the cognitive approach, particularly the work of Brown and Yule (1983). Finally, interactive topic is the shared focus of the interactants, or the topic that they build together; this perspective is reminiscent of the sociological approach that considers topic to be intersubjective at its core.

Schiffrin explores these different topics at play in discourse through the examination of specific linguistic features, such as reference (1988) and conditionals (1992). In a given interaction presented for analysis, she identifies the message topics, speakers’ topics, and interactive topics and demonstrates how these topics relate to each other. For example, Schiffrin describes a case in which she asks a question of an interviewee, intending to solicit the names of community medical providers, however the respondent talks about the fact that she does not currently feel confident that her doctor can provide quality care (1988, 7). These two speaker topics, then, are subsumed under an interactive topic, or how the two women’s interaction affects the course of the topic development. Through an analysis of the referring terms used in the interaction, one can infer what the entity (message) topics are in each given utterance as the topics progress.

These analyses crucially integrated different strands of research on topic, showing how grammar, individual point of view, and interaction are all necessary components of any analysis of topic. And the productive analysis of topic is important; Schiffrin considers topic to be an essential construct for discourse analysts to study for two main reasons. First, understanding the linguistic features that contribute to the construction of topic will help to characterize how interactants use language to manage their own, and their interlocutors’, changing knowledge coherently. Second, investigating how linguistic resources are allotted in a speech community...
(including topic as one of those resources) can lead to a broader understanding of how people use language to accomplish social goals and maintain social order in various contexts.

Finally, to touch upon the sociolinguistic goal of addressing social and linguistic problems, I focus briefly on work that differs from the previous approaches reviewed in that, by and large, it does not focus on the linguistic or interactional emergence of topic.

2.2.6 **Anthropological Approach: Critical Discourse**

The work that I review under the approach I call anthropological considers topic to be a given as a construct, an assumed portion of a larger discourse defined as the matter under discussion or what we’re talking about. In this approach, this intuitive construction of topic is something that can be manipulated to achieve certain interactional, social, or political effects.

I begin with Tannen’s (2005) treatment of topic in conversation, in which she acknowledges the difficulty of clearly delimiting topics in interaction, but does so in order to illustrate how developing topics (as a speaker, and a listener) relates to conversational style. Tannen argues that the sequential management of topic, such as initiations and closings, is the product of one’s conversational style; for example, changing topics rapidly is characteristic of high-involvement style, in contrast to high-considerateness style. Regarding the type of content of a topic, more personal or intimate matters are available to interactants with high-involvement styles, even if the interactants do not know each other well, while these topics might be verboten to people who tend toward high-considerateness. Sharing aspects of both topic management and content is topic cohesion. High-involvement interactants will tolerate less cohesion in adjacent topics, however high-considerateness interactants are more likely to introduce topics that share more thematic elements with a topic that is closing down.
Tannen emphasizes that the analysis of topic is instructive when considering interactants’ dominance or control of a conversation. Whether interactants’ actions are intentional or not (2005, 56), she acknowledges that the management of topic in interaction (as well as other features of conversational style) can be a strong signal of power that can result in feelings of respect, resentment, etc.

Power and knowledge, and by extension topic, are closely connected across cultures and styles. Brennais (1984), in his research on gossip in Fiji Indian communities, discusses how the management of topic within this particular activity type defines social identities in a society growing more egalitarian after various large-scale social changes. In this context, possession and sharing of knowledge allows individuals to claim group membership and social status. Thus, in a conversation among a gossiping group of men, when a new man joins the conversation, the topic will be changed; this will either benefit the newcomer (the new topic will be more accessible than the previous would have been) or disadvantage him (in that he will not be privy to what the men had been discussing). Related to this use of topic to mark out social boundaries is the gossipers’ preference for opacity in their talk. Referents will be signaled obliquely, and stories will be initiated without any orienting material. The effect of this is that those who are intimately knowledgeable regarding the topic will be able to orient themselves, contribute to the topic, etc., while those who are not are excluded. This is one of the most significant social effects that the idea of topic can have (see also Goffman 1981).

Kuipers (1990), discussing the ritual speech of the Weyéwa of Southeast Asia, notes that access to different genres of speech, analogous to discourse topic, is restricted by gender. These social rules governing who may say what, and when they may say it, not only reflects “some underlying system of political or economic relations,” but constitutes it (1990, 157). Essentially,
the fact that women are forbidden from the particular topic of the group’s ancestors (i.e., talking directly to them) reinforces the men’s power as those responsible for the survival of the community, both in terms of daily life and the overall propagation of the society. The conceptualization of topic reflecting, as well as constructing, social structures is one that applies to many analyses that employ topic as a tool to understand sociopolitical issues.

Returning to an American context and taking a CA approach to the study of topic management and its relationship to the genders of the participants, West and Garcia (1988) demonstrate that in dyadic conversations between young American men and women introduced for the first time, men were responsible for the vast majority of unilateral topic shifts, regardless of whether the previous topic had been closed collaboratively or the female interlocutors had been actively involved in talking about a topic of concern to her. While it was in managing topic where gender appeared to be a factor, the content was not insignificant. Similar to Kuiper’s (1990) examination of ritual speech, West and Garcia note that work has shown that: “women’s pursuit of these activities [i.e., talking about negative self-assessment, “unfeminine” career choices] – and men’s curtailment of them – both draws on and exhibits what it is to be a woman – or a man – in these contexts” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 144). They argue that the unilateral changing of topics is a method of controlling the surroundings, and this demonstrates manhood in the culture examined.

As a final point about the interconnections between topic and power and control, I want to discuss the role of topic in professional contexts. Recall that, per Drew and Heritage (1992) and Heritage and Clayman (2010), professional or institutional contexts are distinguished from everyday interaction by a number of observable features of interaction; one of these is asymmetry among participants. While there are asymmetries among participants in everyday
conversation as well, institutional conversation is different in that asymmetries are inherent to the roles and identities of the participants, which are dictated in part by the conventions of the institution. Asymmetry in interaction can be productively examined through topic analysis, as Ainsworth-Vaughn (1992; 1998) has shown. She discusses, in her work on doctor/patient interactions, the ways in which control of topic (e.g., through initiations of topics and ratification – or absence of ratification – of topics) construct and reflect power asymmetries based on the professional identity of doctor, and the knowledge and authority inherent in that role, and patient (see also Mishler 1984).

Investigating how topic emerges in interaction can lead to further thoughts about how it works on an even larger scale than the crucial moments of our interpersonal contact. Examination of topic can provide detailed insights on every level of interaction, from the most intimate to our collective discourses. These collective discourses are resources for intertextuality, described by Johnstone as “the ways in which all discourse draws on familiar formats and texts, previously used styles and ways of acting, and familiar plots” (2008, 191). This process, then, also works to create the “familiar plots,” in Johnstone’s words, which can be thought of as master narratives (e.g, Bamberg and Andrews 2004) that contextualize talk by providing a scheme against which to compare “new” utterances.

These collective, recycled discourses are important to the study of topic emergence (as well as activity types) because they constitute production resources for talk (Erickson 1982) and inform how interactants relate to each other both as intimates and as strangers. For example, interactants who know each other well, and share a good deal of knowledge, might draw on those resources in topic construction while interactants without this shared knowledge might rely more
heavily on available collective discourses in order to achieve intersubjectivity, or find common ground.

For now, I want to focus on the intimate, social, and political context of the clinic, and in particular, communication disorders.

2.2.7 **Clinical Approach: Discourse-Pragmatic Impairments and Topic**

The anthropological approach was one that could be considered an application of topic, in which the concept of topic was taken as a given and another problem was identified and addressed through its lens. What I call the clinical approach refers to research in the field of communication disorders, broadly construed, that investigates the construction of topic by individuals with cognitive communication disorders. The goal is to, in some fashion, describe or determine language pathology, particularly within the realm of pragmatics and discourse. Therefore, before discussing the research that relates to topic specifically, I will take a moment to provide additional background on discourse-pragmatic impairments and clinical practice.

While speech-language pathologists, specialists in communication disorders, manage challenges as profound as the complete loss of speech or hearing, or severe difficulties with phonology or syntax, in the case of some individuals significant interactional challenges may present themselves in the absence of other more observable linguistic changes. Discourse-pragmatic impairment is a complicated, disputed concept; as Cummings notes, the boundaries of the field of clinical pragmatics are as wide-ranged as those of the field of pragmatics itself (2005, 254). In addition, mainstream work in pragmatics generally does not clearly delineate what “normal pragmatic ability” might be, so the task of determining what is “abnormal” has been addressed mostly by clinicians working with their clients (Perkins 2007).
In an attempt to provide some orientation to what discourse-pragmatic impairment could be, I will describe two of the earliest and best known profiles of pragmatic ability. The first, by Prutting and Kirchner (1987), is perhaps the most widely referenced; it includes a checklist for use by speech-language pathologists to characterize discourse and pragmatic deficits in various clinical populations, and it includes verbal aspects (including speech acts, topic, turn taking, lexical selection, and stylistic variation), paralinguistic aspects (including intelligibility and prosodics), and nonverbal observable behaviors (such as kinesics and proxemics). The second, by Penn (1985), shares many characteristics with the checklist later devised by Prutting and Kirchner (1987). It measures features that include response to interlocutor, control of semantic content, cohesion, fluency, and sociolinguistic sensitivity (which includes speech acts among other competencies). As stated earlier, the variety of abilities under examination allows for the conclusion that discourse-pragmatic impairment can encompass a very wide range of observable behaviors and competencies. Indeed, pragmatic impairment is an expansive concept, and as such, many different studies of language in use utilizing many different theories have been conducted in order to clarify and specify it (Cummings 2009). These clinical profiles, examples of the many created to address these issues, are pioneering and now classic guides that illustrate the range of challenges experienced by individuals with some sort of discourse-pragmatic impairment and the need for greater understanding of how and why they exist.

To begin this discussion of the variety of studies and orientations to pragmatics, let us focus on topic, which is one of the components of Prutting and Kirchner’s (1987) profile as well as the focus of a small subfield of clinical studies. Many researchers have shared the perspective that topic is a useful notion to examine with regard to individuals with pragmatic impairments and communication disorders generally, evidenced by the body of work on topic in various
clinical populations. In a series of studies, Mentis (e.g. 1991; 1994) provides one of the more
detailed, specific definitions of topic used in the clinical literature. She defines topic as “a clause
or noun phrase which identifies the question of immediate concern and which provides a global
description of the content of a sequence of utterances. Each utterance within any topic sequence
is required to express a concept or set of concepts that can be directly subsumed under the topic
label” (Mentis 1991, 50). As can be gleaned from this definition, Mentis and her colleagues
follow early work on topic that takes a propositional approach, similar to Keenan and Schieffelin
(1976) and van Dijk (1977) in the focus on an identifiable, isolated clause or noun phrase
specifically. From there, Mentis and Prutting (1991) developed a multidimensional topic
coherence analysis which measures the successful management of topic by the introduction and
maintenance of topics, as well as appropriate embedding of subtopics within more general topics.
They tested this method of analysis using six dyadic conversational and four monologic samples
from an individual with a traumatic brain injury and a typical communicator (as a control), and
coded as many as 20 parameters, including type and manner of topic/subtopic introduction.

Following that early work, in her study of adolescents with language disorders, Mentis
(1994) expands the topic coherence analysis to include specific features that clinicians can look
for when evaluating topic, such as cohesive ties (following Halliday and Hasan 1976), politeness
markers, verb tense inflection, etc., though the specific ways in which these linguistic features
can be informative are not always defined explicitly. She also offers methods of intervention to
be used with patients who are considered to have trouble with topic, and argues that a complete
profile of topic management ability is necessary for each individual in order to best understand
and address the problem. Keeping in mind that an individualized communicative profile is
essential, this topic coherence analysis was also applied to a group of individuals with
Alzheimer’s disease (Mentis, Briggs-Whittaker, and Gramigna 1995) in an effort to see how the analysis could be applicable to individuals with various cognitive communication disorders. In this study, similar to Mentis and Prutting’s (1991) earlier work, a quantitative analysis is used to determine what types of problems individuals with Alzheimer’s disease appear to have, in comparison with typical controls; these problems were difficulty changing or introducing topic while maintaining the discourse flow. This descriptive study, which also re-tested the reliability of the analysis method, helps to classify the communication deficits of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease within a specific framework.

Working in a framework similar to the one used by Mentis and colleagues, Brady, Mackenzie, and Armstrong (2003) study topic introduction and maintenance as demonstrated by individuals with right hemisphere brain damage, a condition often associated with discourse-pragmatic deficits such as the production and comprehension of nonliteral language and organization of discourse. While these researchers, too, found their analysis to be reliable, they also found that individuals with right hemisphere damage did not have many more difficulties managing main topics as compared to typical control counterparts; they note, however, that in specific measures that they analyzed like repetition and fillers, there were some differences that needed to be investigated more thoroughly in future work. These results suggest that perhaps for some populations, the topic frameworks used in the analyses are not targeted or specific enough, and a more fine-grained analysis of topic is needed. They also suggest that perhaps the thorough work on topic done by Mentis and colleagues could be further refined to discover more subtle deficits (and strengths) in individuals with communication disorders. Mentis’ (1994) insight that a complete, detailed, individualized communicative profile of an individual’s orientation to topic is needed in order to best understand and treat observed problems is instructive, and should be
highlighted with the acknowledgement that microlevel and macrolevel comprehensive analyses of topic orientation and disorientation in naturalistic contexts are important for clinical management of communication disorders.

Bedrosian’s (1993) work represents a move to address the interactional significance of topic and communication disorders, in a study of individuals with mild to moderate intellectual impairments. Like Mentis and her colleagues, Bedrosian analyzes topic introduction and maintenance, but in addition to attending to the subject matter (or propositional content) and the impressionistic outcome of the interaction, she also observes the participants’ orientation to the topic(s) and the interaction, and the possible communicative intent, with the goal of understanding the difficulties the participants both experience. This was one of the earlier studies in communication disorders research that included an interactional component in an attempt to describe a participant’s communication deficit with regard to discourse topic specifically.

Another study that considers the interactional aspects of communication disorders is a more recent examination of topic repetitiveness that takes a more clearly conversation-analytic approach than the other studies mentioned: Body and Parker’s (2005) work with a late-middle-aged man with a traumatic brain injury. Though they do not define topic with as much detail as Mentis (1994), considering topic to be simply what is talked about, they do additionally describe topic as an emergent phenomenon influenced by the individual’s cognitive abilities and the actions of his typical interlocutors. They explore how the interlocutors’ use of politeness strategies in conversation reinforces the man’s repetitiveness, which in fact was the observed problem that needed to be overcome. Topic repetitiveness was shown to be not simply a problem for which the individual with the brain injury was solely responsible; rather, his conversation partners contributed to this behavior. So this case study is a good example of one that offers an
interactional perspective on topic, including the explicit examination of the importance of considering all of the participants in a conversation, and not just the individual with the communication disorder, in co-constructing topic.

2.2.8 Summary

The variety of approaches to topic, all quite different, that have been taken by various researchers for various purposes results in a state of some confusion about what topic is, or might be, and how it can be conceptualized and operationalized to solve problems related to language and interaction. For this reason, I found it necessary to build upon the general themes of this work and outline a framework for topic that would encompass the most important purposes that the pretheoretical idea of topic serves in communication; thus, this is the focus of Chapter 3. These general themes begin with the importance of aboutness, and the ability to identify or name the topic in some way. This theme is touched upon by those who see a grammatical role for topic, by the conversation analysts whose topic carriers include nouns and verbs, by the formalists who would identify a title of a text, and by those who posit variations on entity topic. Overall, topic is very much based in the propositional content of what is spoken in an interaction.

But this is not all that topic is or can be, because as those taking cognitive and social approaches to topic describe, the interaction itself in which the topic is constructed is important as well. This is true in topic emergence in everyday conversation among typical peers, and it is especially salient in so-called everyday conversation of which samples are collected for the purposes of research or clinical evaluation. Building upon this general insight from previous work on topic, I want to provide background on interaction as it pertains to investigations of topic and clinical evaluations of acquired cognitive communication disorders.
2.3 CLINICAL LINGUISTIC INTERACTION AND DATA ELICITATION

In this section I describe a component of topic construction and emergence that, while not explicitly connected to the propositional content of topical talk of individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders, is still indivisible from it: the interactional context of the data elicitation and collection, which both affects the construction of topic, and is constructed by it. In this section, first I will discuss the concept of “activity types” (Levinson 1979; 1992; Gumperz 1982) generally, after which I will review work on clinical discourse elicitation activity types specifically, in preparation for discussing the questions that emerge from this review.

2.3.1 Activity Types

Thus far, in the discussion of topic, the idea of context was addressed minimally. In fact, the most notable contrast in the literature on topic was the difference in orientation to topic in isolated, model sentences, or to topic emergence in naturally occurring interaction. However, it will become important, in examining clinical discourse, to focus equally on the content-related features of topic and the features of the context of interaction. In order to describe these features of interactions, I will follow Levinson’s (1992) identification and description of activity types; here I briefly outline the idea of activity types as a background to the specific clinical discourse elicitation activity types that are pertinent to subsequent chapters.

In Wittgenstein’s (2009) conceptualization of language games, he noted the importance of considering the matrix activity from which language originates and develops; the activity contextualizes, and makes meaning and sense of, utterances beyond their semantic properties. This somewhat unidirectional view of context as that which enriches meaning, however, has been roundly challenged by those who argue for a more bidirectional model in which not only does the matrix activity enrich language, but language use constructs the matrix activity (e.g.,
Goodwin and Duranti 1992). Similarly, following Bateson’s (1972) work on metamessage in interaction, or how language can only be understood with respect to the activity in progress, Goffman (1974; 1981) developed the theory of framing in interaction: frames, or contexts of interaction, influence and are constructed by language in use.

Levinson’s (1992) treatment of activity types highlights the co-construction, or the bidirectionality, of language in use and matrix or framing activities; inherent in an activity type is the acknowledgement that interactants share cultural knowledge about activities that they can then bring to their interactions. In short, activity types are socially-constituted bounded events with some particular goals and inherent constraints on the interactants and their contributions; there may be explicit or implicit expectations governing these constraints, and interactants may understand them differently (Levinson 1992). Therefore, some degree of cultural familiarity is necessary for an activity type to be successful, and for interactants to accomplish their goals.

Levinson (1992) emphasizes that activity types are fairly “fuzzy,” and it can be difficult to determine what “counts” as an activity in an interaction, both as it emerges, as well as prospectively and retrospectively. Activity types are situated along different continua of goal definition, boundedness, constraint, and recognizability (by which I mean that there are some activity types that are more familiar than others to most people, because people have more regular experience with these types).

As there are innumerable activity types, some of which (e.g., classroom interactions, courtroom proceedings, healthcare encounters) have inspired independent and robust research programs, I want to focus on a particular activity type that has perhaps received slightly less attention (but see Hamilton 1994). This type is the elicitation of discourse data from individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders; even more specifically, I examine the
elicitation of everyday conversation discourse data (in contrast to, for example, narrative retellings). In this next section, I discuss the general state of discourse elicitation from the clinical perspective.

2.3.2 CLINICAL DISCOURSE ELICITATION ACTIVITY TYPES

As discourse-pragmatic impairments became an object of clinical attention, and clinical pragmatics grew into a field in its own right, it became increasingly necessary to study larger samples of language production; thus, clinical discourse elicitation has become a methodological concern for clinicians and researchers. Relevant questions have touched on the length and complexity of the sample, the type of stimuli used to generate the sample, the role of the elicitor, and others; essentially, the defining details of the activity type of clinical discourse elicitation were opened for evaluation. Another concern for elicitors, or those conducting the evaluation of the discourse sample, was standardization; in other words, how could the results gathered from a single individual be compared reasonably with another individual, and with a larger population.

These questions and concerns resulted in clinical discourse elicitation activity types that differed from one another in terms of the goals and constraints inherent in them. As Hamilton (1994) notes, one’s language use is not monolithic; extracting a sample using any variety of methods in any context will not result in a slice of language or discourse that is representative of the totality of one’s language use. Thus, there has been consistent focus on eliciting various “types” of discourses, in order to evaluate an individual’s full communicative profile; recall that in Ratner and Menn’s mention of the naturalness-control continuum of language production studies, clinicians are charged with determining what an individual does say and do, and what an individual can say or do when the activity requires (2000, 12). Four main types of discourses are generally elicited to canvass this continuum; as Shadden (1998) extensively describes, these
different genres of discourse (narrative retelling, narrative generation, procedural discourse, conversation) contrast with one another in terms of a set of variables, four of which I discuss at length.\textsuperscript{13}

The first variable relates to the discourse stimulus; for example, narrative retelling depends upon an auditory stimulus (i.e., the elicitee must repeat a story told to him or her by the elicitor) while the narrative generation task relies on a visual one (i.e., it requires that the elicitee imagine a story based on a picture or a series of pictures arrayed sequentially). Narrative retelling tasks involve the elicitor telling the elicitee a story, any story from just a few sentences to a well-known fairy tale. Narrative generation requires that the elicitee attend to a picture (e.g., a line drawing, photograph) or series of images (e.g., a comic strip without conversation bubbles); in some cases, the narrative generation might be a verbal rather than visual stimulus, particularly if the elicitor is seeking a narrative about an elicitee’s personal experience. Other genres, such as procedural discourse or conversation, have no stimuli apart from the instructions or the participation of the elicitor. Procedural discourse tasks involve the description of how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or an explanation of how to shop in an American supermarket. Overall, the type of stimulus varies in how much linguistic complexity is required in the elicitee’s response to the stimulus, the complexity of the stimulus itself, and (crucially) the status of the stimulus as readily accessible to all parties present for the discourse elicitation episode.

The second variable in discourse types relates to cognitive complexity, including the memory demands on the elicitee and the sequencing and organizational requirements of the tasks. There is variation in these sub-variables as well; narrative retelling tasks have stringent requirements for the sequencing of the components of the narrative, for example; however this

\textsuperscript{13} These genres are generally consistent in the literature on discourse samples and communication disorders; Hengst and Duff (2007) refer to narrative, procedural, and description (e.g., picture description) and McNeil et al. (2007) discuss story retell, picture description, narrative, and procedural.
skill is related to memory in that it is the accurate repetition of a story already told. In contrast, procedural discourse also has stringent requirements for the sequencing of the steps of the procedure in question, but these requirements depend on the elicitee’s memory not of what he or she must repeat, but what the elicitee him- or herself has already said. Organization of these discourse types depends upon the elicitee’s executive function capacity to manage and monitor a new, emergent monologue.

The third variable encompasses the elicitor’s contribution, such as the instructions provided by the elicitor to the elicitee. Instructions may be highly constraining, in that they require the elicitee to duplicate a model (as in the case of retelling a story) or answer a specific question (such as how to change a tire); or the instructions might be more similar to suggestions, without any articulated constraints on the elicitee.

The final variable I will discuss here pertains to the elicitee’s selfhood. That is, tasks vary on how personally relevant they are to the elicitee’s experience, and they vary on how constrained they are (i.e., how much freedom the elicitee has to display his or her style and creativity). Important also, beyond degrees of personal relevance, is how the elicitee wishes to present his or her image during the task. A story retelling task is not likely to be relevant to many elicitees, and completing the task might not comport with aspects of the elicitee’s desired presentation of self; for example, the story itself or the task might seem juvenile. Procedural task stimuli might vary greatly in relevant across elicitees. For example, as Shadden (1998) points out, the question of how to change a tire might be a reasonable question when posed to an elicitee who had been an auto mechanic, but very difficult for an elderly elicitee who had lived mostly in a city and never owned a car.
So far, our discussion has focused on the factors purported to affect an individual’s production of language from a cognitive perspective. Layered upon the discussion of different discourse types, and their utility, is the activity type of the elicitation itself and the importance it has in the interaction. This is to say that in any genre of discourse investigated, the context of the clinic\textsuperscript{14} circumscribes the participatory choices of both the elicitee (i.e., the individual with a communication disorder) and the elicitor (Leahy 2004). Specifically, Hengst and Duff point out that clinical elicitors are trained to take on an “impersonal, distanced stance” (2007, 38) in order to focus all attention on the elicitee and minimize the contributions of the elicitor, which are often seen as irrelevant and intrusive. In this view, the elicitee should do the majority of the speaking. Shadden (1998) emphasizes that individuals with cognitive communication disorders will have different profiles of deficits that will ideally be highlighted through the elicitation of different genres of discourse. Therefore, it is the elicitor’s responsibility to identify areas of difficulty and target them for further evaluation and treatment.

The guiding principle in this point of view on clinical discourse elicitation is that different discourse types, with their attendant variables, will probe different skills and deficits. The main difference in these types is the amount of overall control the elicitor has over the interaction, and the elicitee’s language production; this concern is not unique to clinical linguistics, as it is significant in child language acquisition (e.g., Ervin-Tripp 2000) and sociolinguistic variation work (e.g., Labov 1972). The control exercised by clinical elicitors, their roles in interactions with individuals with cognitive communication disorders, are complex. While the main responsibility of speech-language pathologists is to monitor and evaluate individuals with communication disorders and their language impairments (Simmons-Mackie and Damico 1999),

\textsuperscript{14} I use the term \textit{clinic} here to refer to diverse settings (e.g., medical facilities, schools and universities, private homes, etc.) in which the focus is the language of an individual with a confirmed or suspected cognitive communication disorder.
this posture does not always allow for the full range of language abilities to be on display (Leahy 2004).

2.4 Questions

Having reviewed exemplars of some of the many types of approaches to topic, in which different perspectives on language and interaction were promoted, one aspect of topic that remained clear and prominent across all approaches was its centrality to language and the organization of discourse. If topic indeed holds this important status (Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005), then it plays an essential part in investigating clinical discourse elicitation activity types in which the intention is to create samples of naturalistic, everyday discourse and interaction. Thus, the questions that arose in my thinking about topic, acquired cognitive communication disorders, and the clinical elicitation of discourse relate to interactants’ orientations in their talk. Orientation to interaction necessarily has two levels, which I represent in these two questions.

1. What is topic? As we have seen, topic is so clearly intuited and yet so difficult to conceptualize in a principled way that is faithful to this intuitive cultural and linguistic knowledge. A topic framework that captures how everyday talk in interaction emerges in a way that interactants can orient to the intersubjectivity of social action and information transmission, and explains how and why this emergence is observed to occur, is a necessary first step. This topic framework, in addition to clarifying aspects of our understanding of discourse and interaction, can then be employed, perhaps more significantly, as an analytical tool to investigate additional questions relating to language in use. One example, I want to argue, is the examination of discourse involving individuals with acquired cognitive
communication disorders; recall that the evaluation of discourse-pragmatic impairment, in which one’s everyday language use is meant to be in focus, necessarily creates an “inherent paradox” (Simmons-Mackie and Damico 1999). A topic framework grounded in theories of discourse and interaction should prove to be an effective tool for investigating this activity type, so it is necessary to first motive the framework itself.

2. What does topic emergence and (dis)orientation tell us about clinical discourse elicitation? Activity types both influence the emergence of interactions, due to the cultural knowledge that interactants bring to the encounters, and are constructed by this emergence. Topic, then, can be productively employed to critically evaluate clinical discourse elicitation activity types, which are an important part of linguistic and clinical work. The activity types on which I focus all have the same goal, which is to collect samples of everyday conversation. Given that Drew and Heritage describe everyday conversation as the “predominant medium of interaction in the social world” and the “language” that children first learn (1992, 19), the need to evaluate and treat difficulties in this genre seems to be of paramount importance. Everyday conversation, though, is difficult to elicit; I hope that my analysis of topic will help to determine how interactants in clinical discourse elicitation are orienting to particular activity types (be they everyday conversation or clinical encounter or other) and how topic emerges as a consequence of the activity type in which the elicitors and elicee are engaged.
2.5 Discussion

In this chapter I intended to provide a broad orientation to work on topic, including research applying topic to questions in cognitive communication disorders and discourse-pragmatic impairment in particular. This brief tour might imply that topic is a vast object of study that is discussed, implicitly and explicitly, by many fields; it might suggest, as Cummings (2005) does, that work on pragmatics in the field of communication disorders is varied; and it might demonstrate that the concept of clinical discourse elicitation is less widely addressed; however I hope that this state of affairs has, in a way, justified my desire to bring this body of knowledge to bear on a new data-driven, grounded investigation of topic and clinical discourse elicitation.

As such, I also intended to emphasize the need to explicitly consider activity types in tandem with an analysis of topic. As interactants cannot understand language without some orientation to the activity type in which the language is used (see Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974; 1981; Levinson 1992; Tannen and Wallat 1993), neither can these activity types, whatever they may be, meaningfully exist without language and communication.

In the following chapter, “Everyday Talk in Interaction: Developing the Topic Framework,” I begin my investigation by addressing the first question by outlining a framework of topic. I do so by examining the most prototypical activity type available for study: everyday conversation among typical adult peers. I want to know how topic emerges in an activity type that we as interactants all have access to, all have experience with, and all participate in daily; an activity type that allows us to showcase important, personal aspects of who we are with one another. The topic framework that develops as a result of this analysis will be important for
understanding language in use in this basic activity type, and will provide a point of departure for examining other types of interaction.
CHAPTER 3

EVERYDAY TALK IN INTERACTION: DEVELOPING THE TOPIC FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Everyday talk in interaction is the most basic interaction we learn from birth, our primary means of relating to the world on a daily basis, and the most free and unconstrained activity type on the continuum of boundedness, constraints, and goal orientation that relates activity types to one another (Goodwin and Duranti 1992; Schegloff 1987b; Levinson 1992). For that reason, I develop my framework of topic in discourse from the analysis of this type of interaction.

In this chapter, I begin by providing background on this stage of the study; first, a description of the data I use for analysis, and my motivations for doing so, and second, a description of my analysis process. Then, I outline the topic framework that emerged from this analysis, including discussions of the theoretical background and illustrative examples. Finally, I illustrate the framework in an extended sequential analysis, followed by a discussion.

3.2 BACKGROUND

3.2.1 THE DATA

To form my thoughts about topic, I wanted to examine what I refer to as everyday conversation. Everyday, or “casual” or “ordinary,” conversation is the type of interaction into which most people are socialized from birth (Drew and Heritage 1992), the medium for conducting most personal social business. And when individuals with communication disorders have (or are suspected to have) discourse-pragmatic impairments whose effects cause distress to themselves or their closest family and friends, everyday conversation is typically the context in
which this is noticed. Therefore, in order to think about what is important about topic, I wanted to think about what was important in an everyday interaction.

I decided to use a pre-existing corpus of everyday conversation at this stage, rather than recorded interactions in which I was a participant, to develop my analytical framework of topic. I knew that for my investigation of clinical discourse elicitation, I would also be working with three pre-existing corpora featuring three types of acquired cognitive communication disorders and three activity types (participant-managed collection, unstructured interviewing, and clinical protocol), and I wanted all four corpora to be comparable at least in terms of my participation and involvement in manipulating the data collection. Therefore, I am not present for any of the everyday interactions to be discussed, nor do I know many details about the interactants beyond the local context of their conversation and some basic demographic information. This approach is not without weaknesses. Tannen (2005) discusses the advantages of participating in a recorded interaction with close friends with whom one shares history, and the insights and deeper analyses that can result; Hamilton (1994) argues for the value of the analyst’s involvement in the interactions that he or she is analyzing, particularly in cases where the interactants’ communicative ability is clearly at issue. These concerns are well taken, and through my own analyses of various conversations in which I have taken part, I have come to understand the significant differences in insight that one can have when one has personal, experiential knowledge of the interactants and their personalities and histories, as well as the details of the circumstances that brought them together to be recorded. However, I hope that in approaching the interactions under discussion as an outsider, what I will lose in terms of personal insight will be balanced by the ability to approach these interactions of different genres and make sense of how topic works within them.
All of the data used in this chapter are contained within the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English, or SBCSAE\textsuperscript{15} (DuBois, Chafe, Meyer, and Thompson 2000; DuBois, Chafe, Meyer, Thompson, and Martey 2003; DuBois and Engelbreton 2004; DuBois and Engelbreton 2005). The audio and transcripts are available through TalkBank\textsuperscript{16} (MacWhinney 2007), a large interdisciplinary language corpus; they are housed within CABank, a subarea of TalkBank oriented toward conversation analysis of everyday talk. The corpus contains 60 samples of conversation, i.e., 60 discrete recorded events including a particular set of participants conversing in a particular location. These samples, available on TalkBank, represent a variety of people and places across the United States. They were audio recorded and transcribed according to conversation analytic conventions, and names and identifying information were distorted in the audio and given pseudonyms in the transcripts to protect privacy. A summary of the source information for this corpus, and all the corpora featured in this dissertation, can be found in Appendix A.

Of the 60 conversation samples available, I excluded certain samples from my analysis. Because I did not want to delve into issues of conversational schisming (see Strong 2010), I only analyzed interactions in which there were two or three participants, but no more. I included only interactions among adults, excluding children and teenagers. Finally, I excluded interactions that were explicitly task based, in that most if not all of the talk centered around a particular goal related to an institution other than everyday conversation (Drew and Heritage 1992); for example, I excluded a tutoring session between two individuals, but included a conversation that occurred while the interactants were involved in preparing dinner. This process resulted in ten

\textsuperscript{15}At the time of writing, the homepage for the corpus can be found at: http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/sbcorpus.html (accessed March 7, 2013).
\textsuperscript{16}At the time of writing, the main homepage for the TalkBank corpus, from which one can access the SBCSAE among others, can be found at: http://www.talkbank.org (accessed March 7, 2013).
discrete interactions, each of which was between 19 and 30 minutes long, for a total of approximately four hours of talk. For each of these interactions, I listened to the audio recordings and checked the transcriptions provided in the corpus against what I heard, to be certain that the transcriptions, as I understood them, comported with my interpretations of the audio recordings. All of the excerpts presented here feature pseudonyms provided by me, and are re-transcribed in a simplified style, the conventions for which can be found in Appendix B.

3.2.2 Process

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Gumperz (1982) characterized the analysis of topic as a method for determining both interactional achievement and conversational breakdown. Attention to breakdowns with regard to topic is important in large part because from the perspective of communication disorders, getting “off topic” provides evidence of what might be an instance of disordered communication or discourse-pragmatic impairment, and a problem to try to fix. While this general idea is not uncontested (cf. Body and Parker 2005), it does provide an interesting starting point for an analysis of topic.

Also, just as topic can provide information about breakdowns, so too can breakdowns illuminate aspects of topic as a framework. Thus, I began my analysis of everyday conversation by identifying what Gumperz (1982) would call breakdowns, and what Coupland, Weiman, and Giles (1991) would call miscommunication. The term that I use, previewed in the Introduction, is disorientation. I use this term because while breakdown and miscommunication seem to embody a sense of fatality or finality, disorientation can encompass a minor, temporary loss of alignment with the emergence of topic, which can pass unnoticed or unremarked upon; it can also pertain to more serious misunderstandings that require repair or metadiscursive comments on the topic. Coupland, Weimann, and Giles (1991) assert that there are many ways that interactants can
knowingly or unknowingly be miscommunicating, and there are many different ways that this situation can be addressed. The same is true for disorientations, however the interactants might not readily perceive themselves to be miscommunicating at all.

In my analyses of these data, I took an expansive view of disorientations, considering moments in the stream of talk in which the interactants indicated disorientation on the part of other interactants, or in themselves (e.g., through repairs, metadiscursive comments); I also considered moments in which there was no overt acknowledgement of disorientation, but I perceived there to be a loss of alignment in some way (e.g., hesitation, pauses). I proceeded by listening to each interaction from beginning to end multiple times on distinct occasions, coding moments in which I perceived a disorientation in the talk.

One paradoxical issue that I found was that even once I identified a disorientation at this stage, I had to ask what, exactly, was the nature of this problem? I was not searching for a circumscribed list of tokens or discourse phenomena, because the development of a topic framework required a grounded approach in which the data defined the terms. Motivating this process was one feature of topic that feels startlingly true, or at least in my approach to it: that the notion of topic does not lend itself easily to discrete tokens or other units of talk. Distributional analyses are very useful and attractive, especially because a large corpus of interactions such as the SBCSAE provides an excellent opportunity for conducting such an analysis. But topic is more suited, I think, to an analysis that at least begins as sequential. One can certainly investigate topic through distributions of tokens or units, but to think about topic from the ground up requires that one be receptive to any cue, any intuition. My thinking was that

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17 See Schiffrin (1987) for a deeper discussion of sequential and distributional analyses.
the best way to approach an intuitive notion, at least at the start, was with intuition. And a sequential analysis seemed a necessary way to proceed.

This process of reviewing the interactions resulted in my identification of a total of 40 examples of disorientations to topic in the four hours of talk. At that point, I worked only with the bank of examples, referring back to the complete interactions if I wanted to check an interpretation. I started looking for patterns in the problems, and in fact examining the examples all together magnified their power and made the issues clearer. I asked myself simply What happened? in each case, and made notes on my answers. This was an iterative process, throughout which I discarded observations that amounted to no coherent whole, or that I suspected could be specious given the limited amount of knowledge I had about the interactions. My intention was to attempt to discover, if not a coherent system of topic, coherent themes in its construction and emergence. As I continued working with the examples and observed similarities and differences among them, three categories did eventually emerge.

I characterized these categories by three questions, questions that were never explicitly asked in the interaction but seemed to underlie the disorientation. The first category, What are we talking about? contained issues with some aspect of the referential content of the talk; disorientations to discourse objects or entities. The second category, Why are we talking about this? pertained to questions not related to any referent, but to a larger sense of the direction of the talk, the reason for it, or what would be a relevant point to add to it. The third, How is the talk manipulated? is a bit more difficult to describe, but it involved a feature of these disorientations

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18 There is a risk underlying this analysis, which is that it depends on reasoning that appears circular. I found this to be a frustrating challenge in thinking about topic, but I want to emphasize that this thinking aided my gathering of examples and my initial ideas about topic; I hope that the analyses that resulted from this early trial-and-error will not seem similarly circular.
that became quite salient: that of the social/interactional effects of however the topic emerged. In the next section, I describe these issues in much more detail, and show how they cohere.

3.3 ANALYSIS: TOPIC FRAMEWORK

Rather than working with the cumbersome questions above, I decided to crystalize them by using single terms for each aspect of topic I wanted to analyze. The terms are concepts, points, and control; like the word topic itself, they are all nontechnical, commonly-used terms in conversation. I wanted to maintain that spirit of intuition throughout my discussion. I will now describe each in turn.

3.3.1 CONCEPTS

Our first question, What are we talking about?, points to a basic component of topic in conversation: the content of what is said. Sacks mentioned that his initial reluctance to examine topic was motivated by his acknowledgement that “direct content considerations” would necessarily be involved (1995, 752), and indeed most researchers interested in topic have referred in some way to discourse content in their work. To begin our discussion, I will refer to spoken discourse content, or the what in the question What are we talking about?, as concepts.\(^{19}\) I consider concepts to be entities, actions, states of being, or ideas that are or have the potential to be the shared objects of talk that are integral to the construction of topic. Others have described a similar notion, which in its flexibility builds on the idea of noun phrases with particular syntactic or semantic roles as topics (cf. Halliday 1967). For example, Reinhart (1982) refers to entity topics, or people, things, and ideas about which things are said; Ariel (1990) describes topic in a similar way in her discussion of saliency and accessibility. Chafe takes a broader view, as reviewed earlier, discussing topic in terms of content: “an aggregate of

\(^{19}\) Also using the term concepts are de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981).
coherently related events, states, and referents that are held together in some form in the speaker’s semiactive conscious” (1994, 121). In contrast to those who see content in terms of entity topics, about which things are said, Chafe highlights the need to consider these entities as related across discourse units, and a topic as something greater than the sum of its parts. Even more broadly, Goffman refers to content as matters, in that a conversation “builds up a fund of matters that can be referred to succinctly” to fill-in newcomers to a conversation (1983, 13).

My characterization of concepts maintains that concepts are not topics in themselves (cf. Reinhart 1982; Ariel 1990), and they are not the objects of a definition of topic (cf. Chafe 1994), but rather they are introduced, and manipulated, as necessary components of what then emerges as a topic in discourse. So for a brief example, in the following excerpt of a conversation between Katrin and Daniel, a married couple, there are many identifiable concepts:

Excerpt 3.1

1 Katrin: Haha it’s ten-thirty.
2 (.) This is the latest thing op[en bes]ides ice cream stores and bars.
3 Daniel: [Mhm ]

Some potential candidate answers to the question What are we talking about? here could be abstract concepts like time (ten-thirty), particular entities such as the one referred to as this (referencing the bookstore where Katrin works, a detail mentioned earlier in the conversation), schematic ideas like being open (for business), categories like things that are open (late), and culturally-familiar institutions like ice cream stores and bars. None of these concepts is the topic; in this single turn by Katrin and minimal backchannel by Daniel, excerpted from a much longer conversation, we cannot discern a particular topic or discuss topic maintenance or shift in
any detail, but we can identify concepts that emerge as candidates for constructing topic in the ensuing talk.

The other component of my definition of concepts was their shared status. I would like to discuss this idea of shared knowledge of concepts in more detail, as it relates concepts to their role in interaction. In order to orient to topic, interactants must have or desire some degree of knowledge to share about concepts, and this knowledge must be managed throughout the interaction. So I will continue to talk about concepts in terms of the aspects or features of knowledge that one could bring to bear in an interaction, and in the emergence of topic.

The first important principle to highlight in a discussion of knowledge and topic emergence is that knowledge is necessarily shared (van Dijk 2003; 2012; Clark 1996; Edwards 1997); in other words, knowledge is a pool of shared beliefs of different types maintained by a knowledge (or epistemic) community. Therefore, important to the study of knowledge in interaction is how knowledge is presented to interactants, how it is received, and how it is (or is not) considered to be common to all or some of the participants in an interaction. Assuming that knowledge is shared, we can discuss first what types of knowledge are shared, and second, how they are shared.

Schiffrin (1988) identified three broad types of knowledge that are important to topic and to the construction of meaning, and to organize my discussion of knowledge I will appropriate these categories: personal, cultural, and social knowledge. Personal knowledge is comprised of one’s own life experiences and observations, and this type of knowledge is closest to our intuitive notion of knowledge, or the contents of our own minds. That said, much of our personal

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20 One could highlight Katrin’s use of this to refer to the bookstore as a potential indicator of a topic, because it implies that the bookstore had been something they had been “talking about,” but my point is that the concepts included in her turn provide a number of potentially relevant next turns.

21 This discussion of the concepts that can be identified in a given utterance draws upon Schank’s (1977) characterization of concepts as they relate to his work on conversation topics and topic shifts.
knowledge was acquired through communal activities and experiences, such as education and familial socialization. As a result, we may expect that others have an understanding of our personal knowledge, or a framework within which they can interpret it; but we cannot be sure that our experiences or perceptions are shared until we share them. Personal knowledge, therefore, provides much of the featured material in narratives (van Dijk 2003; 2012). Another important component of personal knowledge is the “accessibility” of concepts in an interaction (see Ariel 1988; 1990). I include a mention of accessibility here because it touches on the vast field of information status, such as the presentation of knowledge as given or new (e.g., Chafe 1976; Prince 1981), and the idea of relevance (see Grice 1975; Sperber and Wilson 1986); it brings a cognitive perspective similar to Chafe’s (1994) work on levels of consciousness by considering the role of memory in the sharing of knowledge. Knowledge of prior discourse, or what is “recallable” to interactants and available in the “fund of matters” (Goffman 1983, 13) is critical to the construction of topic. I consider the accessibility of concepts to be related to how available for recall one’s knowledge of a concept is moment by moment.  

The next category of knowledge is cultural knowledge, or one’s understanding of and access to values and norms governing relations to others and the world. In this category can be included the notions of schemata and scripts (Schank and Abelson 1977) that provide us with the structures to interpret concepts that we might encounter in our culture, such as being seated at a restaurant (in the authors’ classic example) or approaching an authority figure with a request. Unlike personal knowledge, these schemata that contribute to cultural knowledge are related to our folk or intuitive grasps of concepts, ideas that we consider to be common sense across our communities (Holland and Quinn 1987) and the common ground between one another in

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22 Ariel (1990) refers to discourse topic in her Accessibility Theory, however a definition of topic is presupposed and is used as a tool to resolve ambiguous referring terms.
interaction (Clark 1996). While knowledge is not contained solely within an individual, the opposite extreme is also untrue. That is to say, there is no useful model of world knowledge; rather, knowledge is culturally based (Schank and Abelson 1977).

Finally, I will discuss social knowledge, one’s understanding of society’s institutions, roles, and expectations. This type of knowledge allows for the evaluation of concepts in terms of their institutional contexts, a practice which requires an understanding of how different institutions impose restrictions on how concepts are interpreted and how they are valued. Speaking first about institutional contexts, one observed feature of social knowledge is its asymmetry, or the “differential distribution of knowledge” (Drew and Heritage 1992, 49) inherent in such institutional interactions. Social knowledge is not only knowing about institutions, but knowing about their attendant interactional rules and obligations. Related to this is the idea that access to knowledge, or epistemic rights, are dependent upon the outlines of the social role(s) an interactant inhabits during an encounter. Also relevant to the discussion of social knowledge is Goodwin’s (1994) work on professional vision, or how social/professional roles and experiences shape the objects of knowledge within the professional community.

It is important to emphasize that one might have multiple types of knowledge of a single concept, and that these types of knowledge overlap; for example, through experience I may have gained personal knowledge that complements my social knowledge of a concept. Referring back to Excerpt 3.1, Daniel might have cultural knowledge about the types of places that are open late at night, or cultural knowledge of being open late as a concern for people, and he might have personal knowledge of such places in the city where he and Katrin live. In addition, there are various possible sources of each of these types of knowledge, levels of certainty in them, and depth of experience. The management of these types and levels of knowledge and the interplay
among them are important in constructing topic, and so I will talk briefly now about how knowledge is shared.

Important for the construction of topic is how knowledge is presented as shared (or not) in an interaction, a concept referred to as pragmatic intersubjectivity (Edwards 1997). Knowledge is highly social, and completely private knowledge that is never shared has only limited value to the holder. In fact, one of the most important early cognitive/linguistic developmental milestones is the acquisition of the theory that other people have knowledge and intentions that are different from our own (e.g., Wellman 1990; Baron-Cohen 1997). And so it is our responsibility as interactants to present knowledge that we presume to be shared as such, and present knowledge that the other might not have as not. Van Dijk (2012) describes the constantly fluctuating state of knowledge in interaction as a context model, which allows interactants to situate each contribution that they make to a conversation in a way that is appropriate in that very moment of utterance. The packaging of knowledge as shared, be it completely or partially, leads to interpretations of concepts and, possibly, requests for more information.

I have only touched on the vast, multidisciplinary field of knowledge, and the smaller field of the expression of knowledge in discourse and interaction, however a baseline discussion of it is important to a discussion of topic. When we ask *What are we talking about?* we cannot simply name the concepts that have been introduced into a conversation thus far; we need to have various types of knowledge about them, and whether and how they are shared.

To illustrate concepts and knowledge of concepts in the context of everyday conversation, I present a very brief example to which I will refer again in my discussions of the other main components of topic as well. In the following excerpt, Lia and Keith (sister and
brother, respectively) are talking with their friend Eve about Eve’s infant son’s recent illness and stint in the hospital.

Excerpt 3.2

1 Lia: What was his heart rate?
2 Eve: Two-o-four.
3 Lia: And it’s supposed to be::
4 Eve: I think he said like o:ne sixty-eight or something.
5 Keith: Well (...) babies are supposed to have really high heart [rates.]
6 Lia: [But ] one sixty-eight versus two-o-four?
7 Keith: That’s still scary.

Again, I will be focusing here on knowledge of concepts. Lia asks what Eve’s son’s heart rate was when he was treated at the hospital (line 1), a question which not only presupposes that Eve’s son had a measured heart rate but implies its relevance; it displays the knowledge that the baby’s heart rate is a salient indicator of his health status at the time of his illness. This allows Eve and Keith to infer that Lia understands that the answer to her question, likely to be a specific heart rate, will be meaningful. And so Eve provides a direct, unqualified answer in the form of a number, two-o-four, representing this rate. But while Eve, having experienced the visit to the hospital, has some personal knowledge of this number gleaned from hearing it reported at the time, Lia obviously does not (see Heritage and Raymond [2005] on assessment positions). While Lia’s (limited, non-professional) social knowledge of hospital tests and health indicators, possibly supplemented by personal experience, allows her to recognize the significance of Eve’s answer, her personal knowledge does not include an understanding of low and high heart rates. So to follow up on Eve’s answer, she offers the first part of a proposition for Eve to complete, And it’s supposed to be::, where the elongated vowel in be indicates the place where Eve should take up her turn.
In response to this request, Eve states *I think he said like one sixty-eight or something.* Here the certainty of her knowledge shifts; she draws upon not direct experience (her son’s specific heart rate) but upon her uncertain memory of what the doctor (*he*) told her at the time (hedging her answer with *or something*), and an even less certain knowledge of heart rates generally. She is indicating that this is not her knowledge, not her understanding of heart rate measurement in the institutional context of pediatrics, but her recall of what a professional had told her. The contrast is clear in that Eve has specific, personal knowledge of her child’s heart rate at the time, which is what was most salient to her; her knowledge of the relevant context of interpretation of that number is less clear because she did the important interpretive work (she determined the rate was dangerously high) at some time in the past.

Keith then offers that *Well, babies are supposed to have really high heart rates* (line 5), and accomplishes two actions with this comment: first, Keith exhibits the knowledge that he finds useful, to him, in interpreting the number *two-o-four*, and second, he problematizes the idea of *high*. With his comment, he acknowledges that *two-o-four* and *one sixty-eight* are both high, and he asserts that this is, in fact, within the range of what he would consider normal. This brings into question the concept of a “high” heart rate, and shows that some knowledge of concepts that had just been shared (the child’s heart rate, the ideal normal heart rate) is perhaps not, in fact, entirely shared by all. Keith intimates an understanding of this by prefacing his statement with *well*, signaling that it might be considered dispreferred in this immediate context (Schiffrin 1987). In response, Lia offers a comparison between the baby’s heart rate and the ideal heart rate, *But one sixty-eight versus two-o-four?* This doesn’t offer any new knowledge per se, but it does indicate through the juxtaposition of the two numbers that Keith’s implication that the

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23 Drew and Heritage (1992) note that even when speakers do, in fact, have medical knowledge of a situation, they will often present this knowledge as belonging to a clinician, and will downplay their certainty in their knowledge. This is another explanation for Eve’s response.
baby’s heart rate might not actually have been very high is inappropriate. This part of the exchange recalls the context model of knowledge, in that Keith’s knowledge is determined by Lia to be inappropriate or not relevant to the concepts within the topic at hand. It is important to note that Lia does not provide an explanation of the heart rate scale, such as what a minimum, maximum, or mean might be, or how age is a factor in interpreting the number. She does, however, indicate through her comment that Keith’s orientation to the concepts under discussion is not in keeping with the topic that she and Eve had been constructing.

This final observation, as well as Keith’s response to Lia, will be taken up in the next section in which I discuss the role of the point in topic.

3.3.2 Points

The second question, Why are we talking about this?, leads us to another basic organizing component of topic, the idea that there is a purpose or goal of our talk (Goffman 1981). The why in this question I will refer to as points.24 Stated simply, points are the salient, essential reasons for the talk that constructs topic, which are appreciated by interactants in some shared way (or not). Points are key in the construction of topic because knowing why we are talking about what allows not only for appropriate next turns at talk, but also more generally engenders “euphoria,” in Goffman’s terms (1961) and “rapport” in Tannen's (2005). I want to start talking about points in terms of two components that I see as very slightly different: gists and appreciation. Gists are more related to concepts, or the content of talk, in that the gist assimilates the utterance-by-utterance details of the interaction and represents a summary of the main idea. One does not keep every concept introduced in discourse in mind, or as Chafe (1994) would characterize it, active consciousness; some of the concepts fall away, or are subsumed by larger categories of concepts,

24 Schank et al. (1982) discuss the idea of points from the field of artificial intelligence, drawing on Speech Act Theory and the Cooperative Principle.
when one formulates a gist. What I refer to as appreciation is more social, in that it addresses what is important or interesting to the interactants about the gist, in the context of the interaction.\(^{25}\) Points, then, represent a combination of the two. I will begin by talking more about gists, followed by appreciation.

Evidence for the idea of gists can be derived from various perspectives on language and interaction. To start, we can talk about gists using the framework of the Cooperative Principle, or Grice’s conversational maxims, specifically that of relevance (Grice 1975). Grice’s maxim of relevance simply states that one should make one’s contributions relevant, but does not offer much specificity in how this might be operationalized (Brown and Yule 1983). In a series of studies, Tracy (1982; 1983; 1984) proposes local and global approaches to relevance, in which local means that an utterance is relevant to the one or two that were spoken prior, and global means that an utterance is relevant to the gist of the current talk (following Kintsch and van Dijk 1978). Overall her (experimental) research found that speakers tended to judge possible next-utterances as “more relevant” if they responded to the gist of the discourse, rather than the immediately prior utterances (Tracy 1984).\(^{26}\)

An example of interactional evidence for gists is the expression of formulations (Heritage and Watson 1979). Formulations are versions of some amount of talk, from a single turn to several, that express a gist either by glossing the talk in different terms to confirm receipt of information or adding evaluation or additional information to what has been said (Edwards 1997). In order for interactants to orient to a topic and adjust their next contributions accordingly, they might offer a formulation of what has been said, which will indicate what they

\(^{25}\) See Goffman (1981) for a related discussion, and Tannen (2005) for a discussion of points and conversational style, with particular attention to narratives.

\(^{26}\) Brown and Yule would seem to agree, as they claim that the maxim of relevance could be better expressed as “make your contribution relevant in terms of the existing topic framework” (1983, 84).
think the point of the topic is, or what they want it to be; they do this, as Heritage and Watson described, through preservation of some elements of the prior talk, deletion of others, and transformation. For example, in the following excerpt Jaime is talking to his friend Mike about the detrimental chain-reaction effects of detonating the atomic bomb and how we tend to worry about the wrong problems, ignoring their possible source:

Excerpt 3.3

1 Jaime: We’re all worried about the ozone.
2 We’re all worried about the uh-
3 Mike: Hm.
4 Jaime: Uh: th- cancer is everywhere.
5 [uh: ]
6 Mike: [So you’re saying it] might have done the sa:me ba:d thing,
7 but in a sort of more roundabout way:

I identified this excerpt as a disorientation due to Mike’s formulation (line 6); it suggests that Mike either wanted to “check” his orientation to the topic, or to confirm or display it. Mike’s formulation, launched with the explicit formulation-signaling phrase so you’re saying, deletes all of the detail from Jaime’s explanation (most of which is not even included here) and tries to present a summary: that the atomic bomb might not have destroyed the world when it was used decades ago, but it is slowly destroying us with time. Essentially, Mike is assimilating all of the concepts introduced by Jaime, and all of their shared knowledge about them, to form a gist that projects the point, or why they are talking about this. Similar interactional evidence comes from elisions (Goffman 1981). As Merritt (1976) describes, when a question is replied to with a related follow-up question, rather than a direct answer, the follow-up question is evidence of the assumption of the preferred answer.

27 As Edwards (1997) noted, it seems impossible to talk about formulations without using formulations.
Not so prominent in the previous examples but very important to the idea of a point, *Why are we talking about this?*, is appreciation, or the social component. The result of sharing appreciation is, ideally, rapport (Tannen 2005). The appreciation aspect of a point is a shared acknowledgement and emotional understanding of the importance, and sometimes orientation to this idea of appreciation supersedes orientation to the concepts. This can be seen in the following excerpt, in which Sara and Carrie, two sisters, are talking about one of Sara’s young students, introduced in line (1) as she:

Excerpt 3.4

1 Sara: That’s what she does,
2 she gets real embarrassed and she just giggles like a goofball.
3 Carrie: Turns bright red.
4 Sara: She- she does-
5 well she would if-
6 y’know if her skin weren’t like (.) really dark brown,
7 she’d probably be bright red.

In this example, Carrie orients to an appreciation of what Sara is saying, and she formulates a contribution that is meant to build on it, *turns bright red*, which is another way that people typically react when they are embarrassed. Sara marks her appreciation for the fact that Carrie recognizes this by affirming her comment (*She- she does*), but unfortunately Carrie was not correct in saying that the student turns red. Sara feels the need to set this right, ascertaining that their knowledge of this student is accurate, and so she proceeds to contradict herself and Carrie while still trying to retain the appreciation they shared for the point. Instead of saying that the student does not blush when she is embarrassed, Sara offers a conditional statement, leading with the apodosis (*Well she would if- y’know if her skin weren’t like really dark brown*). This allows that Carrie could be correct, indeed, except for this detail about the student (who is

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28 Also, for further discussion of the role of conditional sentences and topic, see Schiffrin (1992).
Latina). It is perhaps unclear why Sara decided to correct this; as Tannen describes, when one is uncertain of the point, there are choices to be made in terms of being wrong and risking embarrassment, or forgoing the rapport that would be gained from sharing a full understanding (2005, 145). However, Carrie and Sara did share the point, so Sara could have let this pass (see Garfinkel 1967) and maintained their rapport. My opinion is that it is possible that Sara corrected this because while Carrie was grasping the immediate point, Sara had also, throughout the conversation, been continually referencing her students’ Hispanic origins; for example, she often “demonstrated” (Clark and Gerrig 1990) students’ voices by employing a high pitch (to demonstrate their youth) and Spanish (to highlight their ethnicity). So this might have been another opportunity to re-assert the salience of the ethnicity of the student in question, relevant to a larger point.

In order to illustrate this general idea of points further, and more coherently, I will return to the example introduced in the discussion of concepts, repeated here:

Excerpt 3.5

1 Lia: What was his heart rate?
2 Eve: Two-o-four.
3 Lia: And it’s supposed to be:::
4 Eve: I think he said like one sixty-eight or something.
5 Keith: Well (. ) babies are supposed to have really high heart [rates.]
6 Lia: [But ] one sixty-eight versus two-o-four?
7 Keith: That’s still scary.

Here I want to focus on lines 5-7, picking up with my analysis of Keith’s comment that babies are supposed to have really high heart rates. Keith, Lia, and Eve had been talking about Eve’s son’s illness, and when the discussion moved to his heart rate, the context for interpretation of this number was still his illness and time in the hospital. (Lia asks what the baby’s heart rate was, and when Eve supplies an answer, Lia’s response – And it’s supposed to be::: – provides
evidence of the fact that the baby’s heart rate was not healthy or normal.) So for Keith to say that babies typically have high heart rates misses the point; it is relevant and coherent, but it downplays the importance engendered in Eve and Lia’s prior turns in which they provided the number and interpreted it. Keith’s claim that babies have high heart rates might be true; this knowledge might even be accommodated by the other interactants if it is new to them. Note that Lia’s response, *But one sixty-eight versus two-o-four?* does not take issue with whether babies are or are not supposed to have high heart rates; rather, it highlights that there is a difference between Eve’s report from the doctor of what is typical and what her son’s rate was. It is presented, *But…*, as a contrast to Keith’s assessment, not a statement of its falsity (see Schiffрин 1987). Keith’s response to Lia, *That’s still scary*, demonstrates his understanding of her redirection to the point; even if he maintains that babies’ heart rates are typically high, he indicates that he shares the point of the topic. They are talking about Eve’s son’s hospital visit, and subsequently, his heart rate, because this was a traumatic event for the baby and for Eve. And even though the event was so trying, both are able to bear witness to how difficult it was. They overcame a challenge together, and this is what the other interactants are meant to value and admire.

Now that we have discussed the *what* and *why* of topic, we can move on to a discussion of topic as a construct, and the wider effect it has in interaction; I will do so in the following section.

3.3.3 CONTROL

With the final question, *How is topic manipulated?*, I mean to take us out of the realm of the construction of topic in interaction through orientation to concepts and points, and address another important aspect of the emergence of topic: the forces that interactants bring to bear on
the negotiation of topic. Schiffrin (1988) suggested that the main function of topic is the organization and management of knowledge and metaknowledge, however she also allowed that topic can be related to “the distribution of social and linguistic resources within the speech community” (1988, 15), and these resources are constantly obtained and surrendered. To discuss why topic is important beyond conversational coherence and organization, and address this question of resources, I will refer to control. I define control here as the management of one’s own face concerns and those of others in an interaction (Goffman 1981), and relatedly, the positioning of oneself or others as agentive with respect to the emergent talk (see Davies and Harré 1990; Bamberg 2000; Chou 2004). These are linked to control of topic emergence through turns at talk (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). This control, or the will and ability to maintain face, engenders social benefits (e.g., advantages, prestige, power, respect) that are accrued from interactants’ orientation to, and manipulation of, topic; a sense of control brought by an individual to an interaction can also make one more able to orient to and manipulate topics. I also want to emphasize that control is dependent upon the interactants’ perceptions and particular cultural experience.

To describe control, I will draw upon work in multiple fields which I will organize into the two (non-exclusive) categories of orienting to topic and manipulating topic. To begin, orienting to topic, which as discussed involves interpreting knowledge about concepts and grasping the point, results in fulfilling certain face wants. Goffman defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (1967, 5), where a “line” is “a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” (1967, 5). In terms of orienting to topic, sharing a common
understanding with others in an interaction, being on topic, makes for positive social results, what Tannen (2005) has discussed as the desire for community (vs. independence). Face is important not only for one’s own self presentation but for how a person interacts with others in the future; one known for being sensitive to the face wants of others in his or her community will likely be a more sought-after interactant. Relatedly, orientation to topic helps to incorporate new participants into a conversation, or as a newcomer, to be incorporated. As Goffman states, “participants have a right not only to initiate face engagements but also to enter ones that are already in progress” (1963, 173), and orientation to topic is important to integrating oneself into interaction. Most people will recognize the feeling of joining a conversation and not being able to orient to the concepts or the point (or both), even after an introduction to the topic such as We’re talking about the upcoming election or She’s telling us about how awkward this wedding was. It is a very uncomfortable feeling, because one feels unmoored in the interaction, excluded by the other interactants or due to one’s own inability to orient. Orienting to topic not only has implications for face, but relatedly, implications for interactional access and fully taking part in one’s speech community.

Access has much in common with face, in that incorporating new interactants into a conversation could also be characterized as access, etc. First I want to discuss access in terms of orienting to concepts, but in an institutional context. For example, Goffman (1981) discusses the case of a doctor talking with a woman who is the mother of his patient. He writes that “the mother may not know with any specificity what any of the doctor’s acts are leading up to or getting at, her being ‘in on’ the instrumentally meaningful sequence of events in no way being necessary for her contribution to it” (1981, 142). So the woman in this case is not able to orient to the point, and in fact, this ability is immaterial to the doctor, who is in control of the
knowledge of concepts that would affect any subsequent action. Not only does she not have access, but there is no strategy readily available for her to remedy this. She also, in her role as layperson, might not be agentive in this context. While agency can be approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, Chou’s definition seems apt in a discussion of topic. She defines agency as “a speaker’s verbal positioning of self as having a sense of control and autonomy in a given situation” (2004, 69); this verbal positioning (Davies and Harré 1990) of control can be enacted by the manipulation of topic (for one example). Agency is integrated with access specifically as well as control, in that interactants have the option of “claiming power,” in Ainsworth-Vaughn’s terms (1998) and one of the many ways they can accomplish this is through the manipulation of topic (e.g., topic initiations).

Another example of access is access to the floor (Edelsky 1993; Erickson, 1982). If one wishes to speak, and have the contribution suitably oriented to topic thus increasing face benefits and one’s control of them, then one must have oriented to the emergent topic in order to know how to position his or her contribution. The importance of this orientation can be observed in examples of pre-questions such as the following, in which two friends from the same retirement community are chatting.

Excerpt 3.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Delia:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Abby:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Delia:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I really oughta call at least Ron Burke and ask if uh-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Well now he was the one that was up on the uh- [left, ]</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Yeah.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(..) he’s still speaking to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(.) HHHHHHH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Abby:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delia:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Abby:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Abby:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Well he came over to you all smiles I noticed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In response to Delia’ turn in lines (1-3), Abby appears to intend to add that the man Delia is talking about is not angry with her, and in fact, all smiles (line 9). However, in order for her contribution to have any value, or to be on topic, she needs to make sure that the referent called Ron Burke is who she thinks he is.

Let us return one more time to our brief example of everyday talk among friends, in order to examine how control can be accumulated, even in a very short exchange.

Excerpt 3.7

1 Lia: What was his heart rate?
2 Eve: Two-o-four.
3 Lia: And it’s supposed to be:
4 Eve: I think he said like one sixty-eight or something.
5 Keith: Well (. ) babies are supposed to have really high heart [rates.]
6 Lia: [But ] one sixty-eight versus two-o-four?
7 Keith: That’s still scary.

We have already discussed how knowledge of concepts is important for orientation to topic, and in this excerpt the most negotiated concept was the baby’s heart rate. Here, knowing how to interpret a heart rate is a source of control because not only does it reflect well upon the individual and potentially impress others, but it allows one, in Goffman’s terms, to be “in on” (1981, 142) aspects of the action. This permits an interactant to be agentive in making the choice to contribute to the conversation or not, rather than relegate him or her to excluded or observer status. Participating in the topic makes it more likely that one can display what one knows and be asked more questions as a valued member of the community (or at least, the interaction).

Let us focus now on Keith’s interpretation of the heart rate reading in line 5, Well babies are supposed to have really high heart rates. While this displays his knowledge about heart rates, it also shows his temporary blindness to or willful ignoring of the point of the topic. Essentially, with this comment he is disagreeing with Eve that her son’s rate was dangerously
high, and positioning himself as in control of such an assessment. One possible outcome is that the other interactants will accept this and the original point will be abandoned; this would both indicate and reinforce his control in the interaction. The other possibility is that the other interactants will reject this and reassert the point that they had understood the topic to have. This would probably result in less control for Keith, a downgrading of his display of agency. So let us examine what actually happens. Lia indicates that while Keith’s contribution may be true, it misses the point: *But one sixty-eight versus two-o-four?* This increases Lia’s control of the interaction by gently guiding Keith towards the point constructed by herself and Eve; this agentive move assumes that her guidance would potentially have value to Keith. However, as I discussed earlier in the context of points, Lia does not make any explicit claims about heart rates and the normal range; she does not contradict Keith, or assert the point explicitly (see also Tannen [2005] on indirectness). This creates the opportunity for Keith to reply *That’s still scary*, which accomplishes a number of actions. First, by saying that it is *scary* he names the point of the topic, something that neither Eve nor Lia had done, so it shows him as being more knowledgeable about the point than he had seemed to be. Second, saying that the heart rate is *still scary* maintains the truth of his assertion about normal babies’ heart rates, while acknowledging what the point had already been established to be, showing him to be oriented to it rather than making a new observation that could be met with derision. To paraphrase, he is essentially saying “Even though I maintain that babies’ heart rates are typically much higher than adults’, I recognize that what we’re talking about was very scary for Eve.” So, in summary, a moment that could have been detrimental to Keith’s sense of control was negotiated by both Keith and Lia to be benign.
At this point I also want to discuss orientation to topic and control in reference to manipulation of topic. The manipulation of topic both results in more control and is constituted by it; this is a point I did not address often in my analysis of Eve, Lia, and Keith’s conversation, but it is important. The mechanical details of how topic is manipulated in conversation have been described extensively, and this discussion presupposes this body of knowledge. I want to talk about the results of these mechanical processes, or the social “upshot.” Returning to the example of the doctor conferring with the mother of the patient (Goffman 1981), in which the mother is not privy to the point of the topic, the doctor can maintain control of the topic by asking the mother questions which are influenced by his evaluation of the salience of the pieces of information revealed in their talk (see also Tannen and Wallat 1993). In this situation, his orientation to and control of the topic increases his interactional control and allows him to claim status in comparison to the mother; also, his role as a doctor allows this to even be possible in the first place. With that said, Chou (2004) argues that patients can display agency, even if they bring less status to the interaction than the doctors they converse with, by initiating topics through questions. The exchange is constant.

To examine control of topic in everyday conversation, let us examine the following rather explicit example of metadiscursive mention of topic, in which a married couple (Sally and Rob) are talking to their friend Pat about a book they recently read:

Excerpt 3.8

1 Rob: A book [called]
2 Sally: [XX]
3 Rob: (. ) Po:wer and Go:ld?
4 Pat: Power and Gold?
5 Rob: (. ) Power and Gold.
6 (. ) It’s [all about ] ((chewing))
7 Pat: [XX]
8 Sally: (. ) MU:sl:ms.
Here, in lines (8) and (9), Sally and Rob sum up the theme of the book they both read in very different terms: Sally says the book was about Muslims and Rob says that it was about jewelry traditions. Sally is completing Rob’s sentence, It’s all about, terminating her turn with falling intonation. But after she completes Rob’s sentence and supplies the concept, he contradicts her statement and asserts what he believes the book to have been about. Pat backchannels with uhuh, which does not explicitly commit him to one view of the topic of this book over the other. Then, however, Rob takes another turn that functions as a completion to his earlier clause, though the clause would have been grammatically and intonationally complete on its own. The effect this has is that Rob displays control, having decided what the book was about. When Pat backchannels again, Right, he is taking up what Rob has said, not Sally. He reorients to this, Oh that sounds great, marking his change of state (Heritage 1984) and offering an evaluation of that, or “a book about jewelry traditions of the archipelago of Indonesia and the Philippines.” Perhaps anticipating this reaction, Rob overlaps with Pat’s turn, asking him Do you wanna see it? to which Pat replies Yeah. In terms of orientation to topic, neither Sally nor Rob was necessarily wrong in their interpretations of what the book was about, or at least, this was not suggested in the context of the interaction. But they had two different views of it, and Rob simply asserted his more forcefully. So even though Pat might have been interested in a book about Muslims, he ended up expressing interest in the most salient comment, which was Rob’s. When Rob offers to show Pat the book, he is offering to show Pat a book about jewelry traditions; he is the conduit for subsequent knowledge of or appreciation for this topic. And this
control that Rob exhibited provides him with what one could translate into prestige in this context.

The accumulation of control has a variety of outcomes. As has been noted as one of the main themes of Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g., van Dijk 1993; Fairclough 1989) social and political power are based on the accumulation of resources like what I am describing as control. Having the knowledge, emotional and interactional skills, and physical/temporal access to orient to a topic is a significant advantage interactionally. Orientation to topic, which includes active processes like manipulation, can have sociopolitical advantages, encompassing diverse social contexts.

3.3.4 Illustrating the Framework

Having described a framework for discussing topic, I want to proceed with a sequential analysis of a short excerpt of a conversation to illustrate how it works. I chose this example partly because, as I hope will be apparent, there is a clear disorientation to topic, but there are no overt metadiscursive comments that would indicate it.

In Excerpt 3.9, presented in full below, two friends (Mike and Jaime) are talking about selling rights to one’s creative output, and the financial rewards that result – or more often, do not result – from its success. At the start of the excerpt, Mike asserts that failure to receive reasonable financial compensation certainly happens in music (line 1) and Jaime replies that in fact it happens (line 2), happens all over the place (line 6). Jaime’s expansion of the scope of where or how this practice happens allows for a broad range of relevant subsequent contributions, rather than restricting contributions to those related to the music industry; see Sacks (1995) on co-class membership and Chafe (1994) on activated concepts. It is here at a potential topic transition, where Mike begins a turn (line 7) that I focus my attention.
Excerpt 3.9

1. Mike: That certainly happens in music.
3. [?] [?] ?yeah.
4. Mike: [Yeah.]
5. Jaime: (.) Y’know?
6. Mike: (.) Y’know I wish I was-
7. -> Mike: [Y’know I wish I was-
8. uh
9. the person:
10. (.) whose voice they used in the (.) telephone,
11. when it tells you (.) the number has been changed.
12. (.) And that I had /t/ copyright.
13. HH
14. Get some royalties=
15. =Like
16. that lady,
17. y’know
18. h- you hear
19. (.) “the number you have reached
22. Mike: (.) Huh?
23. Jaime: Didn’t they get a different woman?
24. (.) When she th- tried to do that?
25. Mike: [I don’t know if they DID. ]
27. Mike: I didn’t hear any follow-up.
29. Jaime: That’s what I thought that they did any[ways. ]
30. Mike: [Yeah?]
31. (.) Huh.
32. (.) They certainly USE her a lot.
33. (.) But I mean it-
34. they only use-
35. what.
36. A s- uh-
37. five seconds total or something?
38. Y’know
39. it’s a-
40. Jaime: tsk Probably took her a lo:ng time: to-
41. (.) tsk to say every possible combination.

Mike, overlapping with the end of Jaime’s turn, responds to Jaime’s expansion of the topic with a three-part turn, which I will examine part by part. Mike begins with a counterfactual statement (Y’know I wish I was), in which y’know focuses the interactants’ attention on the upcoming talk as well as invites the addressee to share in some sort of knowledge that is forthcoming (Schiffrin
1987). Because Mike begins with a counterfactual statement, accessing an imaginary world rather than the real world that they could both access, it is not immediately apparent what type of knowledge they might both share; accordingly, Jaime is silent while Mike explains. The object of his wish, that he were the person whose voice they used in the telephone when it tells you the number has been changed, orients this counterfactual statement in the real world that Jaime would be expected to know. Mike presents his complex object as a definite description, indicating a jointly-accessible, though not highly accessible, referent (Ariel 1990).\(^{29}\) He embeds in the description other signals that this concept is shared: first, they refers to whomever at the major telephone company or companies is responsible for such recordings; second, the presupposition it tells you the number has been changed signals that this is something that has happened, that Jaime could have knowledge of or could easily accommodate. Additionally, you within the presupposition invites Jaime to orient to the concept of this person by implying that he himself, or others he knows of, might have experience with it. Overall, the description used for this concept makes a strong appeal to Jaime’s cultural and social knowledge, or his knowledge of common institutions and their place in society, and perhaps his personal experience as well (Schiffrin 1988). So far, it is difficult to discern a point; this appears acceptable to Jaime, who does not take a turn and listens to Mike continue.

Continuing with his wish, in the second part of his turn, Mike adds and that I had /t’/ copyright (line 12), which makes the connection to the concept they had been talking about before, copyrights as related to music and, more generally, all over the place. He laughs briefly, signaling that he has achieved some point or arrived at some punchline of this extended turn, but he has no sign of uptake or verbal reaction from Jaime. Mike’s point hinges on two pieces of cultural and social knowledge informing the concepts introduced, which he has not made

\(^{29}\) In Chafe’s (1994) terms, this referent would not be in active consciousness at its mention.
explicit: that the “performance” by *this person whose voice they used*... is heard very often across the country, and that a copyright would require payment for each use, thus making the performer very wealthy. Perhaps Mike was relying on Jaime’s social knowledge of this system being highly accessible since it was a feature of their prior talk. Regardless, Mike cannot know that his point has been taken, or that Jaime even understands the concepts that Mike is talking about. Mike’s own laughter at his silly scenario is not shared, and there is no signal of appreciation or rapport (or even exasperation). So he adds *get some royalties*, filling in some of the knowledge that *copyright* might or might not have triggered, and quickly follows with *Like that lady y’know h- you hear “the number you have reached da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh”* to make the concept of *the person whose voice they used*... more vivid by performing or demonstrating (Clark and Gerrig 1990) the typical action of *that lady* and again appealing to shared knowledge.

Jaime responds to Mike’s turn with a statement that both evokes the prior talk cohesively and shows a completely different orientation to it than Mike. Overlapping with Mike’s demonstration of *that lady*, Jaime offers *They got a different WOMAN, didn’t they*; he repeats the vague *they* that Mike mentioned in his description, referring to *they* who are in charge at the telephone company, and introduces *a different woman*, a concept which gets its meaning from its contrastive relationship with the woman that Mike was talking about: *the person whose voice they use*... and *that lady you hear*... Mike replies with a nonspecific request for repetition (Garvey 1979) after a very brief pause: *Huh?* It is unclear at first whether Mike simply did not hear Jaime, due to the overlap, or cannot make sense of what Jaime said. Either way, it warrants further investigation.
By laying out the text of Mike’s turn in terms of the concepts that point to the real world, those that point to the counterfactual world of Mike’s wish, and those that could be ambiguous, I attempt to isolate the possible source of trouble that influenced Jaime’s turn. It is clear that in constructing his counterfactual scenario or fantasy, Mike anchors much of it in the real world, more specifically the real world that Jaime would be expected to know.

Figure 3.1. Possible source of trouble

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COUNTERFACTUAL WORLD</strong></th>
<th><strong>AMBIGUOUS</strong></th>
<th><strong>REAL WORLD</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[0] y’know I wish I was [1]</td>
<td>[4] Like [5]</td>
<td>[1] the person [1a] whose voice they used in the telephone [1b] when it tells you the number has been changed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we have already discussed the real world, let us focus now on the counterfactual. Mike’s mention of copyright, preceded by a very reduced to that sounds like a or uh-, and his mention of some royalties seem to be grounded in the counterfactual; the preceding and signals that the clause following it is a continuation of the previously-introduced topic, and the clause is structurally complementary with the earlier one. Compare the following two utterances, fleshed out with elided portions underlined:

Example 3.1. Comparison of Mike’s utterances

a. Y’know [I wish that] I was ….
b. And [I wish that] I had /t'/ copyright Get some royalties
Then, *get some royalties* makes clear the upshot of having a *copyright*. However, in the third part of his turn, when Mike continues with *Like that lady y’know h- you hear “the number you have reached da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh”* it is unclear if *like* draws a connection between *that lady* and the first part or second part of the turn. This is why I have called it *ambiguous* in the figure above. If it connects *that lady* to part [2-3], the counterfactual world in which Mike has a copyright and royalties, this would be paraphrased as “I wish I were like this lady I’m performing now, who has a copyright and royalties on her performance.” If *like* connects to part [1], the real world of *the person whose voice they used*..., then this could be paraphrased as “I wish I were like this lady I’m performing now, who is like the person I mentioned earlier, whom you might know.” The distinction here has implications for the emergence of the topic.

Jaime seems to follow the latter interpretation. He takes a strongly epistemic stance (see Raymond and Heritage 2006) when he says *They got a different woman, didn’t they*, and invites Mike to take a similar stance by adding the tag question with falling intonation at the end. Jaime indicates that his certainty might be shared by Mike, but this depends on them talking about the same concept, a specific woman of whom Mike has personal knowledge. But Mike does not present her that way; he presents her first as a role, *the person whose voice they used*... and second as a demonstration of that role. This slight difference is reminiscent of Donnellan’s (1966) distinction between attributive and referential descriptions, with Mike meaning the attributive and Jaime the referential. For the purposes of examining topic in conversation, this difference has implications for the point of the talk. Mike’s point had nothing to do with the woman herself; the point had to do with the money that such a person, perhaps Mike himself, might earn with a copyright. Overall, it was meant to be funny; Mike’s laugh confirms this. The
point was humor. But Jaime is concerned with ascertaining the identity and employment status of a specific person.

In response to Mike’s *Huh?* Jaime repeats his prior utterance but downgrades his certainty slightly, restructuring his utterance by removing the tag question and making the statement into a question, with rising intonation (*Didn’t they get a different woman?*); this signals that he considers this knowledge to perhaps not be shared. He then adds *when she tried to do that?*, referring back to a specific woman, about whom Mike had been talking in a more attributive sense, and presupposing that this woman *tried to do that*, meaning that she tried to copyright her work and claim royalties; these are the only actions described by Mike, the only actions available in the prior talk to be referred to deictically by *do that*. Jaime then restates his earlier utterance, *they hired another voice*, where *they* remains constant, *hired* replaces *got* and *another voice* replaces *a different woman*. And then he finally and decisively downgrades his certainty, going so far as to suggest that his knowledge might be false, with *that’s what I thought that they did anyways*. While Jaime’s comments are cohesive with respect to the prior talk, he treats as shared the presupposition *when she tried to do that*, when in fact the action of getting a copyright and royalties had been introduced by Mike as part of his counterfactual world, not the real world. Jaime acknowledges the desire or necessity of pivoting away from this point, ending his turn with *anyways* (Fraser 2009).

Mike, for his part, responds to Jaime’s assumptions about their shared knowledge by incorporating these pieces of knowledge. But he resists verifying their accuracy or adding any additional information. When Jaime asks, *didn’t they get a different woman? When she th- tried to do that?* Mike says *I don’t know if they DID*, which accommodates the idea that the woman he was talking about tried to get a copyright. When Jaime says *they hired another voice*, Mike
responds *I didn’t hear any follow-up*, which presupposes that there was news or a rumor that he could have known about, but he simply did not hear about the aftermath. It is not clear why Mike would respond this way, but it might be that Jaime has so completely changed the point of Mike’s story that the only other option would be for Mike to try to clarify his point through metadiscursive comments. Mike’s and Jaime’s points could be reformulated as follows:

**Figure 3.2. Reformulations of Mike’s and Jaime’s points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MIKE</th>
<th>JAIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mike: [Y’know I wish] I was-uh&lt;br&gt; the person:&lt;br&gt; (. ) whose voice they used in the (. ) telephone, when it tells you (. ) the number has been changed.&lt;br&gt; (. ) And that I had /t/ copyright.&lt;br&gt; HH&lt;br&gt; Get some royalties= &lt;br&gt; =Like&lt;br&gt; that lady,&lt;br&gt; y’know&lt;br&gt; h- you hear&lt;br&gt; (...) “the number you have reached&lt;br&gt; da-duh da-duh [da-duh da-duh da-duh da-duh.”]</td>
<td>Jaime: [They got a different woman ] didn’t they.&lt;br&gt; Mike: (. ) Huh?&lt;br&gt; Jaime: Didn’t they get a different woman?&lt;br&gt; (. ) When she th- tried to do that?&lt;br&gt; Mike: [I don’t know if they DID. ]&lt;br&gt; Jaime: [They- they- they hired an]other voice.&lt;br&gt; Mike: I didn’t hear any follow-up.&lt;br&gt; But.&lt;br&gt; Jaime: That’s what I thought that they did&lt;br&gt; any[ways. ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Speaking of copyrights and making money from royalties, could you imagine if I were the person who recorded the message one hears when a wrong number is dialed? That message is heard thousands of times per day, and if I had a copyright, I would be rich. POINT: Wouldn’t that be funny?  

Speaking of the woman who recorded the message one hears when a wrong number is dialed, she was replaced when she tried to copyright her performance, as you are suggesting you would do. POINT: Your plan would not make you wealthy.

It seems that Jaime and Mike are oriented to concepts that are only subtly different, and to points that are quite different from each other. Or in other words, while they both share the concepts under discussion, the *what* of their talk, they do not share the point of said discussion, the *why* of their talk. Mike’s presentation of a fantasy, where in his counterfactual world he would unequivocally make a lot of money for his creativity as the voice of a telephone recording, seems to have entertainment as its point. As in, “wouldn’t it be fun to imagine this scenario.”

This is reinforced by Mike’s laughter, which is not joined in by Jaime. Mike probably treats their cultural knowledge (of stories, of spinning out fantasies for entertainment) as shared, perhaps so
shared that it is not made explicit through their talk. Jaime, for his part, expresses a completely different point. It is not the case that either of them is misinformed, or incorrect; Jaime’s point is coherent with what Mike had been saying, but it did not match Mike’s own point. In fact, Jaime’s point is provocative in that it seems to be negating Mike’s fantasy, but a fantasy was exactly what it was, not a plan to be evaluated. Mike’s point was to entertain, to say something clever related to their prior talk.

Both Jaime and Mike seem to realize this impasse and jointly close down the topic, Jaime by ending his turn with anyways and Mike by offering minimal responses like yeah? and huh, interspersed with a series of shared pauses. When Mike resumes the conversation, with a softly spoken They certainly use her a lot, he ignores the negotiation over the woman’s identity they just had, by referring again to they and then to a vague her, which is an attributive reference to the role or position he had been talking about earlier and not the specific woman herself: her, whoever she may be. He stresses use to focus attention on the frequency of the recorded message, implied in his earlier point about the copyright; but he goes on to contradict or at least problematize what he just said, asking Jaime But I mean it-they only use what. a s-uh five seconds total or something? and this invites Jaime to provide input on the knowledge that they might share. Jaime, in response, references Mike’s assertion that they certainly use her a lot and repeats the vague her, agreeing that it Probably took her a long time: to- to say every possible combination. Jaime signals that he is similarly oriented at this point, i.e., no longer concerned about the identity of the woman.

At this point, I want to end with an examination of how control is manifested in this exchange. In particular, I think that this will help to explain Mike’s somewhat puzzling responses to Jaime.
Let us begin with Mike’s laughter in line 13. Clearly, laughter is a sign that humor is successful (Tannen 2005), or at least acknowledged, and the fact that Jaime does not laugh, even politely, is quite detrimental to Mike’s face; in effect, he has failed. Mike attempts to restore his control by elaborating the key concepts in his joke, in case Jaime has misunderstood. But in line 21, with the strong epistemic stance They got a different woman didn’t they, Jaime signals that he in fact did share knowledge of these concepts. Whether or not he had oriented to the point, that Mike was kidding, is effectively ignored because Jaime takes control of his turn and the next turn (elicited through the tag question). Any decrease in Jaime’s own control that could have resulted from not getting the joke is avoided, while Mike is left laughing at his own joke. He would, one would think, want to rectify this.

Excerpt 3.10 (of Excerpt 3.9)

23 Jaime: Didn’t they get a different woman?
24 (.) When she th- tried to do that?
25 → Mike: [I don’t know if they DID.]
26 Jaime: [They- they- they hired an]other voice.
27 → Mike: I didn’t hear any follow-up.
28 But.
29 Jaime: That’s what I thought that they did any[ways. ]
30 Mike: [Yeah?]
31 (..) Huh.
32 (..) They certainly USE her a lot.

In this excerpt, it seems that Mike is a bit disoriented to what Jaime is saying, because it seems cohesive and relatively coherent (due to the shared concepts) but off-topic (due to the difference in point). But, oddly, Mike’s turns signal shared knowledge that might not be expected (as described above). It might be that after not achieving the rapport of his humorous point earlier, he is reluctant to admit to not knowing something; knowledge is, of course, power (van Dijk 2003). In addition, what Mike appears to be doing is stonewalling; Jaime is appealing to Mike’s orientation to concepts, asking questions in order to solicit answers, but Mike will not provide
them. Consider *I didn’t hear any follow-up*. By using the term *follow-up*, Mike signals that he knows about the situation Jaime describes, but by not providing any information about it, he does not co-construct this topic with Jaime.

This strategy results in Jaime downgrading his knowledge to the point of pivoting off the topic. Now it is Jaime who has lost control, by having to abandon his point, and Mike has some back. So much so, in fact, that he takes the next turn, introducing new concepts and points. In his subsequent turns, Jaime orients to and contributes to both.

### 3.4 Discussion

In summary, I have described a topic framework that considers the questions *What are we talking about?*, *Why are we talking about this?*, and *How is the talk manipulated?* Constituents of topic are concepts and points, and the result of orienting to these components, and thus to topic, is control. Because topic is a rare construct in that it has been fitted with numerous technical definitions yet it maintains its accessible, pretheoretical meaning, I have deliberately used the similarly intuitive terms *concept, point,* and *control* to illustrate my opinion that discussions and analyses of topic and its constituents will always be most effective and applicable when they capture and express an intuitive notion. What I offer, rather than a technical definition of topic is a way to organize the most essential elements of topic and provide a way to critically examine how this construct both emerges and is manipulated in interaction. Below is a summary representation of my topic framework that I will be deploying in contexts of evaluation of acquired cognitive communication disorders.
Figure 3.3. Topic

![Diagram of Orientation to Topic]

The dashed lines above are meant to represent that these categories overlap, and they influence each other. Also, the arrows are a more explicit reminder of how control not only influences topic development, but topic engenders control.

In my illustration of the framework, I aimed to show, through an instance of disorientation to topic, how the components of topic work together in everyday talk in interaction and how interactional status is affected by topic development. This framework represents my conceptualization of the metadiscursive notion of topic, thus far. However, I have so far considered topic in the context of an everyday conversation activity type; in the following three chapters, in which I examine topic emergence in clinical discourse elicitations, I also focus more explicitly on these contexts of interaction, in an attempt to understand the interplay of topic emergence and activity type.


Chapter 4

Elicitation through Participant-Managed Collection:  
The Case of Stroke

4.1 Introduction

Recall, from Chapter 3, that everyday conversation is the most common and basic medium for conducting the majority of our personal social business (Drew and Heritage 1992), the activity type (Levinson 1992) with the loosest or most vaguely defined goals, constraints, and boundaries. This is not to say that everyday conversation is not governed by these concerns; it is, and interactants are socialized to be sensitive to these constraints from such a young age that the constraints in one’s own culture’s version of everyday talk usually become second nature to adults.

Thus, everyday conversation is an important aspect of communicative competence, and its production is of interest to those who study and treat cognitive communication disorders (and certainly those who have such disorders and their families and friends). The first stage in understanding how elicitees perform this activity type is to find a way to study it, or to collect data for analysis. The elicitation of discourse, or language more broadly, from individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders, whether for clinical or research purposes, can take a number of forms. One approach to this endeavor applies conversation analytic (CA) goals and methods to the elicitation and analysis of such discourse (e.g., Damico, Oelschlaeger, and Simmons-Mackie 1999), in order to examine interactional features of individuals’ speech, and understand their language use in activities that are of everyday importance to them and to their family and friends (Hengst and Duff 2007). Thus, data are collected by identifying opportunities for recording that are as typical and natural for the interactants as possible, including
conversation partners who are individuals that the individual with an acquired cognitive communication disorder would interact with typically, regardless of the presence or absence of recording equipment, and regardless of the presence or absence of the elicitor (see Ainsworth-Vaughn 1998). The overall goal is to record, for analysis, the most natural and non-clinical authentic interaction possible, which usually results in a recording that does not involve a clinician or researcher per this approach.

In this chapter, I examine what I refer to as participant-managed collection of conversation data, which I characterize as a type of clinical discourse elicitation activity. The participant-managed collection is conducted by a long-married couple in which one partner has aphasia, an acquired cognitive communication disorder resulting from stroke, and the other does not. In these recordings, the elicitors (in this case, the researchers who initiated the collection of these data) have provided instructions on recording talk, but they themselves are not present; only the elicitees (the couple) are involved in the recorded conversations. Following after Chapter 3, in which I used everyday conversation data to develop the topic framework, this chapter explores a similar type of data in which cognitive communication disorder, particularly word-finding difficulties, is a variable of interest in conversation and in topic emergence.

The chapter begins with background on stroke and aphasia for the lay reader, and a more detailed description of the data on which the topic analyses are based. Then, the analyses are organized by sections of the elicitation activity: first, the setting up (introduction) of the elicitation, then the opening turns following the setting up, then the conversation, and finally, the closing. In the topic analyses in each section, I refer back to the components of topic outlined in Chapter 3: concepts, point, and control, and I consider the role of the activity type as well in conjunction with topic. To illustrate, I focus on selected extended examples, with additional brief
examples to supplement (providing support or contrast as appropriate). I conclude this chapter with a discussion that summarizes the salient themes of both the topic analyses and the examination of participant-managed collection as an activity type.

4.2 BACKGROUND

In this section, I provide information about stroke as well as aphasia, a common concomitant communication disorder, and a description of the corpus of conversations that I examined for the analyses in this chapter.

4.2.1 STROKE AND APHASIA

Stroke is a medical event in which a blood clot obstructs blood flow to a certain area or areas of the brain (ischemic stroke), or alternatively a blood vessel in the brain bursts, causing bleeding that leads to brain damage (hemorrhagic stroke). Stroke results in brain cell death that, depending on the area damaged, has varying physical and/or cognitive effects. Motor problems, memory impairment, and speech and language difficulties are common and might co-occur and vary in severity depending on the stroke. While stroke is not a chronic condition, its effects can be long lasting if not permanent.

Not all individuals who survive stroke have communication impairments as a result, but anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of individuals suffer post-stroke aphasia (Nicholas 2005). Aphasia is a language-specific disorder, most broadly characterized as the loss of the ability to express or comprehend language. It is usually caused by brain damage of some type, such as ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke, as well as external brain injury or neurodegeneration. Depending on the type, location, and extent of the damage, aphasia can manifest in many different types (Goodglass 2001). Two of the most common and well-described, which I will
briefly outline here to provide an illustration, are Broca’s aphasia and Wernicke’s aphasia. In Broca’s aphasia, speech output is severely reduced and is limited mainly to short utterances of less than four words, while language comprehension, spoken and written, may remain unimpaired. Vocabulary access is limited and the formation of sounds by persons with Broca’s aphasia is often laborious and difficult for others to understand. Broca’s aphasia is often referred to as a non-fluent aphasia because of the halting and effortful quality of speech. In Wernicke’s aphasia the ability to grasp the meaning of spoken or written words is chiefly impaired, while the ease of producing connected speech is not much affected. Therefore Wernicke’s aphasia is referred to as a fluent aphasia. However, speech is far from normal. Sentences do not hang together and irrelevant words intrude, sometimes to the point of jargon, in severe cases.

In general, different types of aphasia are characterized by an individual’s ability to produce, comprehend, and repeat language, as well as the incidence of paraphasias (productions that are off-target in terms of phonology or semantics) and anomia (word-finding difficulties).

4.2.2 The Data

One approach to eliciting language from individuals with communication disorders is to remove the clinician or elicitor from the interaction entirely. This approach, in theory, privileges the collection of data in the most natural, routine, everyday settings in which individuals with communication disorders might expect to find themselves. Ideally, the individual interacts with a friend, family member, or other person known or relevant to the individual, and the elicitees are responsible for orchestrating the recording of a sample of language to be used for analysis. For these reasons, I refer to this elicitation activity type as participant-managed collection.

The corpus that I draw from was created by Mary Oelschlaeger and colleagues (Damico, Oelschlaeger, and Simmons-Mackie 1999; Damico, Simmons-Mackie, Oelschlaeger, Elman, and
Armstrong, 1999; Oelschlaeger and Damico 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2003; Oelschlaeger 1999; Oelschlaeger and Thorne 1999). The corpus’ seven samples of conversation include “Ned,” a 50-year-old right handed male, who at the time of recording was six years post-left-hemisphere stroke. He exhibited residual moderate conduction aphasia and mild right hemiparesis. Conduction aphasia is a relatively rare form of aphasia, caused by damage to the nerve fibers connecting Wernicke’s and Broca’s areas of the brain, which generally govern comprehension and production, respectively. Individuals with conduction aphasia typically have difficulty repeating words, sentences, and phrases on command due to this type of nerve damage. Speech is fairly unbroken, although individuals may frequently correct themselves and words may be skipped or repeated. Although able to understand spoken language, it may also be difficult for the individual with conduction aphasia to find the right word to describe a person or object, and this is in fact the case with Ned; his word-finding difficulties, are pronounced and readily apparent in the recorded interactions. The other participant in the interactions is Mae, Ned’s wife of almost 30 years. She does not have aphasia or any history of cognitive communication disorder.

Oelschlaeger and Damico (1998b) describe the data collection process clearly. Their original goal, as conversation analysts and clinical linguists, was to study everyday conversation in the context of the interactants’ typical environment. Ned and Mae were given a video camera and instructed to record themselves at various points over a six-week period when their conversational activity would have occurred regardless of the camera’s presence. There were no predetermined instructions or topics.

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30 Again, though the participants are given pseudonyms by the owners of the corpora used in this study, I have given them new pseudonyms here, in order to (1) provide an extra layer of confidentiality, and (2) maintain consistency in naming conventions across chapters.
Ned and Mae’s video- and audio-recorded conversations take place in the backyard of their home in the American southwest. The interactions were transcribed according to conversation analytic conventions, and personally-identifiable information was excluded from these transcripts (and so is further excluded, through the use of pseudonyms for people and places, in my discussions of these interactions). The recordings and transcripts are available through AphasiaBank,31 (MacWhinney et al. 2011) which is a subsection of the TalkBank corpus (MacWhinney 2007) discussed in Chapter 3.

For my analysis, I excluded two of the seven interactions, because the two involved not only Ned and Mae, but the researcher and graduate student assistant (elicitors). I wanted to work with interactions in which the researchers were not present, in order to examine the particular genre of participant-managed collection. This left five interactions ranging in length from approximately 22 minutes to 54 minutes, for a total of approximately three hours of conversation.

4.3 ANALYSIS

As in Chapter 3, I proceeded with my analysis by watching and listening to the interactions multiple times, noting instances in the interactions in which there was some sort of disorientation to topic; and since I had developed the framework for what topic is, I was guided in this effort by my attention to concepts, point, and control. I coded each instance according to one or more of these components.

In addition, when I reviewed the recorded data I also attended to the recording as an activity type; a step that I did not explicitly take into account when I developed the topic framework based on everyday conversation among peers. I had determined that the emergence of

31 At the time of writing, the homepage for the AphasiaBank corpus, from which one can access the corpus discussed here, among others, can be found at: http://www.talkbank.org/AphasiaBank/ (accessed March 7, 2013).
the activity was closely tied to the emergence of topic, and because I am concerned with topic
development and its relationship to the clinical discourse elicitation activity types investigated in
this study, I wanted to understand not only how topic emerged, by how the activity emerged as
well. Therefore, I divided the activity into stages, representing in my analysis the bounded nature
of the clinical discourse elicitation.

I begin with the setting up of the elicitation, followed by the opening turns that come after
the setting up occurs, then the conversation from that point on, and I finish with the closing of
the elicitation.

4.3.1 Setting Up the Elicitation

The elicitation of language through participant-managed collection is distinguished by the
fact that there is no elicitor present for the elicitation who is a representative of a clinical or
research institution. Ned (recall: the participant with aphasia, Mae’s husband) and Mae (the
typical participant, Ned’s wife) record a conversation in the backyard of their home per the
earlier instructions of the researcher. Therefore, in the recorded interaction, there is no “elicitor”
and “elicitee,” but rather both interactants are elicitees even though the interactant with the
cognitive communication disorder is the known person of interest; that is to say that his
communication disorder is the main reason that these participants were approached for an
elicitation in the first place. However, because both participants are otherwise of equal status in
terms of elicitation, there is no formal or formulaic introduction provided by either of the two
participants. What I consider the introduction in these elicitations is the opening segment of the
interaction in which the participants set up the recording equipment and attend to it in some
fashion. Necessarily, there is attention paid to the recording device (audio, visual, or both) at the
start of a recording session, including casual interactions, because it represents a change from the
everyday, an occurrence outside of expectations. In her work on analyzing everyday 
conversation among friends, Tannen (2005) describes her experience of situating a bulky audio 
recorder in the middle of a Thanksgiving table, and how after a few moments it was no longer a 
main focal point of the talk. Attention to the recorder was only rekindled intermittently, such as 
when it needed to be moved or if the cassette tape was full of recorded material. Similarly, in the 
participant-managed recordings of Ned and Mae, their attention to the camera is brief and 
unsustained.

I discuss the following excerpt in terms of how Ned and Mae engage the recording 
equipment and then address the absent elicitor in various ways.

Excerpt 4.1

1    Ned:   ((waves at camera, tongue sticking out))
2    Mae:   It’s Monday, what do you want out of him?
3    Ned:   Stereo lawn mower:s-
4    Mae:   Yeah, right, I was just-
5    Mae:   With a little bit of “ssssss” from the sprinkler behind us.
6    Ned:   Right.
7    Mae:   We did this special, just for y’all.
8    Ned:   Yeah.
9   →    Uh (. ) what do we talk about?
10    Mae:   You got your battery-
11    Mae:   new battery.

At the beginning of the elicitation, Ned addresses the camera nonverbally, engaging with the 
unnamed elicitor who comprises most if not all of the anticipated future audience of the 
recording. Mae follows suit by jocularly chiding his behavior to the same audience (It’s Monday, 
what do you want out of him?) even as she aligns herself with Ned and defends him from any 
negative comments from the absent elicitor. She continues to address the absent elicitor and 
audience by describing the setting (stereo lawn mowers, the sound of the sprinkler in the yard,
etc.) and joking about their self-presentation *(We did this special, just for y’all)*, the irony of which serves to show how typical and unremarkable the scene is for the two of them.

Then, disengaging from directly addressing the audience, Ned expresses some doubt to Mae about how to proceed *(What do we talk about?)*. This is the first metadiscursive mention of topic, in that Ned signals that the most basic component of topic construction, a concept to manipulate, is unresolved at the moment. It acknowledges the need to have a conversation by beginning to construct a topic, and therefore, this is a problem for them to solve together. It also serves as an example that underlines how important and salient topic is to conversation. In response to Ned, Mae takes a turn to report something that happened in their lives; this marks the end of the setting up of the elicitation and the first of the opening turns of the conversation, which I will take up in the following section. The event Mae mentions proves relevant and interesting enough that Ned takes up this topic with his next turn, and there is no further mention of the camera, or the elicitor or the audience, in this elicitation session.

Clearly, the activity type in which Ned and Mae are engaged is an elicitation of language; Ned and Mae are both aware of the fact that they are being recorded and orient to the audience in the introduction to the session. In fact, the imagined audience for the elicitation is treated as a somewhat distant third interactant by Ned and Mae, and this interactant quickly fades from the conversation since he or she does not contribute to or ratify the talk in any way. Ned and Mae largely orient to each other, and the topics that they go on to co-construct are not explicitly influenced by the absent elicitor. Therefore, this is one way in which this type of elicitation approximates everyday conversation. Because the elicitor does not offer feedback or uptake, impose boundaries on the conversation, or otherwise control the emergence of the interaction,
the participants have no recourse other than talk to each other, neither of which is an elicitor of language or clinical discourse samples.

With that said, another factor leading to the construal of this elicitation as an elicitation of clinical language rather than everyday conversation is the roles of the participants. Ned was selected to have his language elicited because of his aphasia, which is why this corpus is medicalized, classed with other corpora relevant to communication disorders. However, it is important to note that Mae was not explicitly selected as a conversation partner; Mae did not elect to talk with Ned because of this same reason, the fact that he has aphasia – rather, he is her husband. So while Ned and Mae work to overcome real communication obstacles that have their causes in Ned’s aphasia, Mae does not relate to him only as someone with aphasia, rather, she talks to him as her husband (who has aphasia).32

Thus, short of the elicitor framing the elicitation in terms that obscure the true purpose of the project (e.g., “couples discourse,” “American dialects,” etc.), which would be ethically dubious, this is an effective way to mitigate the clinical discourse elicitation activity type and encourage natural everyday conversation. This is not to say that the interactants never engage with the recording equipment or their imagined audience after the introduction to the elicitation; in the following excerpt, Ned and Mae had already opened their recorded interaction by addressing the camera, and then they opened a topic of conversation instigated by the activities of their cat running around the yard outside. Ned marks the end of that topic and resumes talking to the camera (anyway), describing the scene and engaging with the imagined audience.

32 Work by Kilov, Togher, and Grant (2009) and Togher, McDonald, Code, and Grant (2004), among others, shares this perspective on communication partners, recruiting for their discourse studies of individuals with traumatic brain injuries interlocutors who are friends, family, etc. of the target participant.
Excerpt 4.2

1  Ned:  Well, anyway- anyway uh this is uh the- the b- (.) backyard.
2  And um-
3  Hi:: HHH ((waves))
4  Mae:  HHH So much for unobtrusive and not paying attention to it huh?
5  (...)
6  She doing okay?
7  Ned:  Yep.
8  Now he’s going back.
9  Mae:  And she’s xxx to squash the tomatoes.
10  Ned:  It’s alright! ((yelling to the cat))

Mae’s joke about their failure to ignore the camera (line 4) implies that this had been a goal for the two of them, per the activity type. But with no response from Ned, after a brief pause she immediately turns her attention back to the cat, and poses a question to Ned that he does reply to and expand upon (Yep. Now he’s going back). It seems to be the case that their backyard is an environment sufficiently rich in stimuli (e.g., the structure of the house and patio, the cats playing, shopping catalogues open in front of them on their picnic table) to allow them to ignore the camera for most of their interaction. The only moment in which Ned or Mae addresses the camera during the interaction is when Mae’s mother enters the conversation very briefly. As she leaves, Ned turns to the camera.

Excerpt 4.3

1  Ned:  My mother. ((addressing the camera))
2  Mae:  MY mother not YOUR mother. ((speaking to Ned))
3  Ned:  I mean your mother. ((speaking to Mae))
4  Mae:  HHH

Presumably, Ned had enough active awareness of the clinical discourse elicitation activity type to remember to introduce the new interactant to the audience, who would likely not know his mother-in-law. However, his way of introducing his mother-in-law is similar to the way one might introduce someone to another person present during the interaction itself. Ned recognizes
that the observer might not know who the additional interactant is, a person who was not participating when he and Mae set up the camera and started recording. Unfortunately, Ned’s use of *my* was incorrect to modify *mother*, and so Mae repairs by engaging Ned directly (*MY mother not YOUR mother*) rather than the camera/elicitor (*MY mother not HIS mother*). Ned responds to her in kind.

In this excerpt, Ned accommodates the absent elicitor’s lack of knowledge when there is an immediate stimulus (Mae’s mother), a local physical production resource (Erickson 1982) whose presence has interrupted his conversation with Mae; but for the most part the elicitor is ignored. This leaves the absent elicitor, or other observers of this interaction such as myself, with the impression that the knowledge managed in the interaction, and its intersubjectivity, is relevant to Ned and Mae only. This will allow us to investigate how they orient to concepts in their interaction together.

Because Ned and Mae are the only interactants during the recorded session (except for these brief appearances by Mae’s mother), and they were given no guidelines on what to record, their talk centers on topics of some interest or importance to them, or at least one of them. Regarding intersubjectivity in their conversation, the process unfolds without interference from the type of observation in which they are engaged; in fact, any attempt to manage the knowledge of the absent elicitor is quite clear and apart from their conversation, such as in the previous excerpt in which a change in footing occurred as Ned introduces Mae’s mother, signaled by physical alignment to the camera and prosodic changes from the prior talk (Goffman 1981).

Overall, we see in the elicitations of language through participant-managed collection, as carried out by Ned and Mae, an initial attention to the recording equipment and the elicitor audience as the interaction begins. The implications for topic emergence in this activity type,
then, are that the elicitor has a very limited role and the way in which topic develops is likely
typical for these interactants, pertinent to their relationship and their conversations; at least, it
represents one of the various natural ways in which these two interactants orient to topic in
different activity types.

4.3.2 Opening Turns

Moving through the elicitation sequentially, following the setting up of the elicitation, I
now examine the opening turns of the conversation; these are characterized by some boundary
between attention to the business of elicitation (setting up the equipment, engaging with the
absent elicitor, engaging with the elicitation activity type) and ignoring these things in favor of
corresponding, as described in the previous section. In this case of participant-managed collection,
the opening turns in which the topic (or, the first topic) is initiated are typically influenced by
local production resources, which I mentioned in the section above but want to discuss in more
detail here. Erickson (1982) defined local production resources as constraints on activity that
come from the immediate physical environment or conversational context, which can be
employed productively in interaction. As Ned and Mae have just set up the recording equipment
and occasionally feel at a loss to initiate a topic centered around a concept chosen at random,
local physical production resources are useful starting points. I focus here on production
resources in the physical environment rather than in the discourse, as they are quite different
from each other; also, physical production resources are particularly salient in the opening turns
of Ned and Mae’s interactions, given that they may not yet have an extensive local discourse
from which to draw resources.

In this excerpt, which directly follows the setting up of an elicitation, Mae notices that
something in their backyard has caught Ned’s attention.
Excerpt 4.4

1  Mae:  What, is your idiot cat doing something?  
2  Ned:  No, no, the brother- HHH  
3  Mae:  Losing the battle?  
4  Ned:  No, he’s go- now he’s going back and he’s there go (.) off.  
5  Mae:  Oh here comes, there goes Tomtom.  
6  Ned:  It’s off.  
7  Mae:  Okay.  
8  Ned:  It’s off.

Mae begins by simply asking *What* with falling intonation, indicating her expectation of an explanation of some observation she has made about Ned’s attention, and then she asks Ned a question that introduces a concept (*your idiot cat*) and requests information about it. Even though Ned’s response to her question (*No, no, the brother*) indicates that Mae’s assumption about the object of Ned’s attention was not completely accurate, Mae has succeeded in initiating a topic centered around the local physical production resource of the cat and its antics, which is taken up and co-constructed by Ned.

Similar results are achieved with a catalogue from a local store.

Excerpt 4.5

1  Mae:  Okay.  
2  Mae:  It’s Saturday morning big thrill.  
3  Okay.  
4  Mae:  That’s not it.  
5  Mae:  S- is it a strap or a tie-down?  
6  Mae:  Or is that a good question?  
7  Ned:  Yeah.  
8  Mae:  Woven polyester-  
9  Ned:  I’m not sure which.  
10  Mae:  It’s not a woven polyester.  
11  Mae:  Heavy duty?  
12  Mae:  No.  
13  Mae:  Awning battery box?  
14  Mae:  Gutter?  
15  Mae:  Nope.  
16  Mae:  Ha, sleeping bag tie-down.  
17  Ned:  ((yawns))  
18  Mae:  Sometime we can hang up the- uh- curtain rod.
Opening a topic with *Okay*, Mae provides some orientation for the absent elicitor and audience (*It’s Saturday morning big thrill*), which comprises the entire setting up of this particular elicitation; the setting up is ended, and the next topic initiated, with another marker, *Okay*. Mae then directs her attention to the physical production resource of the catalogue open on the table between them, initiating a search for a product – a type of window covering – that they need (*That’s not it*) and asking Ned a question about the characteristics of the item (*Is it a strap or a tie-down? Or is that a good question?*). Ned does not choose one of Mae’s options, agreeing that this is a good question (*Yeah*) and elaborating that he does not know the information she seeks (*I’m not sure which*). Mae attempts to match their needed item to things available in the catalogue, rejecting each one. At this point, the interaction has changed to one primarily between Mae and the catalogue, with Ned as the audience, rather than between Mae and Ned (and the catalogue); when Ned yawns (line 17), Mae addresses him and changes the topic slightly, maintaining the concept of window dressings but leaving the catalogue behind for the moment.

Overall, local physical production resources provide a useful starting point for topic development in this clinical discourse elicitation activity type, and were drawn upon in each elicitation session in the corpus. Not only do they allow for the introduction of concepts into the conversation, which can then be manipulated in the construction of topic, but they serve to distract from the clinical discourse elicitation activity type by focusing the attention (including visual and auditory attention, in addition to conversational focus) elsewhere. However, the above excerpt illustrates one potential problem with an elicitation context rich in local production resources, which is that they provide a very reasonable justification for switching topics quickly. The observation of something in the physical world, whether it demands immediate attention and a break from the topic at hand (e.g., a car speeding through a stop sign), or simply serves to
distract (e.g., a cat playing), provides a way to abruptly pivot the topic temporarily or permanently. While we can see that neither Ned nor Mae appears disoriented by these quick changes, it is also potentially difficult to determine how topic emerges in the absence of the physical distractions. This supports the necessity of recording enough talk to make sure that while the local physical production resources can be helpful for introducing concepts in order to build topics, the participants eventually can employ production resources from the discourse itself rather than the physical environment. As we can see, local production resources are focused on concepts, and are a way for participants to exert control by using them to manipulate the topic; but we do not see much development of a point in topics centered around concepts that are local physical production resources. In essence, there does not need to be a point aside from remarking on observations of what’s happening in the backyard; the reason for bringing up the cats, for example, is clear because the cat is a focus of visual attention for them both in the interaction.

Therefore, we need to examine what happens in the conversation after the opening turns, which constitute the bridge between the setting up of the elicitation and the (anticipated) natural everyday conversation; it might be that the remainder of the elicitation proceeds in this fashion, but fortunately, from a research and clinical perspective, this does not appear to be the case for Ned and Mae.

4.3.3 THE CONVERSATION

Moving on to the stage of the clinical discourse elicitation that makes up the majority of the recorded time, I discuss in greater detail the features of how topic emerges in Ned and Mae’s conversation. Admittedly there is no clear boundary between what I have called the opening turns and the conversation; opening turns are bounded at the start by the end of the setting up of
the elicitation, but the division between what might be considered opening turns and conversation is much murkier. Therefore, in this case of participant-managed collection, the topics that I examine here are all initiated independently of the local physical production resources employed in the opening turns; and only the final excerpt presented here involves local physical production resources at all.

In this stage of the participant-managed collection activity type, in which the conversation is examined, it becomes apparent that Ned’s word-finding difficulty is a significant and readily apparent communicative challenge. While standardized clinical testing reveals other neurological and language-specific problems that led to his diagnosis of conduction aphasia, in his interactions with Mae the word searches that they undertake together feature prominently throughout. Because these word searches occur regularly, they are an important element of most of the disorientations to topic that I examine here.

Word searches are, at least superficially, about fixing the concepts that are introduced in the construction of topic; thus, word searches provide an opportunity to examine intersubjective knowledge in conversation quite explicitly. Most of the disorientations to concepts that occur in Ned and Mae’s conversations center around difficulties with fixing the referent, such as picking out the referent of a pronoun, determining if the gender of a pronoun was what was intended, understanding a longer descriptive phrase, or settling on features of the resolved referent. However, the fact that Ned and Mae share a history of experiences and thus a substantial well of knowledge means that these word searches can be co-conducted rather successfully in interaction (for more information on this theme, see Oelschlaeger and Damico 1998b; 2000). To begin with a brief excerpt to illustrate, a place name that Ned cannot access is supplied by Mae after a phonological prompt from Ned.
Ned is describing to Mae some of the details of a coworker’s commute when he encounters difficulty with the name of the town Vera Vista.\footnote{This name is fictitious; in addition to pseudonyms for people, I also provide pseudonyms for places, institutions, etc. and attempt to recreate the interactions faithfully.} Ned indicates this, saying \textit{See I can’t see-} in which the second instance of \textit{see} is likely a perseveration that replaced the target \textit{say}. Mae’s response of \textit{Okay} shows her to be receptive to a potential word search, and Ned makes an attempt to introduce the concept of the particular town on target. Mae’s knowledge of the town, including where it is located, and Ned’s prompt allow them to resolve this concept relatively easily, to their apparent satisfaction. Also, it is important to note that whether or not the absent elicitor knows what Vera Vista is appears to be immaterial, which implies that the elicitees are not consciously attending to some of the constraints of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types; rather, in this excerpt, Ned and Mae are communicating as the only two participants involved.

Having now seen an example of a word search, I want to discuss how this act can be situated in a topic framework; it is useful to consider what the emergence of a word search can tell us about topic, and how topic analysis can explain how a word search unfolds. In the following excerpt, Ned has been talking about his company’s upcoming picnic, and the various types of food that were available. In the first line, Ned begins to demonstrate the action of his
future self choosing items from the array, when he can’t find the word he wants and a search begins.

Excerpt 4.7

1 Ned: So I says “okay just for hell of it we’ll take the- uh the uh-”
2 → Mae: Your lunch?
3 Ned: No not uh-
4 → Mae: Not the whole thing just the others, munchies.
5 Ned: The- no.
6 Beer.
7 Mae: Root beer?
8 Ned: No.
9 See I can’t-
10 Mae: Mhm ((nodding))
11 Ned: Um, drink.
12 Mae: Mhm.
13 → Take your own drink?
14 → Ned: Yeah.
15 Mae: Well they’re supposed to furnish something.
16 That’s what the sign- the thing said.
17 But you could have a soda at three in the afternoon even if you had one at lunch.
18 Take your apple or pear or whatever.
19 Ned: Hmm, right.
20 Mae: And celery.
21 Ned: No.
22 Mae: Just leave the celery in the sandwich at home?
23 Ned: Still.
24 Yeah.
25 Mae: And the other munchies.
26 That should be fun.
27 → Ned: Or if they- see if they don’t like the- if it- see there’s a problem with me eating.
28 Mae: You can’t carry all of that in one hand.
29 Ned: Right.
30 Mae: Hmm.

Mae begins to assist Ned at the start of the word search, offering Your lunch? (line 2), but when this is rejected by Ned, she narrows the concept, from lunch to Not the whole thing just the others, munchies. Mae’s response of narrowing, rather than expanding, the pool of possible concepts appears to be a reflection of her view of their shared understanding of the topic (as related to the picnic). But Ned rejects this as well, and finds the word Beer, for which Mae suggests the repair Root beer, presumably because alcohol is not offered at the picnic but soft
drinks are included. But Ned’s response, No, indicates that some aspect of this repair is not right. Either root beer is not Ned’s target word, or even if the concept root beer or drink is correct, the point of the topic is not shown to be understood by Mae with her repair. Essentially, the type of drink is not important; it is not the point. Thus, Ned temporarily halts the word search and tries to explain: See I can’t- um drink. Mae then clarifies, Take your own drink? and Ned agrees (line 14). So the concept of drink was correct and shared between them, but the reason for its mention was not. The drink was introduced because of an issue with the logistics, not its substance.

Continuing on, thinking that they have resolved the word search, Mae attempts to expand upon this issue. Her first turn, Well they’re supposed to furnish something (line 15), shows that she intended Take your own drink to mean that Ned would take a particular beverage from home to the picnic, because he has to monitor what he eats and drinks. Her assertion that it would be fine to drink what they provide, expressed as But you could have a soda at three in the afternoon even if you had one at lunch, reinforces this interpretation and shows her to be focused on Ned’s diet. Similarly, in lines 18-25 she discusses particular foods that he could eat during the picnic. The introduction of these concepts related to foods and diet builds the point that she thought Ned had been trying to make. Mae implies here that, to her, the point of Ned’s initiation of the word search was to show concern about the sugary soda and whether he could have it. Subsequently, her summative turn, That should be fun, in which that refers to the picnic (line 26), is a move to close the topic.

But in fact this was not Ned’s point. He does not allow the topic to be closed by Mae, following Mae’s turn with Or if they- see if they don’t like the- if it- see there’s a problem with me eating. Beginning the turn with or makes the turn additive to an open topic, in contrast to a ratification of a closing, and implies contrast with what was said. After two aborted starts, Ned
asserts see there’s a problem with me eating, which provides clues to the change in the point from what Mae perceived as the point to what Ned aimed to express. First, see focuses Mae’s attention on something that Ned is trying to explain that has not yet been satisfied in their talk on this topic so far; also, the phrasing there is introduces information that is very new to the topic (Schiffrin 1994), implying that what he is saying has not been brought up or guessed by Mae thus far. And finally, eating pivots the topic from the specific food and drink that Mae had been discussing when the point was Ned’s diet, and focuses on the act of eating. Thus, overall, Ned’s turn shows that his point in discussing the issues he attempted to raise was not a concern about the healthfulness or appropriateness of the food, but something different entirely. Mae, in her next turn, You can’t carry all of that in one hand, correctly guesses the point to be the physical difficulty involved in managing the hotdog, chips, munchies, drink, etc. We can perhaps trace this minor miscommunication back to the polysemy of take in line 13. Take could mean, as Mae thought, to bring or take something from home to the picnic; or take could mean, as Ned likely thought, to physically take or carry something around the picnic site.

Thus, we can see in this relatively short excerpt how the topic seems to be getting off track, or the participants seem disoriented even though the word search appears to have been resolved at multiple points in the conversation. But by conceptualizing this exchange within a topic framework, we can more closely observe how the disorientation occurred.

Other moments of word searches initiated to resolve the concept under discussion involve concepts that are not clearly denoted by a name or definite description; but they interweave cultural and social knowledge as well as personal knowledge in order to achieve intersubjectivity, such as in the following excerpt. Here, Ned is talking about a coworker (unnamed) and the fact that she has not been very helpful at getting Ned’s request for
reimbursement for upcoming business travel approved. Ned is explaining the extenuating
circumstances of the coworker’s life.

Excerpt 4.8

Ned: She’s uh- иворсе.
Mae: Hmm.
Ned: But she looks- still uh, they’re couples.
Mae: They’re divorced but living together?
Ned: Gether.
Mae: Oh, o:kay.
Ned: And then just bought a new car.
Mae: A house?
Ned: A house.
Over- ((points))
Mae: Oh that was the one out there by the winery.
Ned: Yeah!
Mae: O:kay.
Ned: Trust me, if we got divorced I wouldn’t live with you.
Mae: We don’t-
Ned: HHH
Mae: I don’t think he can get the approval.
Ned: Oh.
Mae: Without-
Ned: Ah, for her to get the house they have to be together.
Mae: Right.
Ned: Not enough income or not enough whatever.
Mae: Hmmm.
Ned: That wouldn’t be fun either.
Mae: So I says “I see.”
Ned: Yeah.
Mae: She’s got enough to deal with.

Ned’s introduction of concepts like иворсе (a phonemic paraphasia of divorce) and they’re
couples provides enough information for Mae to reformulate Ned’s turns in lines 1 and 3 as
They’re divorced but living together. Mae does not appear to know the couple under discussion;
one is a coworker of Ned’s and is defined in that capacity only, and the coworker’s ex-husband is
only discussed as far as he relates to her. So Mae’s ability to deduce this detail about them is not
dependent on shared personal knowledge of the couple; rather, it depends more on shared
cultural knowledge. When Ned asserts that the two people in question are divorced, which Mae
seems to acknowledge with her backchannel, he opens his next turn with but. After a false start,
he continues with *still uh, they’re couples*. Here, *but* and *still* present a contrast with the expected meaning of the concept of divorce. So to follow *still* with *they’re couples* allows Mae to interpret this phrase to mean that while the two are divorced, they share one or more properties of couples; it cannot be that they are married, as this would directly contradict *divorce*, but it would be possible that the two ex-spouses are living together. This first attempt by Mae respects the meaning of *divorce* while acknowledging that our cultural knowledge of divorce holds that after a marriage ends, the partners typically separate their households. Indeed, Mae is correct that this was the concept that Ned wanted to convey, and after Ned signals this, by repeating a truncated form of Mae’s last word (*gether*) she indicates that their knowledge is now shared personal knowledge (*Oh, o:kay*).  

Significantly, the collaborative resolution of this concept allows Ned to continue constructing the topic (*And then just bought a new car*). *And*, a topic continuer (Schiffrin 1987), emphasizes that they have resolved the concept sufficiently for the requirements of the topic so far, and are able to move on. This is, as we saw in the previous excerpt, a way that Ned takes control of a topic after a word search largely managed by Mae. However, Mae repairs the concept of *car* introduced by Ned, replacing it with *house* as a guess, which Ned confirms is correct. If it is the case that Mae does not know the people in question, then it is likely that one of two explanations for this repair is correct: either that Mae recognizes that she has heard this story before, but is managing the information as new in the emerging interaction to protect Ned’s face, in spite of the way in which she took control of the topic development by making the repair; or Mae has determined that if Ned is continuing the topic that he started by noting that the divorced couple were living together, then it is much more likely that they bought a house, not a car.

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*I want to emphasize that to some extent, Mae’s guess was lucky. There are many types or pieces of cultural knowledge about divorce that could potentially be relevant here, such as for example a civil divorce that has been executed while a religious divorce has not.*
car, because *house* is a concept more related to *living together* than *car* is. The absent elicitor
cannot know which explanation may be correct, without questioning Mae, however at the very
least it can be said that the strategy was useful for constructing the topic.

Continuing on, when Ned minimally describes the location of this house, Mae responds
*Oh that was the one out there by the winery* in which she connects a house that is already known
to her with this couple she does not know. Ned and Mae both signal this shared knowledge (Ned:
*Yeah!* and Mae: *Okay*) and after this resolution is completed Mae makes a joke about not
wanting to live with Ned if they divorce (*Trust me, if we got divorced I wouldn’t live with you*),
which might imply a closing down or shifting of the topic by Mae (e.g., Jefferson 1984). At this
moment, Mae is exercising control over the course of the topic; she implies through her stating
of the point, as she perceives it, that they have satisfied the topic. But Ned has not provided all of
the information about the concepts he introduced and co-constructed with Mae, and he has not
made his point yet, and so he exerts control himself by keeping the topic open. After Mae laughs
at her joke, Ned continues with *I don’t think he can get the approval ... without-* and here Mae
fills in many details about this concept from her personal and social knowledge. First, she knows
that the pronoun *he* is supposed to be *she*, as this is a common mistake in individuals with
aphasia, and then she disambiguates *approval*, recognizing that Ned is referring to a sort of loan
approval, rather than his travel approval; she surmises: *Ah, for her to get the house they have to
be together ... Not enough income or not enough whatever.* Mae must know something about
purchasing a home and applying for a mortgage in order to guess that it was the coworker’s
lower income that required her to live with her ex-spouse, so that with his income listed on the
application, she could get a better rate. Also, because Ned did not allow Mae’s joke to close the
topic, rather he continued to control the introduction of additional concepts and the development
of his point, Mae can access this social knowledge that helps her to reach her conclusion about this couple, and acknowledge that this is a difficult situation for them. Mae reinforces this (*That wouldn’t be fun either*) while also exercising control by reintegrating her point about not wanting to live with Ned if they divorce; essentially she is saying that living with an ex-spouse would not be fun, but neither would losing one’s house. Mae’s subsequent reformulation of Ned’s point (*She’s got enough to deal with*) helps Ned to close the topic by suggesting that this complicated situation is the reason that he is reluctant to bother his coworker with his travel approval, and why he is skeptical that it might ever be granted.

Having traced the topic emergence in this brief excerpt, let us step back to summarize. It is clear that Ned has communication impairments that restrict his ability to maintain a conversation somewhat, but Ned and Mae are able to converse fluently all the same. In terms of topic emergence, the concepts that Ned has trouble finding the words to express are resolved by question and answer sequences and guesses supplied by Mae (Oelschlaeger and Damico 1998b; 2000); and in this segment of their conversation, we saw that Mae was not relying purely on personal shared knowledge in order to understand Ned. She largely relied on cultural and social knowledge to help her to co-construct the topic via the concepts introduced by Ned. In terms of the point of this topic, or the reason for introducing the concepts and conveying information about them, Ned’s point is that his coworker might not be able to provide his travel approval in a timely way, due to her problems at home. While it took Ned a number of turns, and some repairs from Mae, to get to this point, it was obviously received because Mae is the one who articulated it (*She’s got enough to deal with*). Before arriving at this point, though, Mae seems to extract a different, or perhaps additional, point of the topic, which is simply how unpleasant it must be to live with one’s former spouse; she conveys this point in a light tone, joking about it.
This leads to the question of control, which proved important in this segment. Ned exhibited control of the topic by initiating it, and Mae reinforced it by following suit and cooperating in co-constructing the details of the situation. Mae also showed control in her voicing of what she believed the point of the talk to be, but Ned does not take it up; in lines 14 and 24, when Mae attempts to identify the point as not fun, Ned takes control back in his turns that follow, directing the topic back to his description of his coworker’s situation until he has made his own point. When he says So I says “I see,” he implies that this has all been discussed by him and his coworker, which strengthens his point that this situation is the reason that Ned might not get his travel approval from her. So overall, control was taken up and exchanged by both participants.

While word searches conducted by Ned and Mae have been seen to be successful within the emergence of topic in their conversation, in the following excerpt we see an example of a temporary disorientation, not directly related to a word search, which almost halts the topic development. The excerpt begins with Mae insisting that Ned provide her with a contact at his workplace so that she can talk to him or her about the logistics of Ned’s upcoming Memphis business trip on which she plans to accompany him.

Excerpt 4.9

1    Mae:  And you’re gonna get me the name of that person.
2    Ned:  Right.
3    Mae:  So I can call that person.
4        I wonder how much a trip to Memphis costs.
5    Ned:  You don’t want know.
6    Mae:  Huh?
7    Ned:  You ought to know.
8    Mae:  I know.
9        Maybe they’ll pay for it?
10   Outside chance?
11   Ned:  No. ((shakes head))
12   Mae:  I tried.
13        Since I’m gonna be your tag-along.
14        They don’t care.
Ned: You pay for meals?
Mae: I’ll pay my airfare and food, my part of the food, but you’ll probably- but the room and the car’ll be yours.
Ned: See, I thought that was okay and now we’re saying, now I wanna go away, see. How we going to do it.
And that’s it.
Mae: How are we with the animals?
Ned: No, how are we going to do it?
Mae: To be able to go Memphis?
Ned: No, I’m talking about work.
Mae: Work?
Ned: See I got the card. ((gestures “card”))
Mae: Right.
Ned: Okay.
Mae: American Express or the cr- credit- credit card?
Ned: That’s not good.
Ned: I won’t have it.
Mae: Hmm.
Ned: Well, that’s why you get me a person’s name and I can ask questions.

After Mae mentions that she needs a contact name (lines 1 and 3), she reintroduces the concept of Memphis, the site of the business trip, and muses about how much the trip will cost Ned’s company. Ned and Mae discuss the details of the costs, until Ned says How are we going to do it (line 19); this question is underspecified for Mae, who asks for clarification of it by guessing, first How are we with the animals?, which Ned denies is what he meant, and he repeats his question verbatim. This guess by Mae indicates that she is accustomed to Ned not specifying concepts even when they are new, because Mae introduces animals (referring to their pets), which had not been mentioned, in any sense, as a consideration within this topic yet. She guesses again, specifying it as go to Memphis, which is much more closely related to a concept that had been under discussion in this topic.

But again Ned says that this is not what he meant, asserting No, I’m talking about work and naming the concept explicitly in this metadiscursive comment about the topic. But Mae
interprets the concept *work* to mean the question of whether or not Ned’s supervisors would send him on the trip in the first place, which is again not what he meant. At this point, Ned embarks on an explanation, prefaced by *see* (*see I got the card*), and Mae backchannels (*right*) to cede the floor to him and to indicate that she understood each part of Ned’s explanation. Here, Mae has ceased guessing and Ned is in control of the topic. Essentially, he describes that his concern is that he will not have a company-issued credit card by the time he is ready for his trip. Mae receives this information (*Hmm*) and sums up (*Well*) the point of the topic that she herself had proposed at the start of the excerpt: *Well, that’s why you get me a person’s name and I can ask questions.*

Following this excerpt, there are a few additional seconds of talk about approvals, when Mae again reiterates the point, as shown in this excerpt.

**Excerpt 4.10**

1 Mae: Y’know, and she’ll know who to tell me to talk to.
2 Cause they’ve been real good about me showing up and doing things.
3 Y’know?
4 Ned: Maybe the- the stroke, uh, victim is uh-
5 Well I need uh the- uh the uh-
6 How should I say?
7 Care rate.
8 So-
9 “And that happened to him?
10 Oh sure.”
11 Mae: Right.
12 Yeah, if you find out who to talk to I can call them and find out how we go about doing it.

Mae begins by saying that *she* (a coworker of Ned’s introduced earlier) will tell Mae whom she can talk to about sorting out the details of Ned’s trip. Here, Mae emphasizes her desire for intersubjectivity regarding the point of this topic, by beginning and ending her turn with *Y’know* and trying to engender mutual understanding of the idea that whatever might be difficult about the logistics of the trip, Mae will handle. Ned, however, continues to provide detail about
possible contingencies at the office, not accepting Mae’s reformulation of the point that would potentially close the topic. He introduces the concept of his stroke, his status as a *victim* (line 4), and the possibility that he might need a caregiver during the trip, making the proposal that Mae accompany him more compelling to his superiors. He emphasizes this with a bit of constructed dialogue, set off by his intonation (and indicated here through quotation marks), in which he demonstrates his coworkers’ reaction to the situation (“*And that happened to him?*”) and their resulting approval of the expense (“*Oh sure*”). While Ned and Mae essentially share the same point, they are not in sync with regard to when the point has run its course and the topic can be closed. Mae tried to close the topic at the start of this excerpt, but Ned kept control of the topic by continuing it. At the end of Ned’s turn, Mae takes a turn in which she receives and endorses the information Ned provided (*Right, yeah*) and takes control again, reiterating her point: that Ned will provide her with a contact, and she will work on the details of the trip.

This excerpt is not atypical of topic emergence, in that it is not necessarily Ned’s aphasia that has a role in his desire to keep the topic open; clearly he is anxious about the details of the trip, and concerned that the planning proceed smoothly, and anyone could feel that way regardless of their communication disorder or lack thereof. But this excerpt also demonstrates how knowledge of the point is useful for “smoothing over” language that might not be completely intelligible; it is not completely clear if Mae understood everything that Ned wanted to express about the approval process or the care rate that his office might provide. But Mae could recognize that they shared the point of the talk, and so could reiterate it to confirm her understanding of the gist of what Ned was saying.

I want to end this discussion of topic in Ned and Mae’s conversation with an example of a mismatch in concept and point that is resolved successfully, in a way that is likely particular to
them as a couple conversing (that is, in contrast to a clinical setting). In the following excerpt, Ned and Mae are looking at a catalogue (Mae is in control of it, turning the pages, etc.). They had been talking about items that they need for their mobile home, and they had been having trouble determining what these things should be called.

Excerpt 4.11

1 Mae: Ah whatchamacallit.
2 Ned: Look under whatchamacallit.
3 Mae: Yeah.
4 Mae: No?
5 Ned: Where?
6 Mae: I don’t know.
7 Mae: I said that’s what I mean.
8 Mae: That’s- that’s the- or the category, whatchamacallit.
9 Ned: Yeah.
10 Mae: No?
11 Ned: No.
12 /xxx/
13 Mae: Pull backs?
14 Ned: I’m not sure what do you call that.
15 Mae: Doohickies?
16 Mae: Thingamabobs?
17 Mae: You’re ignoring me aren’t you.
18 Ned: Yes.
19 Mae: HHH

Ned hears Mae say *Look under whatchamacallit* and it appears to be unclear if Mae wants Ned to look under a literal category called *whatchamacallit* or if she is searching for a word that she means. Ned accepts this passively (*Yeah*) but his inaction leads Mae to follow up with *No?* indicating that she expected a response from Ned that was not given. Then Ned asks *Where?*, implying that he might have thought that she was serious with her question, but Mae endeavors to repair this by answering Ned’s question *Where?* with *I don’t know*. She then explains that the category she means is indeed called *whatchamacallit*, to include all the gadgets that do not seem to have accessible names. She was not conducting a word search for a term she could not find. But Ned rejects this, not acknowledging the joke, and Mae offers an example of a member of the
category; Ned acknowledges that he does not have a better name for an item like that, and he says, *I’m not sure what do you call that.* Mae continues offering synonyms to whatchamacallit, like *doohickies* and *thingamabobs*, but Ned had been seriously searching while Mae never was. In this case, there is not a word search (on Mae’s part) that needs to be resolved; she and Ned had in mind different points of this topic. In terms of their orientation to the concept *whatchamacallit*, Ned was serious while Mae was joking. She recognizes their differing points by asserting that she understands that Ned is ignoring her, giving up control of her joke. When he confirms, she laughs.

To briefly summarize, in these conversations we can see how topic can illuminate the process of word searches in interactions, and show how different searches work differently. This is important because while word searches are necessary simply as they are, examining the presentation of a communication challenge and its resolution in the framework of topic, the main way in which we understand how discourse emerges in interaction, can tell us what seems to work and why, and how. We see how word searches represent not just a series of guesses that resolve concepts, but they draw upon interactants’ perceptions of the points they are constructing together, and effect how interactants maintain, cede, and take control of topic development. Ned and Mae appear to be successful because, for a variety of reasons with a variety of causes, they can integrate all three components of topic in order to move their conversation forward despite the obstacles.

4.3.4 CLOSING OF THE ELICITATION

Of course, an interaction that is opened needs to somehow be closed eventually (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). In the elicitation of language through participant-managed collection, as carried out in these interactions between Ned and Mae, the elicitations closed as
inauspiciously as they opened. The recording equipment was stopped by either interactant after approximately the allotted time had passed; but there was no mention of this in the conversation, rather, it simply ended. The following excerpt is typical of these types of closings.

Excerpt 4.12

1 Mae: You’ve got- did you see the chilis on your little thing?
2 Ned: Yeah.
3 Mae: There’s only two but- ((gestures the size of the peppers))
4 Ned: No.
5 Mae: Three?
6 Ned: Four.
7 Mae: Four?
8 Ned: Four?
9 Mae: And then little bell peppers are little bell peppers.
10 Ned: Yeah.
11 ((waves)) That’s about it.

Here, Mae and Ned are engaged in their conversation when Ned, seemingly apropos of nothing, re-engages with the absent elicitor and the imagined audience by waving at the camera and ending the recorded portion of the interaction (That’s about it).

This next example is similar.

Excerpt 4.13

1 Ned: Well, I think I’ll take the- uh the uh-
2 Can’t think of the name of it.
3 (...)Knowing. ((possibly “mowing”))
4 Mae: Mow the grass?
5 Ned: Yeah.
6 Mae: Good.
7 Ned: Bye! ((waves to camera))
8 Mae: Do you want me to get them at my bookstore?
9 Or do you wanna go with me to the bookstore?
10 I’ll see if Mom wants to go out.

Ned initiates a closing (Well) and a description of an activity that he wants to do, which is incompatible with recording conversation. After a brief word search for mowing, Mae agrees with this plan and Ned addresses the absent elicitor, with a wave and a good-bye (line 8). This
process proves so seemingly inconsequential to Mae that she continues talking, initiating another topic with a question that includes subsequent plans for the day. Even though Ned has re-engaged with the elicitor, Mae has not.

It is difficult to tell what motivated Ned to end these elicitations when he did, but given Mae’s reaction in the previous excerpt, it appears to be relatively arbitrary for them. Either way, the informality of the closings match the brevity of the setting up of the elicitations.

4.4 DISCUSSION

Having examined these elicitations, moving through them sequentially as examples of an activity type and focusing on particular excerpts in order to investigate topic emergence, I will discuss them in terms of the broader themes that emerged. These analyses can be considered from two separate but interrelated perspectives: first, topic, and the orientation to interaction expressed through Ned’s and Mae’s language, and second, the participant-managed collection activity type. I will discuss each of these in turn.

What do these analyses tell us about topic? One of the most salient observations, I believe, comes from the examination of word searches in the conversation. It is crucial to identify concepts and share knowledge of them – to answer the question What are we talking about? to the mutual understanding of all participants – and therefore, word-finding difficulties that result in word searches would seem to be a significant barrier to topic emergence. Indeed, we saw that Ned and Mae expended a good deal of energy and time on word searches, in an acknowledgement of this truth about concepts. However, not only did Ned and Mae have relatively little difficulty staying on topic, with disorientations resolved quickly, but the manipulation of concepts was not solely responsible for the minor disorientations to topic that were observed. Point and control are equally relevant to successful interaction.
It certainly is not surprising that point is significant; this was the case in the development of the topic framework. However, given that topic is often paraphrased as *what we are talking about*, particularly in communication disorders work and other applied contexts, concepts are privileged as the most salient components of topical talk. And given that word-finding difficulties compromise the sharing of concepts as topics emerge, it might be possible to conclude that Ned and Mae would have a good deal of difficulty staying on a topic, but they did not. Let us step back to examine why this might be. Not only was Mae skilled at guessing Ned’s concepts based on their shared personal knowledge, or Mae’s cultural and social knowledge, but Ned was able to guide her by using repetition and discourse markers (e.g., *see, well, and*) as well as affirmatives and negations, to make his contribution to the topic clear. Mae’s attention to the point also contributed to her successful word searches and co-construction of the topic. In fact, in Excerpt 4.7 in which Mae had thought Ned was talking about the problem of drinking soda in terms of his diet, when Ned was talking about carrying all the elements of the picnic when he does not have full use of his arm, makes this clear. Mae’s projection of what the point of Ned’s topic was helped her to fill in the words that Ned could not access; unfortunately, she simply perceived the point incorrectly. But when Ned indicated that his point was not what she had thought, she was quickly able to figure out the alternative that got them to the resolution they needed. Also, we saw how point was employed by Mae to curtail a potentially difficult word search that did not, in her estimation, hold much promise for adding new information to the topic under discussion (as in Excerpt 4.9).

The word searches also bring up the issue of control, which had been discussed in the context of the analyses but merits further consideration. Who is in control of the topic during the word search? Is it Ned, who holds knowledge of the word in question and whose word-finding
difficulty causes Mae to take up the search in the first place? Or is it Mae, who through her
guesses guided by her interpretation of the point, asserts what she believes the topic to be?
Overall, Ned seems to hold much of the control because if Mae’s guess is incorrect, he tells her
so and she guesses until they reach an agreement. Ned may not name the target concept correctly
the first time, but he has a role in its resolution and maintains the point he wants to make.

In summary, the word-finding difficulty experienced by Ned does have discourse-
pragmatic effects in the way that the word searches Ned and Mae undertake affect the emergence
of topic. However, if we use the construct of topic in order to examine possible discourse-
pragmatic impairment, it seems that Ned and Mae are effectively manipulating and interpreting
concepts and points, as well as alternating the exertion of control over the topic. The word
searches represent a joint effort to determine the concepts, however the role of these concepts in
the construction of topic seems to be intersubjective (e.g., concepts are not introduced out of
nowhere, without background that the interlocutor would require; they are not repeated
incessantly, they are not imaginary, etc.). So we can see that this symptom of aphasia, which is
realized at the lexical level, does have clear interactional effects; but we can also see that it does
not necessarily constitute a discourse-level language impairment. This is an important difference
to consider in an effort to identify (and rehabilitate) discourse-pragmatic impairment.

And what do these analyses tell us about participant-managed collection? In this case, the
connection between activity type and topic was not particularly obvious or very compelling,
because participant-managed collection, as practiced by these elicitors and elicitees, did appear
to encourage everyday conversation. While both Ned and Mae were quite alert and oriented
toward the recording equipment at first, they were able, particularly influenced by the rich local
production resources at their disposal, to largely ignore it (or behave as if they ignored it). In
these participant-managed data collections of everyday conversations, we see that the interactants are minimally oriented to the absent elicitor and what his or her needs may be with regard to the knowledge of concepts, understanding of point, etc. But this lack of attention to the recording equipment has a positive effect, which is that even though it might be difficult at times for the absent elicitor or observer to be “in on” the interaction, in Goffman’s (1981, 142) terms, it is at least possible to study how knowledge is managed in interaction, and how ambiguous concepts are resolved between two people in a topic framework including point and control. We are able to see in these extended recordings how Ned and Mae construct topic in a way that seems to offer a glimpse into their everyday life.

The lack of attention to the absent elicitor also resulted in an activity type that approximated that of everyday conversation, rather than clinical discourse elicitation. In fact, the stages of the activity type (setting up, opening, conversing, and closing) appeared minimally bounded, and based largely on the elicitees’ whims as well as my determinations of when they occurred. However, the attention to the recording equipment and the absent elicitor in the early moments of the elicitation, coupled with the sense of loss about what to talk about that is common when one is encouraged to talk on command, leads to the conclusion that it is indeed important to allow for an elicitation that is long enough to get past this obstacle. I hesitate to say how long this elicitation should be; Ned and Mae dispensed with the setting up and opening rather quickly, but others might find it more uncomfortable or the recording equipment harder to ignore.

While participant-managed collection, in this case, resulted in naturalistic data that seem to offer a clear picture of how Ned and Mae typically communicate, including how they overcome obstacles, the approach is not without weaknesses. For one, we are unable to know
certain details about what Ned or Mae might be thinking; while we are able to determine through
topic analysis whether or not a topic seems to be constructed and emerge without conversation-
ending disorientation, we cannot know if all of their knowledge was intersubjective. We can only
know about the local production resources that were attended to during the elicitation.
Fortunately, Ned and Mae’s talk did not depend entirely on local physical production resources,
and they often talked about displaced concepts in order to make points that transcended the
immediate setting. But, it is possible that for other elicitees this would not be the case, and so it is
an important variable to consider in such elicitations. Also, one strength of the participant-
managed collection approach (the strength being the ability to observe interactions between an
individual with aphasia and his closest, primary communication partner) is also a weakness, in
that this approach does not tax skills of co-constructing topic in the same way as interaction with
a stranger would; and interaction with strangers is also a part of life, important in its own right.

This analysis suggests, as many others have in different ways (e.g., Goodwin 2003) that
individuals with aphasia can participate actively in conversations in spite of a wide range of
communication challenges. An analysis of topic, a construct that is crucial to understanding
emerging conversation of any sort, shows how this happens, and how it is true, in these
interactions. Through an examination of topic, we can see clear abilities in managing the point of
the topic, and sharing control of the topic (meaning that control is taken and ceded); we also see
successful manipulation of concepts. Much of the success can be attributed to Mae’s focus on
Ned’s word searches and her attempts to access her knowledge, and achieve intersubjectivity
with Ned. This is perhaps a more noticeable, extreme example of what typical communicators do
in constructing topic; Ned and Mae only have to work a little harder at it.
4.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have shown how the elicitation of language through participant-managed collection was carried out by an individual with aphasia and acute word-finding difficulties and the individual’s wife, a close and familiar conversation partner. We saw how the lack of attention to the absent elicitor resulted in an interaction that approximated the activity type of “everyday conversation” rather than “clinical discourse elicitation.” Thus, it was an effective method for gathering this genre of interaction. If everyday interaction is, indeed, what a clinician or researcher aims to study, then participant-managed collection might well be advantageous.

Regarding topic analysis, I have shown how word searches can be understood within this framework. Point was an effective component of topic that helped the typical conversation partner guess the concept that the partner with aphasia was trying to produce, and provided a way for him to remain in control and for them both to remain on topic.

In the next chapter, I examine topic emergence in the context of a different sort of acquired cognitive communication disorder (resulting from Alzheimer’s disease) and a different activity type (unstructured interviewing).
CHAPTER 5
ELICITATION THROUGH UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWING:
THE CASE OF ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

An interview is a type of speech event (Gumperz 1972; Mishler 1986), or as I will construe it more broadly, an activity type (Levinson 1992). Within the expansive category of interview there are what could be considered different activity types varying in terms of goal orientation, constraints, and boundedness; for example, a standardized survey interview is considered successful if the interviewer does not deviate in any way from his or her script, while a sociolinguistic or ethnographic interview typically assumes more flexibility on the part of interviewer and interviewee. An additional important point to consider with regard to an interview activity type is the question of how or why a given interaction came to be an interview. While the identification or labeling of an activity type can help interactants to interpret conversational moves, such as when interactants embodying the roles of doctor and patient open a discussion of the patient’s complaint (Mishler 1984), it is also the case that such identifications, or labels, are not necessarily consonant with the way that interactants understand and orient to an emergent interaction (Gumperz 1982). For example, Schilling-Estes notes the example of an intended sociolinguistic interview that had the “character of a casual conversation between friends” because the elicitor and elicitee knew each other well (2004, 170). In this chapter, I discuss the converse: intended everyday conversations that take on the characteristics of interviews (Davis 2005a), or what I refer to here as unstructured interviews.

First I would like to discuss some of the features of interviews generally, those that make an interaction feel or sound like an interview though it may not be intended as such. People who
live in the U.S. are usually familiar with and recognize the activity type of interview in some sense, as our social lives are saturated with this type of interaction (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). Interviews of various types are so common and pervasive (e.g., medical, job, news, and research interviews, etc.) because there is no more direct way to be in an encounter with a stranger, with whom one does not have much in common, than to engage in question asking and answering in pursuit of common ground. As Hamilton (1994, 79-80) points out, in terms of the adjacency pairs that comprise conversation turn by turn (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), there is perhaps none more powerful than the question/answer set; a question provides the conversational space for a conditionally-relevant answer (Schegloff 1968), and this system keeps the conversation from ending. Also, question/answer pairs promote intersubjectivity in conversation, in that questions typically display the asker’s state of knowledge, and the answers in turn display the answerer’s acknowledgement of the gap and an attempt to fill it (see Heritage and Clayman 2010). Thus, question/answer pairs, especially those in which the questioner remains the same, are one of the recognizable hallmarks of interviews.

Another recognizable feature, perhaps more abstract, is power or control asymmetry. In his critical analyses of research interviews, Briggs (1986) notes that power asymmetries between interviewer and interviewee typically favor the interviewer; this power differential affects the frames of reference and courses of interpretation of interviewee behavior that determine what is gleaned from the interaction. Heritage and Clayman’s remark about question/answer pairs highlights this potential power difference: “Questions invoke a right to an answer and place the recipient under an obligation to respond” (2010, 23, emphasis in original). This sense of entitlement and obligation comes from acknowledgement of interactional norms, i.e, what interactants expect to happen. As Ainsworth-Vaughn notes, “Power is constructed moment-to-
moment during interaction, with all participants being involved, in turn, as either its claimers or ratifiers” (1998, 42). Thus, these norms that Heritage and Clayman point out can be manipulated to engender a sense of power.

Ainsworth-Vaughn (1998) makes the point that power can mean dominance, as it is typically understood, but it can also mean the accomplishment of one’s agenda. A questioner, or interviewer, sets the agenda; sometimes this agenda is made explicit, but sometimes the agenda is hidden (Drew and Heritage 1992). And significant metacommunicative competence (Briggs 1984) on the part of the answerer or interviewee is necessary in order for him or her to subvert the control imposed by the interviewer over the proceedings.

When eliciting language from individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders, whether for clinical or research purposes, it is likely more often than not that the elicitor and the elicitee in a dyadic interaction will not know each other well (though, of course, there are exceptions), and there are institutional asymmetries that influence who sets the agenda; thus, their interactions take the form of a type of interview. Recall that in the previous chapter, in the discussion of participant-managed collection, the elicitor was absent during the interaction and the elicitees – an individual with aphasia and a typical communicator – were a married couple.35 Thus, the elicitor/elicitee dynamic was not a focal point of the interaction itself. In contrast, in this chapter, I examine what I refer to as an unstructured interview activity type as carried out between college student elicitors and elicitees with Alzheimer’s disease who live in assisted living facilities. In these unstructured interviews, the elicitors are guided by suggested prompts rather than formal, mandatory lists of questions to cover. Thus there is no predetermined set or sequence of topics, and the goal is for the elicitor and elicitee to have a pleasant interaction

35 This is my interpretation of the elicitees’ and elicitors’ roles, and I believe that it comports with that of the researchers who collected the data.
an everyday conversation – rather than for the elicitor to gather specific information (cf. Maynard et al. 2002; Briggs 2007; Mishler 1986; see also Suchman and Jordan 1990). I will suggest that an analysis of topic emergence illuminates the ways in which the everyday conversation emerges as an interview.

The chapter begins with very general background on Alzheimer’s disease for the lay reader, and a description of the data on which the subsequent analyses are based. Then, as in the previous chapter, the analyses are organized by sections of the elicitation activity type: first, the setting up of the elicitation, then the opening turns, then the conversation, and finally, the closing. In each section, I refer back to the components of topic outlined in Chapter 3: concepts, point, and control, and I consider the role of the activity type. I conclude with a discussion focusing on the emergence of topic and the import of the unstructured interview activity type.

5.2 **BACKGROUND**

In this section, I provide information about Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and a description of the corpus of conversations that I examined for the analyses in this chapter.

5.2.1 **ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE**

Alzheimer’s disease (AD) is a type of dementia, a neurodegenerative disease indicated by changes in cognition and/or behavior. AD constitutes about 60 percent of dementia incidences (Asp and de Villers 2010), and approximately 5.1 million Americans live with AD (National Institute on Aging 2012). AD is not caused by outside factors or other physical conditions or events; it is mainly a progressive, degenerative disease affecting elderly people over 65, and prevalence increases with age. While AD currently can only be definitively diagnosed through autopsy, where structural pathologies can be directly observed, it is typically diagnosed by a
neurologist through tests of memory impairment, language problems, difficulties completing activities of daily living, and executive function deficits. These deficits must be gradual and progressive, and other factors must be ruled out, for a diagnosis to be made (Asp and de Villiers 2010). As a progressive disease, AD typically proceeds in three stages: mild, moderate, and severe. Changes in cognitive function include a loss of the ability to follow step-by-step instructions (such as how to do the laundry), getting lost or disoriented easily even in familiar surroundings, impulsive behavior and changes in judgment, and difficulties with memory (e.g., memories of people, places, recent events, processes, etc.). While linguistic characteristics like phonology, morphology, and syntax remain largely intact (Obler and De Santi 2000), as cognitive function changes, so too do specific linguistic changes occur as damage spreads throughout the brain. In the mild stage, common difficulties include word finding or naming. This difficulty (also called *anomia*) worsens as the disease progresses. Other communication impairments, related to cognitive function and memory, include difficulty understanding nonliteral language, breakdowns in cohesion and coherence, tangential or repetitive topics, and “empty” talk. Eventually, individuals with AD who progress to the most severe stage may become globally aphasic, exhibiting some of the symptoms described above, or lose the ability to speak entirely.

5.2.2 The Data

The corpus that I draw from for these data is the Carolinas Conversations Collection (CCC). This corpus contains interactions with individuals, mostly from North Carolina, suffering from various health conditions. Of this group, there are 32 individuals with some form of Alzheimer’s disease, from mild to severe.

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36 At the time of writing, the homepage for the CCC can be found at: http://carolinaconversations.musc.edu/about/ (accessed March 9, 2013). Also, see Davis (2005b) for examples of work that draw upon this corpus.
As was the case in Chapter 4, these interactions were not elicited for clinical or diagnostic purposes, but rather for research purposes. They were elicited as part of a service-learning component of a gerontology course, *Aging and the Lifecourse*, at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; the goal of this course component is to facilitate interactions between college students and adults with dementia (Hancock, Shenk, and Davis 2009). Thus, the elicitors are all approximately 20 years old and students at the University of North Carolina; for this course, they are required to spend ten hours at local assisted living facilities with whom the University of North Carolina has a relationship and informed consent procedures. The eliciters are approximately 80-90 years old on average, and residents of these facilities. They had indicated, through the informed consent process, their desire to take part in this research.

The student eliciters received a brief training on how to communicate with elderly individuals who may have communication impairments. Techniques include the use of go-aheads, or backchannels like *mhm*; asking indirect questions in the form of statements to avoid the use of wh-questions; and quilting, or the invocation of previously introduced information meant to encourage the continuation of the conversation (Hancock, Shenk, and Davis 2009; Pope and Davis 2011). The eliciters did not have to cover any particular concepts or obtain any specific information, as in some discourse elicitations in which eliciters started each recording session with the same topic, to create consistency across samples (e.g., Hutchinson and Jensen 1980); however, eliciters did have a set of suggested prompts in case the conversation lagged. For example, if the interaction took place in the dining room, the elicitor would ask about the elicitee’s lunch, or other meals or foods. Another common line of questioning pertained to the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday and the elicitee’s plans to see family (or, again, what types of Thanksgiving foods the elicitee preferred).
Thus, the label of *unstructured interview* that I have applied in this chapter is my characterization of the interactions that emerged, rather than a stated goal of the interactions.\(^{37}\) The elicitees, as will become clear in this chapter, indicate an expectation that the elicitors will ask them questions. However, this is not stated as part of any recruitment materials, etc. (Boyd Davis, March 2, 2013, email message to author); rather, the elicitees could have arrived at this conclusion from conversations with other elicitees, or from an impression formed in advance of the recording, as audio recording of the elicited interactions typically occurred after the students had already made several visits to the assisted living facilities and met conversation partners (Boyd Davis, March 2, 2013, email message to author).

The unstructured interview approach moves slightly along the naturalness-control continuum from the most natural to a slightly more controlled elicitation. In contrast to participant-managed collection, in this type of dyadic interaction, both the elicitor and the elicitee are present and both participate in the elicitation. Naturally, the elicitor’s very presence ensures that more control can be applied to the proceedings by the researcher, even as the goal was to elicit natural, everyday talk. This can be an advantage in that data collection does not rely on the elicitees alone, which is often a particular concern in cases in which one of the participants has dementia.

The interactions were recorded in the elicitees’ apartments, the communal dining room, or outside on the grounds. Interactions were audio recorded and transcribed broadly for readability. In total, I sampled ten interactions from the corpus, eliminating interactions from the total of 32 in which more than two people participated, interactions in which English was not the

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\(^{37}\) My characterization is not original; in fact, Davis also notes that the interactions that were intended as everyday conversations “often sound like interviews” (2005a, 130). Pope and Davis (2011) also make reference to the interview activity type in the description of this corpus. In my view, these examples not only validate my interpretation of the interactions I heard, but also demonstrate how recognizable the interview activity type is.
first language of the participant(s), and interactions in which the conversation was difficult to hear or there were other difficulties with the recording. This resulted in approximately four hours of conversation.

5.3 ANALYSIS

As in the previous analytical chapter, I proceeded with my analysis by watching and listening to the interactions in my data subset multiple times, noting instances in the interactions in which there was some sort of disorientation to topic; I was guided in this effort by my attention to concepts, point, and control, the framework that I used to understand topic emergence. I marked each instance of disorientation according to one or more of these components.

In addition, when I reviewed the recorded data I attended to the elicitations as an activity type; recall that I did not explicitly do this to develop the topic framework, because I considered everyday conversation to have constraints, goals, and boundaries that were so minimal that it almost did not appear to qualify as an activity type, per se. In the previous chapter, having been concerned with topic development and its relationship to the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, I examined the concurrent emergence of topic and activity type and discussed how they were related to each other. Participant-managed collection approximated everyday conversation in a number of ways, and so the examination of topic and activity type in unstructured interviewing represents, I assume, some increased distance between the goal of natural, everyday talk and the practice of eliciting language in this fashion.

Therefore, in this chapter the stages of the activity type that I had outlined in Chapter 4 come into sharper focus. As before, I begin with the setting up of the elicitation, followed by the opening turns that come after the setting up, then the conversation from that point on, and I finish
with the closing of the elicitation. Also, I focus largely on the progression of a single elicitation across each stage, adding other examples and explanation to supplement. It is my aim to show how topic shapes, and is shaped by, the activity type of unstructured interviewing. I also want to explore what these results imply about unstructured interviewing as an elicitation strategy.

5.3.1 Setting Up the Elicitation

This case of elicitation of language through unstructured interviewing involved college student elicitors paired up with individuals with Alzheimer’s disease living in assisted living facilities. The elicitors were not only making the recordings to fulfill course requirements, but to contribute to the CCC corpus. Thus, they all supplied an audible verbal identification of the elicitation session, and all of the introductions in the corpus contain similar elements with minor variations. To start off with an example, the following excerpt is a typical beginning of an elicitation.

Excerpt 5.1

1 Beth: My name is Beth Miller,
2 it’s ten-thirty in the morning,
3 and I’m talking to Peter Smith.

Beth, the elicitor, attaches an identification to this interaction by including it in the recorded interaction itself; this will complement the later labeling of the file in its electronic or physical form. From the introduction, it is clear that Beth is in control, addressing the imagined audience for this recording, as well as her future self, but not the elicitee (in this case, Peter Smith). Beth uses deictic terms (my name, I’m) to refer to herself in the introduction, but not to refer to Peter (you, etc.); rather, she refers to him in the third person though he is a participant with her in the

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38 As in previous chapters, I have given new pseudonyms to elicitors, elicitees, and relevant other names or descriptions in the interactions.
interaction and physically present throughout. Also, the simple fact that she is giving the introduction means that she is in control of the proceedings, or at least its beginning, as the individual with Alzheimer’s disease (Peter) is positioned as the elicitee, not her.

After she introduces herself, the elicitor identifies the time of the interaction, which serves to further distinguish the session from any other she might do. (It also proves a relevant detail in many encounters as they occasionally happen over lunch, or in the late afternoon when the elicitees are tired or the elicitor needs to get back to school or to an evening part-time job.) While Beth did not do so here, some elicitors additionally identify the name of the assisted living facility that provides the setting for the encounter.

While the stating of the full names of the elicitor and elicitee add a degree of formality to the introduction, the phrasing of the linking of the two (and I’m talking to) is important, in that it attempts to frame the encounter as a chat. Similar to media interviews in which and I’m talking to may set a tone of informality, here talking suggests a conversation more than a clinically- or research-oriented list of probes. In that sense, Peter is an addressee here in that Beth is creating the impression that she is not eliciting language; rather, the two will simply be conversing. This information is relevant to Peter’s role as an interactant, in an interaction that Beth intends to be casual and friendly. This introduction, then, presents the subsequent interaction as something less constrained than a formal interview or test of some sort.

The activity type of this interaction is different from participant-managed collection, as it was unambiguous that Beth, the elicitor, is in control of the interaction. The interaction is framed as a casual conversation, and is largely intended to be so; but in this case, because the elicitor is participating in the interaction and the two interactants are strangers to each other outside of their
roles as interviewer and individual with Alzheimer’s disease, there are differences. This dynamic is even clearer in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 5.2

1  Holly:  This is Holly Jones.
2   I’m at The Forest at Mountain Brook.
3   Um- today is Wednesday, October twenty-fifth,
4   and I am talking to Sam.
5   Sam, how are you doing today?

Similar to Beth’s introduction, here Holly introduces herself and gives some information about the setting; she does not mention the time of day, as Beth does, but she gives the name of the assisted living facility, the day of the week, the month, and day. One notable difference between Holly’s and Beth’s introductions is that while both identify themselves with their full names, Beth identifies the elicitee by his full name and Holly uses only the elicitee’s first name. There could be many reasons for this, however one action that it performs is an additional signal of asymmetry between elicitor and elicitee.

Continuing on, Holly too tells the audience for the elicitation that she is *talking to Sam*, and in her next move she disengages from the introduction, and the imagined audience, and addresses Sam directly for the first time (line 5). So we can observe here the clear break between the introduction and the opening turns of the conversation. But because the introduction is made in the same time and space, and the elicitee is part of the audience, it serves to set up the activity type as a formal interview or elicitation.

The potential implications for topic emergence, based on the setting up of the elicitation, are that the elicitor asserts her role as elicitor with her comments in the setting up of the elicitation directed to the imagined audience for the recording, rather than the elicitee; but these comments are made within hearing range of the elicitee. So this lends the interaction a sense of
formality and participant asymmetry that, we will see, is reflected in the topic emergence. The issue of control is quite prominent; the elicitor is in complete control of how the interaction continues, at least so far as the constraints of the activity type, as they have been laid out here, are followed.

5.3.2 OPENING TURNS

It is generally clear, in the unstructured interviews, where the boundary is between the setting up and the opening turns of the conversation. This enables us to examine how the elicitors, who typically take the opening turns after the introductions, launch the conversation. Often they began similarly to one another, including a topic-initiating discourse marker (e.g., *so*) and/or a vocative to highlight the change in addressee from the imagined audience to the elicitee. But after this opening phrase, the elicitors otherwise took slightly different approaches to engaging the elicitees, and to the concepts that they introduced to initiate topical talk. The first of these approaches, illustrated in the following example, a continuation of Excerpt 5.1,\(^{39}\) features Beth (the elicitor) opening the interview by soliciting information about an individual in Peter’s (the elicitee’s) life.

Excerpt 5.3

1 Beth: My name is Beth Miller,
2 it’s ten-thirty in the morning,
3 and I’m talking to Peter Smith.
4 +
5 Beth: So Peter, tell me about (.) Anna.
6 Peter: What do you want to know about her?
7 Beth: Everything.
8 Peter: I don’t know where to start.

\(^{39}\) I use the symbol “+” between turns from the previous excerpt and turns that are newly-presented in this current excerpt. I hope this will assist the reader in connecting the two easily.
Beth’s opening turn in line (4) is presumably spurred by a stimulus, whose explicit mention occurs later in the conversation: the local physical production resource of a photograph in the elicitee’s apartment. Saunders et al. (2012) call such local physical production resources “conversational objects” and note that they are often drawn upon to promote interaction among individuals with dementia. Beth introduces the concept of Anna here; Anna is Peter’s wife, as Beth likely knows from having visited Peter at least once in the past.40 *Tell me about Anna* is understood to be a request for information by both Beth and Peter (as evidenced by Peter’s response in line 5); however, this is not, in Labov and Fanshel’s terminology, an “AB-event” (1977, 80). AB-events are characterized by “the knowledge that both participants have about the access each of them has to any given piece of factual information” (1977, 80), and as we will see, the state of this knowledge is uncertain.

I want to focus on Beth’s use of the proper name Anna here first, because this referring term is important in how it destabilizes the interactants’ orientation to what types of knowledge are shared between them about this concept. Using the name Anna demonstrates that Beth has personal knowledge of a person by this name, in contrast to other descriptive options such as calling her *your wife* (presupposing that Peter was married), or *this woman* (referring to the figure in the photograph), or other possible descriptors. Because Beth has indicated that she knows Anna, or knows of her, it follows that Peter could find it difficult to orient to the emerging topic predicated on this concept. It is not clear what personal knowledge Peter could reasonably share with Beth that would not be redundant with her current state of knowledge. The unstructured interview activity type, together with Beth’s explicit request for information (*tell me

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40 As was mentioned in the description of the data in this corpus, the student elicitors typically make audio recordings of their conversations with the elicitees after they have already met them, and visited with them. While I do not have extensive details about the length and frequency of these visits, they are the source of many of the concepts that the elicitors introduce into the interactions with the elicitees.
about Anna) in keeping with the standard interview practice, makes constructing a topic potentially difficult for these reasons.

Referring to this concept in this way shows that, to some extent, this is a display question (e.g., Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; Tsui 1995) that Beth has asked. Beth is already holding some information about Anna, but is looking for an answer to a very broad question. So, what could be relevant to the questioner? In Chafe’s (1987) terms, Anna is a concept that is currently in Beth’s focus of consciousness, and though Anna is new information in this particular interaction – a new focus of attention – she is not “new” in the sense of “unknown” to Beth. And indeed, Peter’s response to this question is What do you want to know about her? By referring to Anna by a pronoun (her), he not only acknowledges the accessibility of the concept due to her recent mention in the conversation, and that he shares this focus of consciousness, but he accepts that Beth must know something about Anna already to even be able to introduce her as the focus of their talk and a potential topic. In fact, the focus shifts slightly from her, which is weakly stressed in Peter’s question, to know, which is strongly stressed (see Chafe 1987); all potential information about Anna is available to bring into focus, but Peter cannot know what is already known and what would be new. When Beth answers Peter’s question with Everything, she does not enable him to continue the topic; she clearly cannot truly want to know everything, because in fact, she already knows something by even mentioning Anna in the first place.

Continuing at line (7), Peter again responds with a metadiscursive comment that shows he cannot currently orient to the concept of Anna as Beth has introduced her: I don’t know where to start. It is not until later, when Beth asks a much more specific follow-up question that requests a specific answer from Peter, that he is sufficiently equipped to participate fully.
What I want to emphasize here is the variety of possible interpretations of Peter’s responses. The first is that he is unable to provide Beth with an answer to her question, or request for information, because he does not understand her request or remember details about the concept *Anna*. This could be a sign of possible impairment of comprehension, production, or cognitive abilities more broadly. The second interpretation is that Peter does not want to disclose this information, or engage on a topic centered around this concept. While the motivation for this type of response might not be apparent, it has different implications from the first interpretation because it does not imply impairment on Peter’s part. A third interpretation, which seems to fit this interaction, is that both participants aim to be cooperative but the phrasing of the question makes it difficult to respond to it. The phrasing implies two things: first, that Beth possesses knowledge about Anna but the state of her knowledge about the concept is unclear, and second, that subsequently the reason for answering the question is uncertain (see Crystal 1984, cited in Hamilton 1994). In other words, because Peter does not know how much Beth already knows about Anna, it is more difficult to judge what she would need to know, and hence what an appropriate answer would be. What this highlights is the importance of the need for talk in the first place; not only the question of why are we talking about a particular concept, but why are we talking. In this instance of Beth and Peter beginning their conversation, Peter needed to know what Beth already knew about Anna, and why she might have wanted to know additional information, before the topic surrounding this concept could be constructed. Anna is an intersubjective concept; but the nature and extent of the shared knowledge is not known.

In contrast, asking a very general question, not tied to a local production resource other than the typical sort of friendly pleasantries that opens many interactions, is not always successful

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41 Here I would like to emphasize that it is possible that Peter’s difficulty in providing Beth with responses might be due to Alzheimer’s disease, however, the features of the interaction and the emergence of topic that I discuss here make it challenging to draw this conclusion with much certainty.
either. In the following excerpt, after the introduction and so followed by a vocative typical of a change in focus, Lila (the elicitor) asks Elma (the elicitee) how she is feeling.

Excerpt 5.4

1 Lila: So Elma, how are you feeling today?
2 Are you feeling okay?
3 Elma: No.
4 Lila: Why not, are you just tired today?
5 (..)
6 Elma: Now you weren’t-going to ask me questions?

Lila asks Elma How are you feeling today? which, unlike the more formulaic How are you today? suggests that the elicitor perceives the relevance or immediacy of the elicitee’s possibly-compromised state of health and is seeking information about it (see Heritage and Maynard 2006; Robinson 2006). She follows up with a close-ended question (Are you feeling okay?), and indeed, Elma confirms that she in fact is not feeling well; this reinforces the interpretation of Lila’s question as one in which she is asking for information rather than only being polite. Lila tries to pursue Elma’s health as a topic, rather than a pleasantry acting as a precursor to a topic, by asking a question to determine the cause (Why not, are you just tired today?). Elma does not reply immediately; after a pause, she takes control and changes the topic by asking Lila a question of her own. Elma’s response, Now you weren’t-going to ask me questions? performs two actions. First, as Grice (1975) might have suggested, this non sequitur of a question may be Elma’s move to change the topic, in that she has no desire to talk about her ill health. It also implies that Elma does not perceive questions about her health to be the types of questions she was expecting from the student elicitor. Lila, of course, had been asking questions of Elma that were, for her, relevant to the task at hand. For Lila, a question like How are you feeling? is a
legitimate part of the everyday conversation she aims to have with Elma, but this clashes with Elma’s orientation to the point of the interaction.\footnote{Wolfson (1976) describes a similar phenomenon in sociolinguistic interviewing. She notes in her discussion of this methodology that elicitees who were expecting formal lists of questions, rather than the elicitation of conversation that was the elicitors’ goal, would often express impatience with the elicitor for what they perceived as his or her incompetence or lack of preparation.}

So here we see how the activity type and topic emergence interact; Elma’s and Lila’s perceptions of the point of the activity type are slightly different. They both orient to the elicitation, but for Lila this means motivating Elma to talk, while for Elma this means a more formal list of questions, more like an interview for information-gathering purposes than what Lila has in mind. And the topic of how Elma is feeling does not fit within Elma’s conceptualization of this interaction; it seems to have no point. This also brings up the component of control. If Elma is considering this interaction to be a formal interview, with questions and answers, it is interesting that she took control and asked the elicitor a question. But perhaps this temporary reversal of roles was sanctioned, for Elma, by the fact that their talk was not conforming to the activity type.

In the following excerpt, in contrast to Lila’s opening question, Kati (the elicitor) opens her interaction with Gene (the elicitee), with a more formulaic pleasantry. This excerpt is transcribed in a column format, with Kati’s contributions on the left and Gene’s on the right, to highlight the contrasts apparent in them.

**Excerpt 5.5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kati:</th>
<th>Gene:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gene, how are you doing today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good, thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Did you go anywhere today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No ma’am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I see you got a haircut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes I did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Did Briana do that?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kati’s question *Gene, how are you doing today?* is replied to by Gene with a standard *Good, thank you* and so in this case, Kati closes this segment of the interaction with her response of *Good*. She does not attempt to develop a topic surrounding Gene’s current state of wellbeing; rather, both of them seem to accept that this question and answer were simply a precursor to a topic (see Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Rather, Kati opens a new topic with a yes/no question (*Did you go anywhere today?*) that Gene, unfortunately, answers fully and succinctly, *No ma’am*. Gene’s enthusiastic delivery of these responses gives the impression that in this interaction, he was not stonewalling Kati or trying to change the subject; his use of *ma’am* to address Kati is likely a signal of closeness rather than distance, or irritation (Johnstone 1999), and is also an acknowledgement of her gender.⁴³ Gene’s orientation to the point of the topics introduced by Kati seems to be that he should helpfully provide answers to her questions without extensive elaboration, which references the interview activity type. When Kati makes a remark that elicits an affirmative response from Gene (*I see you got a haircut*), she has the opportunity to develop that new topic further; again, however, she asks a yes/no question, introducing the concept of *Briana* as known to both of them (*Did Briana do that?*). So when Gene replies that yes, Briana is responsible for his haircut, just as Kati assumed, Gene has completed the question successfully and Kati has limited resources for continuing the topic of his hair. In this case, Kati and Gene run into some challenges with co-constructing topics because Gene can answer Kati’s yes/no questions fully in a single word.

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⁴³ See Pope and Davis (2011) for a discussion of the examination of identity as constructed through dialect in this corpus.
Some elicitees, however, seem to be enthusiastic to participate in the interview activity type and embrace it fully. In this excerpt, Mellie (theelicitor) has just finished identifying the session and checked the sound when Opal (theelicitee) takes control of the proceedings.

Excerpt 5.6

1 Opal: Okay now, are you gonna ask me questions?
2 Mellie: Yes, so- so-
3 Opal: Okay.
4 Mellie: What- what types of food do you like the best?
5 Opal: Do what?
6 Mellie: What types of food do you like the best?
7 Opal: Vegetables, meat, and desserts!
8 Mellie: Oh, desserts, yeah.
9 They’re my favorite.
10 Opal: What you want- wanna know what kinda dessert I like the best?
11 Mellie: I would love to.
12 Opal: A fresh coconut cake.

Opal expects that Mellie was about to ask her a series of questions, though for what purpose is unclear. Mellie, with a series of false starts, seems surprised for a moment, but then recovers and complies with Opal’s expectation by opening their interaction with a question that has no connection to the immediate environment or anything that either Opal or Mellie had said: *What types of food do you like the best?* In so doing, she builds upon Opal’s construal of their interaction as a formal interview, in that her question is prepared and independent of the local production resources of their encounter. Opal answers Mellie’s question immediately and confidently, in a forceful tone (*Vegetables, meat, and dessert!*). Mellie picks up on Opal’s mention of dessert, abandoning *vegetables* and *meat*, and builds rapport with her by disclosing her own, matching, preference for dessert; this turn by Mellie pivots the topic to desserts specifically, and Opal again takes the lead and offers to pursue the topic by giving information about herself. This follows Chafe’s (1974) thinking that when an exemplar of a category is activated, all other items within that category are also activated, allowing the focus to shift;
similarly, Sacks (1995, 757) discusses how topic emerges related to the mention of concepts that share “co-class membership,” as in this case in which food includes vegetables, meat, and desserts, and then Opal offers to share an example of desserts. Her offer, phrased as a question (Wanna know what kinda dessert I like the best?) draws upon the local resource of Mellie’s opening question, repeating the wording (…like the best). Mellie, somewhat amused and nonplussed by Opal’s enthusiastic control of the talk, matches her spirit in her response (I would love to). Opal gives her example of a fresh coconut cake.

Overall, there is no incorrect way for the elicitor to open an interaction; the elicitors and elicitees are all individuals, and while a pleasantry might be a fortuitous start to one interaction, a clear and specific question might be quite successful in another. The point, however, is that from the setting up of the elicitation and continuing through the opening turns controlled by the elicitors, both the elicitors and more importantly the elicitees viewed the activity type as an interview, each approaching the activity in their own manner. The elicitees signaled this in their style of answering questions (economical) and their questions to the elicitors (knowledge-transfer based). We also got a glimpse of the challenge of display questions, and how they seemed to be difficult for elicitors and elicitees to manage, at least in this example. We will examine similar types of display questions, with different outcomes, in the next section of this chapter.

Now, as our discussion progresses to the conversation beyond the preliminaries, we can consider how topic emerges in this light.

5.3.3 The Conversation

I want to focus now on the features of how topic emerges in the unstructured interview activity type. As was the case in the examples of participant-managed collection in the previous
chapter, the boundary between the opening turns and the rest of the conversation is vague; in contrast to the analysis of the previous chapter, I want to examine topic emergence in the conversation in the context of the setting up of the elicitation and the opening turns as well, to see how the activity type progresses. I begin with a continuation of the interaction between Beth and Peter that we have already examined. As we have already seen, Beth opens her interaction with Peter by switching from talking about him in the third person to the second (using the vocative Peter at the start of the turn) and proceeding with a request for information about a woman called Anna.

Excerpt 5.7

1  Beth:  My name is Beth Miller, it’s ten-thirty in the morning, and I’m talking to Peter Smith.
2        So Peter, tell me about. . . Anna.
3  Peter:  What do you want to know about her?
4  Beth:  Everything.
5  Peter:  I don’t know where to start.
6        +
7  Beth:  Uhh, how old was she when you guys met?
8  Peter:  How OLD was she?
9        Oh, she was one year old and she was two years old and then three years old.
10       She got all the way up to where she is now. . . and I’m not going to reveal her age HHH
11  Peter:  Cause she’ll beat me up=
12  Beth:  . . . Ahhhh HHHH
13  Peter:  =if I do.
14  Beth:  Smart man HH
15        You’re a smart man.
16  Ohhhh. ((coughs))
17        You were married for-
18  Peter:  Huh?  
19  Beth:  How long (. .) have you been married?
20        Forever?
21  Peter:  Oh I don’t know, for quite a while HH
22  Beth:  You lived up in Philadelphia?
23  Peter:  Huh?
24  Beth:  Was it Philadelphia?
25  Peter:  In Philadelphia, yeah,
26        there is a Philadelphia,
27        and I guess so other places too, I would imagine.
28        (.)
29  Beth:  She’s beautiful though.
30        I love to look at those pictures.
31  Peter:  Mhm. ((weeping very softly))
32  Beth:  That’s okay.
As discussed earlier, Beth recognizes that her initial prompt for information was not successful in that Peter is not easily able to orient to a topic; while it would be possible to assume that Anna is a topic unto herself and thus a sufficient starting point, in this case, the interactants have no way to contextualize the concept and expand upon it with an overall point in mind. So far, the only point to the interaction that the participants can acknowledge is that Beth is recording an interaction with Peter, but this is not sufficient to support the topic development as initiated by Beth. Therefore, Beth refines her question and solicits a detail about the concept Anna: she asks, How old was she when you guys met? With this question, she further emphasizes that she has knowledge of Anna, specifically that she and Peter met at one time (and therefore, Anna is someone Peter knows, but not a blood relative, etc.). Peter repeats the matrix clause back (How OLD was she?) and provides an answer that, at first, seems inscrutable or irrelevant (lines 8-9).

Peter is not answering Beth’s question; Anna was not one year old (and so on) when they met. But Peter is in the process of answering his own formulation of the question, How OLD was she?, listing various ages in Anna’s past, culminating with where she is now. Laughing, Peter reveals that he will not reveal Anna’s current age for fear of the repercussions, a move that Beth responds to with laughter. This exchange demonstrates that both Beth and Peter orient to a less formal activity type, at least much less formal than other interviews; in other interview situations (e.g., applying for government benefits, etc.) one’s exact age would be required to be reported.
But Peter treats Beth’s question as frivolous, and Beth in kind plays Peter’s game, validating his vague response (*You’re a smart man*). It is unclear at this point if Peter could, in fact, answer Beth’s question; that is, his humorous response could simply be for his and Beth’s amusement, or it could be a genuine desire to avoid revealing Anna’s age, or it could be a strategy to circumvent a question requiring a numerical answer that he cannot access, which is a common difficulty for people with acquired cognitive communication disorders (see Saunders 1998). Interactionally, however, Beth’s alignment with Peter’s joke is evidence of its success in this moment. Continuing on, Beth asks another question; I repeat this portion of the excerpt here for easier reading.

Excerpt 5.8

15 Beth: You’re a smart man.
16 Ohhhh. ((coughs))
17 You were married for-
18 Peter: Huh?
19 Beth: How long (.) have you been married?
20 Forever?
21 Peter: Oh I don’t know, for quite a while HH
22 Beth: You lived up in Philadelphia?
23 Peter: Huh?
24 Beth: Was it Philadelphia?
25 Peter: In Philadelphia, yeah,
26 there is a Philadelphia,
27 and I guess so other places too, I would imagine.
28 (..)

Maintaining the concept of *Anna* but passing by the question of her age and moving on to the length of her marriage with Peter, Beth asks another question that solicits a numerical answer (*How long have you been married?*). She immediately answers it, maintaining the jocular style that Peter had introduced (*Forever?*). Peter responds vaguely, reformulating what Beth had said (*Oh I don’t know, for quite a while*), and ends his turn with laughter; Peter is either reticent on any question regarding the concept of Anna, or he cannot or does not answer the questions in the
way that Beth intends, which is likely a length of time in years. Abandoning the concept of lengths of time, Beth changes topics again, asking another question, *You lived up in Philadelphia?* Her formulation of the question, similar to her questions about Anna, shows the knowledge that she already has about Peter’s life and where he lived, by asking him for confirmation. When Peter does not hear her first attempt at the question, she rephrases it as *Was it in Philadelphia?*, and Peter does not appear to understand what Beth means by *was it in*. When he answers *In Philadelphia, yeah, there is a Philadelphia /and I guess so other places too, I would imagine* it begins to become clear that Peter is not able to expand upon these topics much at all. The concepts that Beth introduces (*Anna*, the related concepts of her age and their marriage, *Philadelphia*) are concepts that Peter ratifies as familiar, but he does not offer any further knowledge to share. The questions, though, based as they are on Beth’s substantial knowledge about Peter’s life, tend to require confirmations or brief responses rather than elaboration. In a sense, each potential topic fails to be developed in any way, as hard as Beth tries to find an agreeable topic by asking questions and as friendly and accommodating as Peter is; and, again, it is unclear whether the humor that Peter approached the encounter with is a coping mechanism to deal with the difficulty of some of the questions.

In the continuation of their interaction below, we see that indeed Peter is attempting to cope with some emotional aspects of the conversation.

Excerpt 5.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Peter:</th>
<th>and I guess so other places too, I would imagine.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>(..)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Beth:</td>
<td>She’s beautiful though.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

44 It is possible that this is an example of Beth using the *indirect question* technique she would have learned in her training.

45 Hamilton (1994, 53) reports the same phenomenon, in which a vague answer is provided when possibly cognitive challenges prevent a more specific, informative response.
I love to look at those pictures.

Beth: That’s okay.

Um.

Beth: In Phil-[in Phil-

Peter: [Wha- [Wha- huh?

Beth: No go ahead.

Peter: What’s it doing?

Beth: It’s recording our conversation.

Peter: On this or on that?

Beth: On that.

Peter: Oh HHH

Beth circles back to Anna after a pause; She’s beautiful though. I love to look at those pictures.

The salience of the local physical production resource of her image, in addition to the attempted topic initiations related to the concept of Anna, allow her to be referred to as she. But something in Beth’s comment about Anna, be it her beauty (possibly the photograph was taken when she was newly married) or the enjoyment of looking at pictures and reminiscing, makes Peter start to weep very lightly for a moment. After Beth tries to set him at ease (lines 32-33), there is a pause, after which Beth tries to take up the topic of Philadelphia again just at the same time that Peter tries to take a turn himself (lines 35 and 36). In an effort to save face, both for themselves and for each other, Beth and Peter each try to take a turn to change the topic. Beth tries to return to constructing a topic around the concept of Philadelphia and Peter attempts a more drastic change to focus on the local physical production resource of the elicitation recording equipment that Beth brought. After their overlap, Beth cedes the turn and Peter asks Beth a question about the audio recorder. His question, What’s it doing?, allows for elaboration by Beth, and after she answers Peter asks a follow-up question. Their lightheartedness is restored as they discuss the details.

Saunders et al. (2012) note that the researcher’s recording equipment are common “conversational objects,” as they are quite new and salient in the physical setting of the recorded interactions.
What can this analysis tell us? First of all, we see a very clear influence of activity type on topic emergence. It seems to be consistently the case that the elicitees are orienting to an interview activity type, rather than an everyday conversation activity type, particularly in the earlier minutes of the conversation. This could be helpful, if the elicitees are expecting questions, because it enables the elicitor to change topics rapidly (as Beth did, when she found that Peter was not elaborating on a concept she had introduced). However, unlike some typical interviews between strangers, it was clear in the way that Beth asked her questions that she already had an idea of the answers, similar to known answer questions typical of pedagogic contexts in which the goal is to learn what theelicitee knows, rather than for the elicitor to learn any new information about a topic (Heritage and Clayman 2010, 28). This is also an example of the variation in such institutional interaction sequences, in that Beth does not offer evaluations on Peter’s answers (Mehan 1979); thus their interactions do not “feel like” or construct a classroom context. Rather, Beth’s personal knowledge of the concepts she introduced made the point of the emergent topics unclear, as the questions seemed to be display rather than referential questions. Thus, given that Beth was in possession of knowledge, and asking the questions, she held a great deal of control during the course of the topic emergence in this segment of their interaction – as is typical for an interview. However, Peter is not without control; in fact, he took control when he answered Beth’s question about Anna’s age with a joke, and he took control in order to save face when he was emotional and Beth appeared embarrassed.

I want to follow this extended analysis with an example of knowledge of concepts managed differently, and a discussion of some of the contrasts. In this excerpt, Kati (the elicitor) and Gene (the elicitee) are midway through their elicitation; this segment occurred several minutes after the opening of their elicitation, described above in Excerpt 5.5.
In her first turn in this excerpt, Kati initiates a topic by first mentioning something she heard (*I heard, um-*/Amy talking about going to see the lights at Oak Forest); Amy is someone known to both Kati and Gene, as is the local landmark of *Oak Forest*. The *lights* might be an ambiguous concept, had Kati not introduced *the lights* in the context of the person (*Amy*) and place (*Oak Forest*) associated with them; these concepts help to define the concept of *lights* as *Christmas lights*. After this orienting statement, she follows with a related question posed to Gene (*Are you going to go with them to see the Christmas lights?*) which explicitly specifies the lights as *Christmas lights*. Kati’s question is thus contextualized by a reason for asking it (Kati heard talk
of it) and supporting concepts (Amy, Oak Forest). The state of her knowledge, and shared knowledge with Gene, is clarified by the context she provides. Gene answers that he does not know, which Kati accepts because, after all, it is a question about the future and it would be expected that Gene might not have made plans yet. But after a pause, he adds that We went last year. We went over to Meadowtown, introducing a new concept, Meadowtown. In her response, Kati again provides her state of knowledge about the place (Yeah, I haven’t been there) and asks about it (Was it pretty?).

Kati’s practice of providing orienting statements that preface her questions accomplish a number of goals. First, as I stated, it helps to clarify Kati’s knowledge of the concepts she introduces and asks about, which is helpful for understanding them and how they could be manipulated in topic emergence. Second, information about Kati’s knowledge state helps to construct the point of the topics she introduces with her questions, in that it provides reasons for why she might want answers to them (even if the reason is simply a desire to know). And third, even though this segment of their interaction unfolds like an interview activity type, with Kati asking questions that Gene answers, Kati’s pre-question statements help to position them more symmetrically, rather than as elicitor and elicitee. In an interview, particularly a more formal one, the interviewer typically holds the power in the dyad and does not have any obligation to provide a reason or justification for her questions. The same is true for an elicitation of language. Therefore, by providing Gene with information about her state of knowledge, she gives some of her power to him; their interaction may not be as symmetrical as everyday conversation between peers, but it is more egalitarian than a typical interview. Kati seems to be making an effort to do this; she begins in line 27 to ask Gene a question related to what he had said (Did you um- I know you mentioned you went with your wife, did your kids go, too?). She aborts the question,
however, and explicitly reminds Gene that she knows that he went to see the Sutherland house with his wife, because he just told her so; then she asks if they took their children.

While Beth and Peter’s interaction unfolded like an interview in many ways, and Kati seemed to be trying to mitigate some features of the interview type, this is not to say that the question and answer interview style is pervasive across all of the interactions, moment by moment. In fact, many elicitors and elicitees switched roles during the course of the session, with the elicitee asking questions and the elicitor providing personal information. In this excerpt, Allie (the elicitor) has just told June (the elicitee) that she wants to attend graduate school after she finishes with her undergraduate degree, so that she can study nutrition. June asks for additional information about this.

Excerpt 5.11

1  June:  But- but what’s your actual aim?
2       What, w-w-what do you want to do that o-one thing?
3  Allie:  I want to help overweight children.
4  June:  Overweight children?
5  Allie:  Yeah.
6  June:  Mhm.
7  Allie:  I really want to help them.
8  June:  That, that is, that is a, uh, w-wonderful thing for you to just (.) say out of the air.
9  And- and not have anybody saying anything to you,
10 and therefore, knowing- that from you, I think, I think you’re to be congratulated.
11  Allie:  Thank you.
12  June:  That’s marvelous. That’s marvelous.
13  There’s so- so- so many, uh- things going on nowadays.
14  One child won’t let the other child do anything.
15  “I’m not gonna play if she’s gonna be there” and that kind of stuff.
16  Allie:  Mhm.
17  June:  And you hear that all day long, and kind of wonder,
18      uh, we didn’t do that way back then.
19  But now I- I think- it’s getting awful cold isn’t it?
20  Allie:  No. It feels good.
21  June:  It does?
22  Allie:  Yeah.
23  June:  Okay.
24  Allie:  No- the- uh- getting back to what I was saying.
25  I don’t think that the way the children are- are reacting-
26  I don’t think it’s going to get any easier for the children.
27  Not at all.
28  Allie:  No. Not at all.
Allie says that she wants to help overweight children with her degree in nutrition (line 3), and June repeats the concept to confirm that she heard this correctly. While Allie likely means that she wants to use her education to work to make children healthier, given that childhood obesity is a growing problem in the United States and particularly the South, where Allie and June both grew up and currently live, June seems to have focused on and expanded the help concept introduced in Allie’s turn. Congratulating her on this goal, June seems to have assimilated the state of being overweight into the larger concept of things going on nowadays with children, citing examples like one child won’t let the other child do anything. “I’m not gonna play if she’s gonna be there” and that kind of stuff. It is not clear if June means to draw a direct connection between children being overweight and the other problems they face (e.g., being bullied at school) or if she has taken up the idea of “helping children” and extrapolated from that, while leaving behind the concept of overweight children entirely. Either way, she has made the point of the topic about helping troubled children, rather than helping to improve the nutrition of overweight children. This is a minor topic shift; indeed, Allie herself stated I really want to help them which focuses on helping rather than the technicalities of nutrition. After a brief interlude to talk about the temperature, as June had requested, earlier in the interaction, that they sit outside and was concerned about the cold (lines 19-23), June takes up the topic again, marking this transition with a metadiscursive comment (getting back to what I was saying). She reinforces the point that children today face many difficulties that she did not face in her own youth, thus requiring help from people like Allie. Allie shows her agreement with June’s point by repeating the phrase (Not at all), and following it with And it’s getting worse, where and signals a continuation of the topic. And so the topic moves through time, from their shared opinion of the
present (*nowadays*), to June’s perception of the past (*we didn’t do that way back then*), and to the future (*getting worse*), where Allie hopes to do her work. So Allie seems to have accepted the point as constructed by June in her argument.

This topic construction is helped by the fact that June, upon hearing about Allie’s goals, was very complimentary of them (e.g., *I think you’re to be congratulated*). Regardless of whether June fully shared the knowledge, with Allie, of what it means to help overweight children as a nutritionist, her appreciation of the value of this goal was clear, even if she understood it differently. June controlled this segment of their interaction forcefully, beginning with the question about Allie’s goals, continuing with the compliments of these goals, then with the break in topic to discuss the immediate resource of the weather, and finally with a return to the topic.

June’s enthusiastic control of the concepts and point of the topic she constructed with Allie was unique in this corpus; most elicitees were not as forthcoming with questions to the elicitors and were not as comfortable, it seemed, controlling the topic. In these cases, when concepts need to be fixed more concretely in order to enable topic emergence, soliciting information about local physical production resources was a common strategy among the elicitors. When Beth attempted this by asking Peter about Anna, focusing on a photograph of her, it was not very fruitful because not only is the concept of one’s wife so extensive and complex that it can be difficult to orient to something to say about her, but the state of Beth’s knowledge of Anna was unclear. But other local physical production resources produced more successful results. In this example, Sophie (the elicitor) is asking about Ada’s (the elicitee’s) extensive collection of souvenir bells.

Excerpt 5.12
Here, the state of shared knowledge is clearer, in fact closer to Labov and Fanshel’s request for information as an AB-event (1977); when Sophie, the elicitor, says *Tell me about this one*, she is indicating an object in the immediate environment that represents the concept under discussion. Because the object can be observed by both Sophie and Ada, the elicitee, at the same time, Ada could have a sense of what Sophie could know about the bell in question. She chooses to name the figures represented on the bell, which might not be apparent to Sophie, though it is likely that Sophie has sufficient cultural knowledge of Christmas iconography to guess this. In fact, Sophie receives this knowledge as a blend of new and old. She repeats the concepts named by Ada (*Mary, Baby Jesus*), using the same names rather than variations, seeming to take pleasure in or “savor” (Tannen 1989) their mention as recognizable entities. Her enthusiasm, additionally, mitigates any possibility that this was obvious information. Sophie’s following response that the figures are *sweet* concludes the discussion of this concept. Even though it may seem that not much information was exchanged about the bell, Ada seems enthusiastic about describing more bells, and committed to the activity and to the point of it (*Let’s see if there’s anything else that I need to tell you about*). It seems that Sophie has engendered a sense of needing to know about the bells, which supports the point of the topic. Ada focuses next on a bell from Disney World, which Sophie responds to by asking *Did you go to Disney World?* This is a relevant question in
terms of the souvenir bells and Sophie’s interest in them because some of the bells in Ada’s collection are souvenirs from her own trips, while others were gifts from others’ travels.

This brief interaction shows that it is quite possible, in fact beneficial, to use local physical production resources in this activity type to attempt to build topic, and the important factor to attend to is the point. Sophie was able to establish (with Ada’s ratification and co-construction) that the point of talking about the bells was for Sophie to enjoy examining them and to learn interesting information from them about Ada’s travels (or those of her friends and family) throughout her life. Sometimes this point does not appear so clearly in an interaction; certainly, most have had the experience of wondering, when faced with a question from someone, if he or she really wants to know about a concept, and if so, why? But this does not seem to be a problem for Ada in this case. With regard to control, we see that Sophie uses similar syntax as Beth to initiate a topic (Tell me about X), indicating a high level of control, but the point shared by Sophie and Ada makes it easier for Ada to take control as well (And uh-let’s see if there’s anything else that I need to tell you about).

Finally, I return to the interaction between Lila (the elicitor) and Elma (the elicitee) discussed above, to illustrate an interaction that proceeded less smoothly, as evidenced by Elma’s very brief responses and, as we will see, an apparent discrepancy in knowledge or belief in concepts. Elma was very tense throughout the recorded interaction and there was likely little that Lila could have done to improve the situation. In this excerpt, Lila had just been asking about Elma’s children (individuals already known to Lila), and Elma was very reluctant to talk about them, answering simply and tersely with yes or I don’t know.

Excerpt 5.13

47 We can see how this differs from a testing activity type, such as the Verbal Expression Test discussed by Hamilton (1994, 17-18), in which an elicitee is instructed to say all that he or she can about a random object.
Lila asks a question, introducing the concept of Elma’s grandchildren for the first time. Her wording of the question (*Do you have any grandchildren?*) does not demonstrate any knowledge on Lila’s part, but she follows this question with questions that upgrade her epistemic stance (Heritage and Raymond 2005), first answering her own question (*I think you do*) and then adding further details, finishing her turn with a tag question to request confirmation of her accuracy (*I think you have five grandchildren, right?). Similar to the interaction we saw emerge between Beth and Peter, whether Elma answers with uncertainty (*I don’t think so*) in a bid to take control and close the topic of her grandchildren, or if she truly cannot access the information, Lila maintains control and continues to talk about the grandchildren, responding to Elma’s turn by contradicting it (*Yeah, you do*). She then reintroduces the concepts of their mothers, Elma’s daughters, about whom Elma had been loath to converse moments earlier in the interaction. Lila again adds details, that the daughters are married (*Cathy and Lisa are married*), and they have children (*They have kids*), thus verifying Lila’s own correctness and countering Elma’s projected uncertainty with facts. Because Lila seems to know so much about all of the concepts she introduces, the point seems to be for Elma to simply provide an answer to satisfy the structure of the conversation and the emergence of the topic within the clinical discourse elicitation activity type. Lila has no conceivable need to know, to fill in any gaps in her knowledge, in contrast to
Sophie in the previous excerpt.\textsuperscript{48} So this time, when Elma again answers \textit{I don’t know}, Lila accepts this and initiates another topic, begun in the next excerpt. This excerpt is transcribed in a column format, with Lila’s contributions on the left and Elma’s on the right.

Excerpt 5.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lila:</th>
<th>Elma:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8  No?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Okay.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+  What you going to eat tomorrow for Thanksgiving?</td>
<td>Maybe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Are you going to have some turkey?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 What’s your favorite thing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 I like um- the yams.</td>
<td>Mhm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 The sweet potatoes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Those are good, aren’t they.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 With the marshmallows on top of them.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Well, that’s cool.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lila asks what Elma will be eating the following day (Thanksgiving) and then specifies a yes/no question about \textit{turkey}. Lila seems to have gleaned that Elma is not going to talk extensively about the Thanksgiving menu and guides her to clear responses. Similarly, she asks \textit{What’s your favorite thing?} and then shares her own favorite, perhaps to build rapport or to model a possible answer to spur Elma to speech. But again, she gets minimal responses, and her attempts to introduce multiple concepts on which Elma could expand (\textit{turkey, yams/sweet potatoes, marshmallows}) do not lead to any uptake on Elma’s part. Lila then closes the topic with a summative evaluation (\textit{Well, that’s cool}) and tries another question.

\textsuperscript{48} See for example Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) on display questions, Heritage and Clayman (2010) on known questions, and Mehan (1979) on classroom discourse.
Excerpt 5.15

Lila: Well, that’s cool.

Elma: Here?

Lila: Yeah.

Elma: Okay.

Lila: Are they nice to you?

Elma: Yes.

Lila: It doesn’t seem like it.

You don’t seem like you like it here that much.

I bet you’re excited to see Cathy (.) tomorrow.

She’s going to come see you for Thanksgiving, right?

Elma: Right.

Lila: That should be fun.

It will be nice to see your daughter.

Right?

Elma: YES. ((very agitatedly))

Don’t ask (.) those questions!

Lila: Why not?

( . . )

Elma: HELP! ((yelling))

Lila: You want some milk?

( . . )

Elma: I guess.

In response to Lila’s next question (How do you like everybody here?), Elma asks for clarification (here?), indicating her acknowledgement of the switch from her family and her family’s Thanksgiving as the topic to her assisted living facility and the staff. She answers the questions, minimally, including Lila’s question, Are they nice to you? Then Lila’s next turn was one that truly stood out in the audio replay of the conversation. Though Elma has answered that she likes the staff and that they are nice to her, Lila challenges her answers and acknowledges Elma’s tense, unhappy demeanor (It doesn’t seem like it. You don’t seem like you like it here that much). Elma does not respond verbally at all. In fact, Elma’s mood might be completely unrelated to the assisted living facility; Lila does not pursue the issue. Lila switches back to the topic of Elma’s daughter Cathy and how nice it will be to see her for Thanksgiving, likely casting about for something to talk about with Elma that should be pleasant and accessible; but
Lila’s prior questions surrounding the concepts of Thanksgiving and Elma’s daughters were fraught, in that Elma did not elaborate on them. Lila tries to put a positive sheen on the topic she intends to co-construct, asserting with high epistemic certainty that *That should be fun. It will be nice to see your daughter. Right?* But Elma responds back in a very loud, agitated, and frustrated tone. The topic of Elma’s daughter has so far not elicited positive responses, and Elma now pushes back explicitly, *Don’t ask those questions!*, taking control of the topic and the activity type, bringing up the notion of questions inherent to the interview type. In spite of this reaction, Lila does not switch the topic this time, and again challenges Elma’s response by asking *Why not?* At this point, Elma has truly lost any control of the interaction, because while she had been able to maintain some control before by answering Lila’s questions minimally, Lila has now touched multiple times on the sensitive concept of Cathy, and asked Elma for an explanation of the unpleasantness, which Elma is likely in no mood or state to give. This culminates in Elma expressing a moment of panic or anger (*HELP!*), but Lila remains calm and steers the topic completely away from all of the concepts that they had been discussing in order to focus on an immediately accessible environmental stimulus (*milk*). Rather than asking an abstract question, the topic is now simply whether or not Elma would like a glass of milk, which seems to lessen her agitation immediately. As Lila fetches the milk from the refrigerator, the interview ends.

One of the most prominent characteristics of these interactions, in which unique (i.e., unrepeated) dyads participate in elicitations through unstructured interviewing, is that there does not appear to be a template that will work for each elicitation. Subtle differences among strategies (such as invoking local physical production resources) yielded different results depending on the manner in which the elicitors introduced the concepts and the spirit in which
the elicitees received them. This and other themes will be addressed further at the end of the chapter, but first, we can discuss the closings of the interviews.

5.3.4 Closing of the Elicitation

While the discussion so far has focused on the interview activity type, the closings of the interactions do not provide supportive evidence for this as the interactions appear to conclude either quite abruptly (as in, the recording ends mid-conversation, without a closing sequence of any sort) or they end in a way that approximates everyday conversation (see Schegloff and Sacks 1973). In brief, they did not close in the same way that they were opened. In every instance in which the closing of the conversation was included on the recording, the interview was ended due to an interruption (a phone call, the serving of lunch) or, in a single case, a formal leave taking, as seen in this next excerpt.

Excerpt 5.16

1 June: I bet you’re ready to go, aren’t you?
2 Allie: I kind of have to.
3 I have to go to work.
4 June: You do?
5 Allie: Yeah.
6 June: And what do you do?
7 Allie: I’m a waitress.
8 June: A who?
9 Allie: A waitress.
10 June: Are you?
11 Allie: Mhmm.
12 June: Where, honey?
13 Allie: At Famous Bob’s.
14 June: At Famous Bob’s?
15 Allie: Yeah.
16 The barbecue place.
17 June: Is- is it close by?
18 ((41 turns at talk not included))
19 June: Okay.
20 Bye-bye.
21 Allie: I’ll be back. ((June and Allie part company))
22 (...) ((addressing someone else)) I just wanted to let you know that
23 I’m gonna go get my computer cause I have to download this.
24 I didn’t want her to think I was leaving with the stuff.
June, the elicitee, again takes control of the interaction as she in particular was wont to do throughout, and suggests that Allie might have to leave through a sort of pre-closing *I bet you’re ready to go, aren’t you?* Allie confirms this, but frames her leaving in terms of obligation rather than desire (*I kind of have to. I have to go to work*). This introduction of a new concept, that of Allie’s work, is built upon by June, who asks what the job is, where it is, etc. Rather than passing on initiating or continuing any new topics once June has offered a pre-closing and Allie agrees that she must go (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), June’s questions and pursuit of this topic leads to 41 turns at talk (19 from June, and 22 from Allie, though Allie’s are largely backchannels, laughter, etc.) Thus, Allie does not leave for a long while.

These closings are reminiscent of the original goal of these elicitations; rather than interview respondents in order to gather information about them, the intention was simply to have a conversation and more generally share knowledge, learning about the elicitees that way. Indeed, the excerpt above which marks the closing of June and Allie’s interaction matches the activity type of their interaction up to that point. This elicitation was the least like an interview of all those in the corpus, in that while there were many questions asked in order for strangers to share knowledge of one another, the power asymmetry typical of interviews was not constructed by the participants. Allie and June shared control of topic emergence, including question asking and pacing of the talk, and thus their interaction most closely approximated everyday conversation. Thus, while I suspect that many of the elicitations might have ended similarly, though this phase is not recorded, June’s questioning kept Allie in the conversation even after it had begun to close.
5.4 **Discussion**

I want to begin this discussion by noting an observation that became apparent in the data, which is that each dyad in the corpus, composed of a college-student elicitor and an elicitee with Alzheimer’s disease, was unique; some pairs built rapport while others did not, some had effortful conversations while others found a lot to talk about. In these unstructured interviews, there were so many personal and contextual factors that were relevant to the emergence of the interactions that it was, at times, difficult to see clear patterns or draw strong conclusions. However, these caveats seem to make the themes that were discernible across multiple interactions all the more prominent.

We can begin by considering the activity type. In contrast to everyday talk in interaction among peers, and to elicitation through participant-managed collection, the activity type of elicitation through unstructured interviews was more salient. This became apparent from the setting up of the elicitations, where the elicitors signaled their control of the interaction, which suggested an asymmetry in the past and upcoming talk. The elicitors would determine the course of the conversation, including its beginning and end, and the elicitees therefore could take a more passive position. With that said, recall that the elicitors phrased the interaction as *talking, talking to* or *talking with* the elicitee, which references the elicitors’ goal of having an everyday conversation rather than conducting an interview per se. Unfortunately, the setting up of the elicitation and the control held by the elicitor seemed to match the elicitee’s orientation to the activity type as an interview in which questions were anticipated, and an asymmetrical interaction was expected. Thus, we saw that the elicitations were largely conducted through questions and answers, more as an artifact of the establishment of control and the participants’ orientation to that dynamic rather than a preconceived plan.
A difficulty arises, however, because the elicitees do not have any way of knowing that there was not a preconceived plan. Their expectations of the activity type would be consistent with an information-gathering activity. This situation then leads to the point of the interaction, and the potential topics that are constructed in the topics within it. If the elicitors’ overall point is to display interest in the lives of the elicitees, and build rapport with them, then it follows that they would make friendly and polite overtures and ask questions that are familiar, perhaps expected to engender positive feelings in the elicitees (e.g., talk about family, holiday traditions, etc.). But if the elicitees expected the overall point to be providing information to the elicitors, then it follows that they would try to answer questions fully and accurately. This understanding of the point meshed with the framework of a formal interview type, and they saw reason to provide necessary information to the elicitor. Often, though, the elicitor indicated, through the phrasing of the question or through follow-up turns, that the answer to the question was already known to some extent (e.g., display questions). This creates a problem in determining what an appropriate response to the question might be; in fact, even in standardized interviews meant to follow a very strict protocol, asking questions one knows the answer to is so interactionally discordant that the question is usually mitigated in some way, or the information is verified rather than asked, or the question is simply skipped (Maynard, Houtkoop-Steenstra, Schaeffer, and Van der Zouwen 2002). So in these unstructured interviews, it is difficult to orient to the point when the state of the interlocutor’s knowledge does not align with the information they seek.

The mismatch in point leads to the next main theme in the elicitations, which is the status of knowledge and its presentation as shared or not shared in the context of the interaction. Generally, the elicitors asked questions in order to provide the interactional space for the elicitee
to respond leisurely on a concept of interest to him or her. In terms of topic, the elicitor, who was in control, introduced a concept through interrogative or imperative syntax with the goal of the elicitee enjoying the act of responding. Knowledge was managed in various ways; often, the elicitor would already have knowledge of the concept in question, such as when Beth asked Peter about Anna, or when Lila asked Elma about her daughters and her Thanksgiving plans. In other instances, there were production resources (physical or discursive) that made the status of knowledge clearer, such as Ada and Sophie’s conversation about Ada’s bells, or Kati’s verbal contextualization of the questions she asked Gene. However, when the state of the elicitor’s knowledge was unclear (i.e., it was not clear if the elicitor already knew facts about the concept in question) or the elicitor obviously knew the information he or she sought (e.g., the instances of display questions), it could be difficult for the elicitees to answer the questions because these states of affairs did not align with the elicitee’s orientation to the point of the interaction, which was for the elicitors to gather information for whatever overall reason they may have had.

With regard to topic emergence, perhaps the first observation to make is that in these elicitations there were not many instances of major disorientations. In fact, compared to the prior two chapters, it was difficult to see how topic emerged such that one could become disoriented to it. Put another way, questions are often the source of topic initiation, or “topic-proffering” strategies (Schegloff 1987a), and the question/answer sequence used often in these elicitations made it possible to, if not initiate topics anew with each question, to at least maintain control of topic emergence. Thus, any minor disorientations to topic specifically can be traced to issues pertinent to the unstructured interview activity type, more than to the content of the talk.

Concepts, the basic components of topic, are manipulated based on the displaying and sharing of personal, cultural, and social knowledge about them; therefore, a state of affairs in
which knowledge of concepts is uncertain will make it difficult to orient to an emerging topic. We saw too that there was a mismatch in the point of the interaction; whether the point was to have an everyday conversation or to elicit specific information was unclear. And, because the elicitor had control of the interaction from the beginning, this led to a question and answer style that reinforced the more formal expectations of the elicitees, but not the elicitors themselves. This is not to say that the unstructured interview activity type precluded everyday interaction from occurring; it was certainly possible for the two interactants to have an intersubjective understanding of the elicitation. June and Allie’s conversation was a clear example of how the activity could result in more symmetrical, everyday talk. This was likely due to a number of factors, including June’s enthusiasm for asking questions of Allie (and in turn, Allie’s interest in answering them).\textsuperscript{49} The two simply got along well, and this resulted in the point of the topics, broadly construed, to be that they wanted to get to know each other better by sharing knowledge and appreciation for knowledge. But this seemed to be an exception.

With regard to topic as a framework for understanding discourse-pragmatic impairment, the overall conclusion that comes from the analyses of these data is that it can be very difficult to discern discourse-pragmatic impairment in the elicitee in terms of disorientation to topic. Recall, briefly, that topic orientation depends upon intersubjective personal, cultural, and/or social knowledge of concepts and sharing the point of the introduction of the concepts and the reason for sharing of knowledge about them; control then determines how the topic emerges in interaction. In these interviews, the point of the topic was often unclear, and this was often due to the unclear state of the elicitors’ knowledge of the concepts. In terms of topic, then, it can be unclear if an elicitee is disoriented to a concept introduced by the elicitor, or disoriented to the

\textsuperscript{49} Another factor that might be relevant is June’s clinical profile; it is possible that at the time of the elicitation she had a mild form of Alzheimer’s disease, in contrast to moderate or severe cases. I have no way to confirm this, however, because the information is not available.
knowledge they share about it, or disoriented to the point of the emerging topic for whatever reason.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have shown how the elicitation of language through unstructured interviewing was carried out by college student elicitors and elicitees with mild to moderate Alzheimer’s disease. We saw that even though the overall goal of this activity was to have a conversation, rather than to solicit and collect specific information, the elicitees oriented to the activity type as an interview. Because the elicitors were trying mainly to get the elicitees to talk, they were not concerned about the particular details of what they were asking; but the elicitees expected a different goal orientation from the elicitors, and this occasionally resulted in topic disorientation. This makes it difficult to evaluate how well individuals with Alzheimer’s disease in this corpus oriented to topic in interaction.

Because the interview activity type appeared to be embraced by the elicitees, it could be an effective starting point for eliciting everyday conversation, as a way for the elicitors and elicitees to orient to the interaction. In fact, the interview is a natural way for two individuals who do not know each other to orient to one another as they are becoming acquainted. The point to focus on is how knowledge of concepts is managed in the interaction (be it an interview, or everyday conversation). In these interactions, when the elicitor clearly knew the answers to the questions, or more importantly, the elicitree knew that the elicitor must have some knowledge of the concepts, but the state of knowledge is unclear, the interview activity type presented some difficulties. Some important strategies seem to be contextualizing the state of knowledge (e.g., reminding the elicitree about how or why the elicitor knows something) to show what parts of a question are known and what are not, and thus making the point of the turn more clear. Topic
development would be more active, and the resulting elicitation would be a more useful
evaluation or research tool, if elicitors did not know the answers to their questions (or, if they
did, they hid it well).

In the next chapter, I examine topic emergence in the context of a different sort of
acquired cognitive communication disorder (resulting from traumatic brain injury) and a
different activity type (clinical protocol). The chapter investigates the most structured elicitation
activity type thus far, which has implications for topic emergence that contrast strongly with the
patterns we have seen so far.
CHAPTER 6
ELICITATION THROUGH CLINICAL PROTOCOL:
THE CASE OF TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

No matter the type of acquired cognitive communication disorder, the perceived severity, the time post onset, or the expected progression, an individual should have the right to be evaluated by a speech-language pathologist trained in the diagnosis and treatment of the many linguistic, cognitive, mechanical, and social challenges that one might face post injury. Therefore, at some point, a clinician is going to be in the position of evaluating a client’s language in some way, in order to inform later decisions about therapy plans, if any, and how to execute them.

Eliciting language that would allow a clinician to make a diagnosis or suggest appropriate treatment for possible patients with traumatic brain injuries is the focus of this chapter. In the case of traumatic brain injury (TBI), resultant communication disorders can be challenging to diagnose and treat in the language pathology clinic. This is largely due to two factors, the first being the heterogeneous nature of traumatic brain injury; the type and location of the injury, combined with the interrelated effects that it can have, means that it can be difficult to establish norms for the diverse population of individuals with TBIs, and, subsequently, evaluate individuals against those norms. The second factor is the nature of the acquired cognitive communication disorders in nonaphasic brain injury survivors; typically, impairments in language are manifested in pragmatic- or discourse-level language use rather than at the lexical level (e.g., naming tasks, jargon) or phonological (e.g., articulation). Also, participating in a conversation or organizing a narrative, or other such activities, require executive function and
emotional regulation, cognitive and noncognitive factors that are integral to language use (Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005).

The data from individuals with TBIs that I will discuss in this chapter were collected for research purposes, just as in the prior chapters, and were not used for diagnosis or treatment; however, the goal of the data collection was to determine the feasibility of a method to do just that. Thus, this chapter is closest in spirit and goal to a traditional clinical, speech-language pathology setting; therefore, I provide more background detail about the state of assessment in this particular field.

Principled evaluation of language and communication problems faces many challenges, in both standardized and nonstandardized assessment. Since pragmatic competence, important to the remediation of communication disorders of various types, was identified as an essential target of assessment (Penn 1985; Prutting and Kirchner 1987), evaluations of language in use have become more widely used and clinically integrated practices. These evaluations can be standardized or nonstandardized. There are many standardized testing options for clinicians to choose from; for example, over 85 options exist for evaluating cognitive communication disorders specifically (Turkstra, Coelho, and Ylvisaker 2005), and this total is consistently increasing. Particularly well known tests of communication in daily life are the American Speech Language Hearing Association Functional Assessment of Communication Skills in Adults (Frattali et al. 1995), Communication Activities of Daily Living (Holland, Frattali, and Fromm 1999), the Quality of Communication Life (Paul et al. 2005), and the Functional Assessment of Verbal Reasoning and Executive Strategies (MacDonald 2005); however, such tests, argue Turkstra, Coelho, and Ylvisaker (2005), are quite limited in their capacity to characterize a particular individual with a TBI and his or her communication across interactional contexts.
relevant to the individual’s daily life. In fact, they additionally note that these tests, with the exception of the more recently developed Functional Assessment of Verbal Reasoning and Executive Strategies, do not explicitly evaluate the quality of communication itself or consider personal or environmental influences on conversational performance; rather, they focus on behaviors and reports of behaviors that are then used to infer communication ability. Otherwise, cognitive tests or tests developed for aphasia are often used as proxies for standardized assessment of pragmatic impairment.50

In part due to the inherent challenges in developing standardized tests for cognitive communication disorders subsequent to traumatic brain injury, nonstandardized evaluations are commonly conducted in clinical settings. Recognizing that individuals with TBI often have difficulty not at the word or sentence level, but at the discourse level, discourse is often the target of these varied assessments. These can be monologic or dialogic, and involve scales or checklists of verbal and nonverbal behaviors to guide the examiner (Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005). In their review of 12 studies of conversational discourse analysis evaluations in individuals with TBI, Coelho, Ylvisaker and Turkstra found that “overall, measures of content and topic management appeared most useful for identifying conversational impairments,” and that “measures of conversational discourse appear better able to discriminate TBI and non-brain-injured groups than measures of monologic discourse” (2005, 231). That said, they also noted that it was difficult to determine how ecologically valid these assessments were, outside of the clinical settings in which the data were gathered.

50 While further discussion of standardized evaluation of TBI is beyond the scope of the discussion in this chapter, for more detailed information see Turkstra, Coelho, and Ylvisaker (2005) as well as the “Practice guidelines for standardized assessment for persons with traumatic brain injury” (Turkstra, Coelho, Ylvisaker, et al., 2005) directed to a professional clinical audience.
Thus, the inherent paradox of attempting to evaluate an elicited sample of natural, everyday language remains not only a research problem but a clinical challenge as well. In this chapter, I aim to build upon the previous two chapters by using the same procedure to investigate the two observations made by Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra (2005) and mentioned above: first, the conclusion that analysis of topic, as it emerges in conversation (i.e., non-monologic discourse) is a fruitful way to understand discourse-pragmatic impairment,51 and second, the concern that the clinical environment of the elicitation does not result in language samples that are ecologically valid. I draw upon a corpus of data that was collected in the context of an assessment, but in which the elicitor followed a protocol that had the goal of mitigating the clinical context of elicitation. I attempt to show, through analysis of the emergence of topic, how the shape of the talk is influenced by, and is constitutive of, the activity type of a clinical discourse elicitation.

The chapter begins with additional broad and nontechnical information on TBI and common resultant communication and cognitive disorders, and includes a description of the clinical research data on which the topic analyses are based. Then, as in the previous chapters, the analyses are organized by sections of the elicitation activity type: first, the setting up of the elicitation, then the opening turns, then the conversation, and finally, the closing. In each section, I refer back to the components of topic outlined in Chapter 3: concepts, point, and control, and I consider the role of the activity type, which I call clinical protocol and explain in detail in the description of the data below. I conclude with a discussion focusing on the emergence of topic and the clinical protocol activity type.

51 To address the conclusion of these researchers fully, I would argue that topic analysis entails consideration of content.
6.2 BACKGROUND

In this section, I provide information about traumatic brain injury and a description of the corpus of conversations that I examined for the analyses in this chapter.

6.2.1 TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

Traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to the brain that occurs as a result of some external force (as opposed to hemorrhages or blood clots that cause strokes, or neurodegenerative diseases that cause dementia); closed head injury refers to TBIs that result from a blow to the head that causes the brain to hit the skull very hard, while open head injury refers to TBIs that are caused by penetration of the skull by some foreign object such as a bullet (Gillis, McHenry, and Pierce 1996). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1.7 million cases of TBI occur each year in the United States, and in fact, the figure could be higher because many people who have suffered head trauma do not seek treatment (2010). TBI can be mild, moderate, or severe, and the effects of TBI vary due to the heterogeneous, multi-focal nature of the injuries. Cognitive effects differ greatly from person to person, but generally include difficulties with memory, attention, and executive functions (such as planning, control, etc.), as well as confusion, confabulatory language, and inappropriate social behavior (McDonald, Togher, and Code 1999). Language impairments have been observed across many individuals and these impairments are often not related to phonology, semantics, or syntax; while individuals with TBI can sometimes be aphasic as a result of their injuries, often this is not the case. Rather, impairments are observed in the various competencies considered to be in the realm of pragmatics. Individuals with TBI have been reported to be overly literal in their interpretation of utterances, thus not being able to understand irony or indirect requests; have difficulty

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52 Mild traumatic brain injuries are also called concussions, though some therapists favor the term mild traumatic brain injury because it tends to be viewed as a more serious condition (DeMatteo et al. 2010).
organizing extended discourse; jumping from topic to topic; not maintaining conversational cohesion; and perseverating on topics not currently under discussion (Martin and McDonald 2003).

6.2.2 THE DATA

The approach to elicitation that I discuss in this dissertation, which is most controlled and fits best within the typical clinical paradigm, is the elicitation of language through clinical protocol. As was the case in the other elicitations in the previous chapters, the goal is to have an ordinary conversation; however, this explicit agenda is clear (or made clear) to both the elicitor and elicitee. The specific clinical protocol used for data collection, called the mediated discourse elicitation protocol (Hengst and Duff 2007) draws upon the idea of mediated discourse analysis, which focuses on the actions, cultures, etc. that contextualize talk (Scollon 2001). The main goal of the protocol is to elicit various genres of discourse – conversation, narrative, descriptive discourse, and procedural discourse, in keeping with the standard types that are examined in clinical contexts – in a clinical setting while maintaining interactional features of the genre (rather than defaulting to the interactional features of an interaction between clinician and client). In keeping with Drew and Heritage’s (1992, 25) point that a physical setting or a situation is not determinative of a particular institutional interaction, the idea is that the participants can co-construct an everyday conversation through context-shaping strategies like turn-taking, lexical choice, etc. (Heritage and Clayman 2010). In order to have an everyday conversation – and, subsequently, other discourse genres – and still manage the elicitation, the clinician is instructed to shift from the “clinician-directed frame,” in which the explicit management of the elicitation is handled, to the “reciprocal frame,” in which the samples of discourse are generated (Hengst and Duff 2007). One potential difficulty, though, is a point by Gumperz (1982) mentioned earlier that
is particularly relevant here; the suggestion that how interactants orient to an interaction and process it, contributing accordingly, is not easily determined by the label of the activity type, whatever it may be. In other words, a reciprocal frame might indeed be reciprocal, or it might not, but naming it as such will not guarantee that it will be so.

The data that I explored for this type of elicitation come from a corpus that represents the product of a study of individuals with chronic TBI (see Turkstra et al. 2012). The study aimed to compare the assessment of discourse in an in-person setting (i.e., face to face) and a telehealth setting (i.e., clinical interaction at a distance, facilitated by electronic media). Telehealth approaches have become more feasible, and thus more popular, in recent years; in the field of speech-language pathology in particular, the provision of assessment and therapy in this way provides the opportunity for more people to receive treatment. However, it is important that telehealth services be strictly comparable to in-person care (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association 2005). Thus, the study by Turkstra et al. (2012) employs the mediated discourse elicitation protocol (Hengst and Duff 2007) to investigate whether elicitees talk as much in telehealth vs. in-person encounters, whether they are demonstrably more or less fluent, and whether the elicitor talked more or less during each elicitation. In brief, the researchers found no significant difference across these measures, and clearly demonstrated that telehealth is a viable method of discourse assessment for adults with TBI.

The discourse data that led to these results followed the mediated discourse elicitation protocol framework, and the protocol of tasks established for AphasiaBank (MacWhinney et al. 2011); the lead author of this study (Turkstra) was one of the team of researchers responsible for
AphasiaBank and the data collection protocol.\textsuperscript{53} The elicitees in the study (Turkstra et al., 2012) ranged in age from 21 to 69; they had all suffered moderate or severe TBIs at least 1.4 years prior to participation, meaning that they were in the chronic stage of the condition; the study included 20 adults, and 11 of these elicitations were made available through TBIBank,\textsuperscript{54} which is a subsection of the TalkBank corpus (MacWhinney 2007). The set of elicitation goals for the study included roughly ten minutes of extemporaneous conversation, then narrative discourse, picture description, and procedural discourse, and the data include narrowly transcribed transcripts and audio and video recordings. I sampled ten interactions from this corpus, in which each elicitation session was recorded in two parts; I focused on the ten-minute extemporaneous conversation segments from all participants, which resulted in approximately three hours of conversation.

6.3 ANALYSIS

I conducted my analysis of these data by watching and listening to each ten-minute elicitation multiple times. As in the chapters examining participant-managed collection and unstructured interviewing, I was most aware of noting disorientations to topic, based on concepts, points, and control; I marked these instances according to these components. However, I was also very cognizant of the activity type as well because in these data, as I hope will become apparent in this section, the hallmarks of the clinical protocol activity type are much more explicitly entered into the interaction than they were in the other activity types. In fact, as described above, this explicit signaling is an essential component of the clinical protocol, per\textsuperscript{53} AphasiaBank is the subarea of TalkBank that included the Oelschlaeger corpus discussed in Chapter 4; however, the protocol was developed after Oelschlaeger and her colleagues collected their data. Other earlier contributions to AphasiaBank also follow their own protocols.

\textsuperscript{54} At the time of writing, the homepage for TBIBank can be found at: http://talkbank.org/TBIBank/ (accessed March 10, 2013). The corpus is named Marshfield.
In the clinician-directed frame, in which pre- and post-task instructions were given, “the clinician was the expert-in-charge managing clinical business, providing task instructions and prompts, and moving the session forward” (2007, 40). This was done to motivate the tasks ahead and make expectations clear to the elicitee; it was enacted in this explicit fashion to avoid a blurring of the intended boundary between the institutional talk and the everyday talk. In other words, it was the goal for the clinical-directed frame to be so obvious that it would be clear when that frame was exited and the “everyday” frame was entered. In a sense, this procedure is intended to exploit the boundaries that interactants often intuit naturally; for example, the line between greetings and pleasantries and the “turn to business” in types of institutional interactions (see Heritage and Clayman 2010, 17).

As I had stated in the previous chapter, I had assumed that the unstructured interviewing activity type would engender increased distance between the goal of eliciting everyday conversation and the practice of eliciting language that is, in fact, an elicitation. In contrast to participant-managed collection, unstructured interviewing did indeed have clearer stages of the activity type, with a particularly clear break between the setting up of the elicitation and the opening turns by the elicitor. I again assume, in this chapter on clinical protocol, that the stages will be more formalized and delineated than either other clinical discourse elicitation activity type discussed thus far. Therefore, I also compared phases of the activity type across elicitations in an effort to understand the degree of standardization that shaped the interactions. The overall structure of the activity type is an important feature of institutional talk (Heritage and Clayman 2010; Drew and Heritage 1992), and in this chapter, this feature is very clearly marked for examination.
This chapter, the third of three chapters examining clinical discourse elicitation conducted with individuals with three different types of acquired cognitive communication disorders, represents the end of a progression through increasingly constrained activity types, which I aim to make clear in this following analysis. As in the previous two chapters, I begin with the setting up of the elicitation, followed by the opening turns that come after the setting up, then the conversation, and finally the closing of the elicitation. In this analysis, I focus largely on the progression of a single elicitation across each stage, adding other examples and explanation to supplement. We will see, I believe more explicitly than in other clinical discourse elicitation activity types, how topic emerges as a product of the clinical protocol activity type.

6.3.1 SETTING UP THE ELICITATION

The mediated discourse elicitation protocol (Hengst and Duff 2007) used to gather the data in this corpus (Turkstra et al. 2012) requires explicit clinical management of the emerging discourse in each elicitee’s session. Specifically, the elicitor is “expected to clearly display, through verbal and nonverbal means, when she is exercising her control of the session and fulfilling her role of communication expert” (Hengst and Duff 2007, 43). The reasoning is to differentiate the clinical management from the main activities of the session, and to provide motivation for each task. For example, in their pilot session of this protocol, Hengst and Duff (2007) found that the elicitee (a woman with profound amnesia) often commented during the conversation task that she was not confident that she remembered all the details of the story she was engaged in recounting; the elicitor gently reminded her that her memory was not being tested, rather, they were simply having a conversation. Instances such as this one prompted the authors of the protocol to make each phase of the elicitation explicit and manage the elicitee’s expectations. However, this also creates a situation in which the elicitation goal of everyday
conversation is embedded in a larger “evaluation” activity type. Their intention is that the elicitor will manage these two frames through footing shifts (Goffman 1981), as described above.

In keeping with the goal of making expectations explicit, the everyday conversation component of the mediated discourse elicitation protocol begins with an introduction such as the excerpt below. In this excerpt, a young woman with a traumatic brain injury (Rose, the elicitee) is listening to the research speech-language pathologist (Lily, the elicitor) describe the task at hand. Presumably, administrative details such as greetings and explanation of the consent forms were handled off camera, as the recording begins with this exposition. I will move through this introduction in some detail, and given that this constitutes the clinical management portion of the start of the elicitation, I focus largely on the activity type.

Excerpt 6.1

1 Lily: Okay so the first part is that I want to see how you converse with other people, and how they converse with you.
2 So I’m just looking to see your conversational abilities.
3 And we can talk about any topics that we want.
4 And I’d like as much as possible for this to be similar to the kinds of conversations you have in your everyday life.
5 Rose: ((nods))
6 Lily: Okay?
7 Rose: Mhm.

In the setting up of the elicitation, Lily reinforces the “evaluation” or “elicitation” activity type through a number of conscious or subconscious strategies. She begins with Okay so the first part is…, in which the complement to part is elided; they are beginning the first part of the battery of elicitations. Though this information is not explicitly entered into the interaction, its presence in the meaning of part highlights the fact that the two interactants are commencing a formal activity, with delineated beginnings and endings. It is this characteristic of the activity type, and its mention in the introduction, that sets Lily’s high level of control from the outset; if she asserts
that the activity will be of a circumscribed time unknown to Rose, then she has complete control of the boundaries of the interaction. While this might not imply that Lily has control over the emergence of the topics within the elicitation, the fact that she has this control over the start and finish of the interaction in the first place makes it necessary that she would have some control over the intervening talk.

Continuing on, Lily introduces the purpose of the activity, to see how you converse with other people and how they converse with you. The phrasing of this is notable not only as it is an explicit metadiscursive comment on the subsequent talk, but for the terms referring to the actors involved. Lily wants to see how Rose converses with other people and how they (i.e., other people) converse with Rose. However, Lily will achieve this only by examining a conversation that the two of them have together; so in effect, Lily is designating herself a representative of all other people, an interactive blank slate who can stand in for any person with whom Rose might interact, including family, friends, teachers, service providers, doctors, etc. When Lily says that she wants to see what Rose’s conversational abilities are like, she implies that her own conversational abilities (to the extent that she has or lacks these skills) are not relevant or influential.

Next, Lily says that we can talk about any topics that we want, which further reinforces the “evaluation” activity type in two ways. First, the assertion that any topics are allowed (we can talk about…) gives rise to the implicature that this might be contrary to expectations; in other words, in an activity like this one, one might think that certain topics were prescribed. Second, in this case the modal can has a deontic meaning, which is to say that Lily and Rose are allowed to talk about any topics that they want. Lily and Rose are linked together, in inclusive we, and as a
unit are directed by some unseen, unmentioned institutional entity that makes the rules they are following.

Finally, Lily notes that she wants the conversation they are about to have to be similar to the kinds of conversations you have in your everyday life, which is a difficult goal to realize. Lily has now explicitly said that their conversation is marked, and somehow different than Rose’s everyday conversation, by expressing her wish that this be similar. Notice also that Lily maintains the idea that whether or not their conversation is similar to Lily’s (rather than Rose’s) everyday conversations is immaterial. After Rose verbally assents to begin (nodding, following by okay elicited by Lily), Lily initiates a topic.

In the majority of Lily’s introductions to the everyday conversation elicitation, the main elements of the introduction remain largely the same in terms of the concepts evoked as well as the sequence of turns. Rather that provide further variations on this introduction, I want to briefly discuss an example of an introduction that did not follow the typical pattern (i.e., introduction, request for assent, provision of assent).

Excerpt 6.2

1 Lily: The first thing we need to do is I just wanna see
2 how you are conversing with people and how they converse with you.
3 Matt: Okay.
4 Lily: We can talk about any topics we want,
5 and I’d like as much as possible for this to be similar to
6 conversations that you have in your daily life.
7 Matt: Alright,
8 → may I ask you your name again so I can at least do it four more times.
9 Lily: Sure.
10 Matt: I can refer to you as Doctor Blahblahblahblah.
11 What would you like me to refer to you as?
12 Lily: You can call me Lily.
13 Matt: Lily?
14 Lily: Mhm.
15 Matt: Okay.
16 Thanks Lily.
17 Lily: And you go by Matt?
18 Matt: Yeah, yup.
19 Lily: Okay.
Here, Matt (the elicitee) assents twice (okay, alright) before he is officially asked by Lily. After he does so, he opens with a question (May I ask you your name again so I can at least do it four more times... What would you like me to refer to you as?), which performs a number of actions. By asking Lily’s name, he implies that this vocative, a name for the concept of Lily/elicitor might be useful to him in the upcoming interaction; he might have the occasion to use her name to address her, implying his perception of the point of the interaction, which might indeed be to have a more symmetrical conversation. In terms of control, Matt shows self-deprecation when he notes that he might have to ask Lily’s name repeatedly (possibly due to his cognitive abilities subsequent to his TBI), but he also shows a great deal of control of the interaction by even asking the question before Lily has finished the introduction or asked a question herself. As Atkinson and Drew (1979) note, the interactant assumed to have the higher institutional status typically enacts the role of questioner; relatedly, Sacks (1995) pointed out that the interactant asking the questions has control of the interaction. On the other hand, Matt shows that while there might be the possibility of a symmetrical interaction, his suggestion that he address her as doctor implies that he is quite aware of the actors and their roles and status in this conversation.

Lily, for her part, requests that Matt address her by her first name, in keeping with the idea that they have a conversation between peers. In fact, she maintains this point adeptly by asking Matt to confirm his preferred term of address (And you go by Matt?); Lily certainly knows Matt’s name, and based on all of the other introductions she anticipates calling the elicitees by their first names, so she clearly does not need to have Matt share this knowledge with her. Her question functions as a canny way to contextualize Matt’s question in the interaction and put the two of them on equal footing for their upcoming conversation.
These introductions to the elicitation (i.e., the everyday conversation) fulfill the requirements of the mediated discourse elicitation protocol in that the clinician takes control, as the expert in the situation, and makes the point of the upcoming action clear to the elicitee. However, I hope to have demonstrated that more than provide guidance to the elicitee, the introductions directly contradict the context or frame – the activity type of everyday conversation – they intend to call up. Heritage and Clayman (2010, 21) discuss two classic metaphors for context: (1) the bucket theory of context, in which interaction emerges in accordance with a predetermined context; and (2) the Yellow Brick Road idea of context, in which context is created and renewed in interaction, with each successive move. The introduction to the elicitation – the clinician-directed frame – seems to subscribe to the bucket theory, in that the context is set up in advance and the talk will subsequently conform to it. The goal is for the elicitor to alert the elicitee to the upcoming everyday conversation, so that an everyday conversation will occur; but the upcoming sections will examine whether or not this occurs as intended.

6.3.2 OPENING TURNS

After the elicitation is set up, Lily officially begins the elicitation, the conversation itself. Because the introduction was intended to establish Lily as the expert managing the proceedings, her control is maintained as the everyday conversation is begun. Thus, she begins with either a question or an imperative; both of these solicit information of some sort from the elicitee (see Labov and Fanshel 1977), and in this way, the opening turns are quite similar to those in the unstructured interview activity type. In this next excerpt, which is a direct continuation from the introduction above (Excerpt 6.1), I discuss the opening turns of the conversation and how topic emerges in them.
Excerpt 6.3

8   Lily:  Okay?
9   Rose:  Mhm.
10  Lily:  Why don’t you start by telling me a little bit about yourself and what you’ve been up to today.
11  Rose:  Alright, um my name’s Rose.
12  Um I- I’m an undergrad, graduating in- in the spring.
13  Four years later, but better late than never.
14  Lily:  Yeah.

Similar to the topic initiations used in the unstructured interview elicitations, Lily initiates a topic in a way that functions as a directive; while the syntax is similar to that of a suggestion (why don’t, similar to how about or let’s), Rose’s agreement to participate in the previous turn means that she has essentially agreed to Lily’s subsequent directions. The fact that these concepts are elicited through a directive and not a question (such as What have you been up to today?) reinforces that Lily is in control of a controlled activity. Rose’s response to this directive highlights how she has attuned to the activity.

The concepts that Rose introduces first illustrate her orientation to the topic and how it relates to the activity of evaluation. Um my name’s Rose is certainly a response to the request that she provide some information about herself, but this information is very obviously shared personal knowledge. As a participant in the study conducted by Lily, Rose has furnished consent forms and other information about her demographic characteristics and details about her brain injury. Stating her name as she does, asserting information as new when in fact it is known to both, orients to Lily’s introduction to the conversation by making this a performance of a conversation, an approximation of something natural or real. Beginning with her name, this introduction of a known concept highlights what Rose believes the point of the topic to be: that
she is producing language to be recorded, in her case speaking as a possibly-impaired brain injury survivor. This demonstrates how Lily’s question is a display question (e.g., Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), as we have seen in other elicitation contexts; Rose understands that Lily needs her to show, to provide, some language in response even if in terms of sharing knowledge, it is not particularly interesting. From there, Rose adds another bit of personal information that, while probably known by Lily, is less certainly shared (I’m an undergrad) and follows that with additional detail that might well be new (graduating in- in the spring) as well as contextualization of that fact (four years later). She is graduating later than one might have expected her to, due to her accident, but Lily agrees with her evaluation of better late than never.

A similar approach is taken in the following excerpt, the opening turns of Lily’s interaction with John, the elicitee.

Excerpt 6.4

1 Lily: Um (.) tell me a little bit about your family.
2 John: Okay I have- I’ve got uhh my wife,
3 and I’ve got a: forty (.) four (.) year old (..) daughter and a forty year old ga- daughter,
4 and a fifteen and a half year old grandson.
5 Lily: Okay.
6 And where do your daughters live?
7 John: They live here in Chicago.

After an acknowledgement from John, in which he complies with the demands of the evaluation activity type, Lily begins with an imperative. In contrast to the previous excerpt, in which she phrased her directive as a suggestion, here she issues a clearer command to which John must respond. While your family is likely to be a concept that John can talk about, Lily likely knows details about John’s family already, from recruiting him for the research, from medical records, etc. Thus, again the opening question is a display question, in which the elicitor has more

55 This mimics other institutional interactions, such as when a lawyer asks a witness to state his or her name in court, though the lawyer, judges, and jury already know it.
knowledge of the answer to the question than the question wording would suggest. John acknowledges the question, and he seems to be working within the activity type constraints by listing his family members, some of whom Lily might be assumed to know; for example, in contrast to *a daughter* and *a grandson*, John refers to *my wife*. The presupposition asserted by *my* might indicate that Lily knows about John’s wife or has spoken to her; though of course, this might not be the case and the referring expression would still be felicitous. Either way, John is reinforcing the “evaluation” activity type with his answer. Lily then replies with a third turn of *okay* here before she poses a question that is cohesive with John’s response; the prefacing of the question with *and*, as Heritage and Sorjonen (1994) point out, highlights some larger agenda to the interaction, a routinization of question asking that contrasts with follow-up questions that are contingent upon the answerer’s response. Thus, the question-answer pattern that develops gives Lily much of the control of the topic emergence. 56

To further emphasize the elicitor’s opening turn as an instance of a display question, the sense in these interactions that Lily’s first non-introduction topic opener is a display question is so pervasive that it supersedes even genuine interest on the part of the elicitor. In this next excerpt, Lily notices the bandage on Craig’s (the elicitee’s) hand; rather than draw upon a reservoir of appropriate topics, she uses this local production resource to initiate a topic following her introduction.

56 We can take a moment to contrast Lily’s opening turn, *Tell me about your family*, with a similar opening turn we saw in an unstructured interview in Chapter 5: *Tell me about Anna*. They are both display questions, in that the elicitors likely have knowledge of the concepts they are invoking (*your family* and *Anna*). But John was not disoriented by the request for information in the same way that Peter, the elicitee who was asked about Anna, seemed to be. This could be related to the elicitees themselves, and their willingness or ability to respond, but it could also be related to the significant differences in the referring terms. In asking about John’s family, Lily presupposes that John has a family; this is a reasonable presupposition to make, as everyone must have a family or a story about not having one. Otherwise, however, it is unclear exactly what Lily already knows about them, or at least it is not made explicit. In contrast, the referring term *Anna* encodes personal knowledge; the elicitor clearly knows that this particular person exists and has some relationship with the elicitee. So it would follow that *Tell me about Anna* is more likely to be disorienting.
Craig begins to tell his story of what happened to his hand (*I was down-* ) but then pauses and reconsiders how he wants to tell it. He then adds that his story is *not overlong*, insinuating that a long story would be dispreferred, either by Lily, or in this activity type. He continues with *I hope I don’t use too much of your time*, which calls attention to the fact that there is a finite amount of time that the two of them have to converse, and that time belongs to, or is controlled by, Lily. In effect, Craig acknowledges that Lily does not need to know what happened; rather, she wants him to say something about it.

The opening turns of these elicitations, following the introductions, are perhaps inevitably fraught; it is at these moments that the clinician is supposed to leave behind the clinical management of the interaction and initiate the everyday conversation portion of the elicitation. In many of the elicitations, the clinical management aspect remains active, as the elicitor commands the elicitee to begin talking. However, even when she is arguably at her most casual and genuinely interested, as in the excerpt of her interaction with Craig above, the elicitee persists in acknowledging aspects of the interaction that are more formal and constrained.

So far, very early in the elicitation, we can observe an orientation to the activity type of evaluation or elicitation much more clearly than an orientation to everyday talk. It might be the case that over the course of the elicitation, the interactants’ talk becomes less constrained by the more formal activity type; this is what we will investigate in the following section.
6.3.3 THE CONVERSATION

Many of the features of the opening turns, such as directives issued by Lily or display questions about concepts likely known to both interactants, reappear throughout the conversations. In this excerpt, Lily asks a question about family (*So what’s your family like? Are you a- do you have brothers and sisters?*) which leads to the following.

Excerpt 6.6

1   Violet: And my brother goes to graduate school here at Chicago,  
2           and he does computer eng- computer science engineer.  
3   My sister goes to Nebraska State for graduate school,  
4           and she’s a statistics major.  
5   And I’m like- I’m an undergrad here at Chicago,  
6           but I’m not good at math or anything.  
7   I didn’t get that but-  
8   Lily: Well y’know everybody’s different.  
9   Violet: Yeah.  
10  Um parents are still together and their in their forties,  
11     so I guess that’s a good family of five.  
12   I don’t know.  
13   We’re Catholic.  
14   I don’t know what else there is to tell.  
15   Lily: Do you have any pets waiting for you at home?  
16   Violet: Um yeah.

Responding to Lily’s question, Violet listed her siblings and their ages, and at the start of the excerpt above she describes her brother and then her sister. Because they both have mathematics-oriented fields of study, Violet emphasizes that out of the three siblings, she is the only one for whom math is not a strength. She elaborates *I didn’t get that but-* and Lily responds by saying that *Well y’know everybody’s different*, which is simultaneously comforting and reassuring but also an aphorism that closes the emerging topic of math ability. So rather than continue with the topic that she had been constructing in her previous turn, indicated by *but*, Violet acknowledges Lily’s control and returns to addressing Lily’s question about what her family is like. Having sufficiently described her siblings, Violet mentions her parents (lines 10-11); and then she seems
to begin to run out of concepts to support further construction of the topic. She says *I don’t know* and adds another detail about her family that seems to be apropos of nothing, *we’re Catholic*, and then more explicitly states that *I don’t know what else there is to tell*. At this point, Lily asks a question about other family members: the pets. This conversation unfolds in a way similar to what was observed in unstructured interviewing, in that the elicitees cast about for ways to satisfy the elicitor in an absence of any identifiable point to the talk other than to speak. We also see how Lily’s control of the interaction affects the emergence of a possible topic, and compare Violet’s response to that which might be provided to an experimental prompt. Similar to the experimental prompt described by Bayles (1982, cited in Hamilton 1994), *tell me everything you can about this*, in which *this* referred to a button, Violet can only say so much about her family without knowing why Lily wants to know this information, or what they may have in common. Granted, Violet’s family is likely much more salient and a richer concept to discuss than Bayles’ button, but even so, Violet’s difficulty coming up with additional things to say about them is not unusual.

I would like to continue here again with Lily and Rose. This is the excerpt with which I opened Chapter 1, and I discuss it again here, now that the introduction to the task and the opening turns have been reviewed. In this section, I will discuss topic more explicitly, as again this is presumably the most effective portion of the conversation to examine, whatever one’s diagnostic, evaluative, or research goal may be.

**Excerpt 6.7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rose:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Lily:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Um I- I’m an undergrad, graduating in- in the spring.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Four years later, but better late than never.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>What’s your degree gonna be in?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Um- communicative disorders.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lily asks a question at this point (*What’s your degree gonna be in?*), related to what Rose had said so far; focusing on the type of degree Rose will earn, Lily orients to the concept of education, introduced by Rose (putting aside, for now, Rose’s graduation date or her delay in finishing). In response to *What’s your degree gonna be in?* Rose answers *communicative disorders*. Of particular note in Lily’s turn is the fact that Rose has just disclosed that she is a student in Lily’s own field; known to both of them is the fact that Lily is a speech-language pathologist. Lily’s third turn response (Mehan 1979) in line (18) contains an acknowledgement of receipt of this information (*oh*) and an evaluation of the response (*okay*), inviting Rose to continue. In fact, this is perhaps an interesting combination of what Heritage and Clayman (2010, 28) describe as “third-turn *oh*” and “third-turn evaluation” sequences in response to the answering of a question. They note that the differences between these sequences are clear: *oh* responses generally indicate that a question was “real,” indicating a gap in the questioner’s knowledge; evaluation responses indicate that the questioner likely already knew the answer, which is why such sequences serve to construct a pedagogic context of interaction. Lily, in a single turn, seems to do both. Rose’s sharing of this personal knowledge, which could have tapped into social knowledge about the profession and its challenges, elicits no elaboration or follow up from Lily. Somewhat ironically, Lily’s minimal response likely derives from her clinical training (e.g., providing space for the client or patient to talk). See Hengst and Duff (2007) for a discussion of this issue.
Rose continues to provide more information on this topic, in a sequence of hyperexplanation (Erickson and Shultz 1982) in which she makes the abstract more concrete, describing the specific work she does in the field of communication disorders, and naming the academic center (Dumman) where she conducts this work (lines 20-23). This turn is designed to appeal to Lily’s knowledge, as someone knowledgeable about speech pathology and the university where they currently are conducting the elicitation (and where Rose studies). Rose’s passion is the brain, and Lily works on traumatic brain injury (in contrast to stuttering, swallowing disorders, etc.); Rose works in Dumman, which she indicates through her use of the proper name without a description that she believes is accessible to Lily (Ariel 1990); Rose describes the type of work she does, starting with a technical term (trace the amygdala) and then, perhaps after receiving no response from Lily, describes it (the emotional part of the brain, like the fear center). At this point, Lily backchannels minimally, forfeiting her turn and inviting Rose to continue (mhm). Relevant here is the fact that even though Rose had begun by acknowledging the point of the activity type (stating her name, etc.), with the detail that she provides about her study of communication disorders she seems to be constructing an additional point of the topic, in particular, one of shared appreciation and rapport. The idea is that surely, they would have something in common to discuss on this topic; however, Lily does not contribute or acknowledge it, as she encourages Rose to keep talking. Lily seems to be communicating that the point of the talk is not to arrive at a sort of meeting of the minds, but rather, the point is for Rose to talk about anything, regardless of what Lily may think, and with as little interference from Lily as possible.

While it certainly occurs in everyday conversation, that a point is not jointly appreciated, it seems marked. In this case, the markedness stems from the activity type and Lily’s desire to adhere to its implied rules. Lily is likely maintaining a clinical stance, similar to the experience
of the speech-language pathologist (the second author, Duff) in Hengst and Duff’s (2007) development of the mediated discourse elicitation protocol. A hallmark of maintaining a clinical stance is giving the elicitee the interactional space to speak and being unobtrusive; but in this interaction between Lily and Rose, this behavior was obtrusive in a way, because it effected the development of the topic that was emerging. Of course, the clinical stance also conflicts with the activity type of everyday conversation in which they are supposed to be engaged.

Rose’s next turn, then, (um today I just had one class, um I finished up with my yoga *class*) is an example of “casting about” for new contributions or new topics, related to the activated class of concepts in focus (Chafe 1987; 1994). She has not been able to elicit any extensive feedback from Lily, relating to a concept that should be known, and of interest, to them both; so Rose leaves behind talk of the future (her eventual degree) and the habitual present (her work on the brain) and returns to the second part of Lily’s original directive, that she talk about what she has been doing on that day (*Why don’t you start by telling me a little bit about yourself and what you’ve been up to today*).

Continuing on, Rose talks about finishing her fall semester of her senior year, and Lily takes a turn that (in retrospect) results in a multi-turn disorientation.

Excerpt 6.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lily:</th>
<th>Rose:</th>
<th>Lily:</th>
<th>Rose:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Are you- so you’re at the end of your graduate work-</td>
<td>I wish graduate.</td>
<td>So you’ll start up again with that?</td>
<td>In the spring or [after this year?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>I mean your undergraduate work um-</td>
<td>(..)</td>
<td>[Umm ]</td>
<td>Start up with my [undergrad?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your grad-] your grad work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Your grad-] your grad work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Um I- I- have required courses to take in the spring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Okay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lily’s question begins with a yes/no question that she upgrades to a statement to be confirmed, indicating her confidence that Rose is indeed at the end of her graduate work; but Lily realizes her mistake and immediately repairs *graduate work* to *undergraduate work*. While this potential misunderstanding was fixed, the subsequent talk leads to a disorientation that I will outline is greater detail below. Rose replies, *I wish graduate*, which moves the conversation into the counterfactual world and simultaneously answers Lily’s question.

Again, as in the analysis in Chapter 3, laying out this section of text in terms of what concepts are presented as part of the real world and the counterfactual world of Rose’s wish, as well as concepts that could be ambiguous in this respect, we can isolate an instance of trouble that influenced the miscommunication.

Figure 6.1. Possible source(s) of trouble

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REAL WORLD</th>
<th>ERROR</th>
<th>AMBIGUOUS</th>
<th>COUNTERFACTUAL WORLD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[0] Are you so you’re at the end of [0a]</td>
<td>[0a] your graduate work-</td>
<td>[2] I wish graduate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[1] I mean</td>
<td>[1a] your undergraduate work um-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Here Lily introduces *graduate work*, a concept that is neither part of the real world (because it is not true), nor the counterfactual; it is simply an error. Rose had explicitly identified herself as an undergraduate student earlier in the conversation, and said that she planned to graduate in the following spring. Lily immediately corrects this concept, replacing it with a recently-mentioned concept known to be part of the real world that she and Rose are able to access: *undergraduate work*. Rose replies, *I wish graduate*, which moves the conversation, including the repaired concept of *graduate work*, into the counterfactual world. It simultaneously answers Lily’s question; since finishing her graduate work is something that Rose wishes were true, but is not,
her reply to Lily’s question also carries the meaning of “yes, I’m at the end of my undergraduate work.” Lily’s next question, So you’ll start up again with that? contains the source of the disorientation; her question is followed by a pause, without an immediate reply from Rose. The main issue is with what concept that refers to deictically. The two possibilities are the counterfactual introduced by Rose, graduate, which is the closest antecedent, or the real world concept that the speaker, Lily, last mentioned. It could also refer more obliquely to the pragmatic meaning, the implicature that potentially arose from Rose’s answer.

The clause leading up to that does not offer much assistance in an attempt to resolve the referent. Lily phrased this as So you’ll start up again with that, which is thoroughly ambiguous. Start could refer to the beginning of the next semester, meaning the final semester of Rose’s undergraduate career, or the beginning of the next stage of Rose’s academic plans (it is likely that if Rose intends to pursue communication disorders, she would eventually go on to graduate school). Similarly, again could mean starting the final semester (in that each semester is a new beginning) or it could mean starting an academic program (as Rose already did once, by starting her undergraduate years). Finally, if that had been contained within the phrasal verb start up (as in, start that up again) then again would necessarily have scope over that and result in a clearer meaning of start up again with undergraduate work. But this is not the case; again only refers to starting “something.” So Lily, recognizing that Rose is not answering, attempts to repair.

Excerpt 6.9 (of Excerpt 6.8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lily: In the spring or [after this year?]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rose: [ummm]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Start up with my [undergrad?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>[Your grad-] your grad work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Lily: Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Rose: Um I-I have required courses to take in the spring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But Lily specifies not the meaning of that, but the timeframe of start up again (In the spring or after this year?). Rose indicates, though, that in fact the referent of that was the concept that was ambiguous to her, by repeating the syntax that Lily originally used (start up [again] with) and inserting my undergrad to eliminate the ambiguity in the form of a contingent query (Garvey 1979). But Lily meant Rose’s graduate work, contrary to what Rose guessed. So Rose replies that she has required courses to take in the spring, meaning undergraduate courses, because she will be graduating at the end of the spring semester. Lily replies, simply, okay.

At this point I want to step back and look at this interaction, so far, as a whole. In terms of concepts, we have seen that Lily introduces concepts through questions posed to Rose, and Rose’s introductions of concepts are tied to Lily’s questions. We see interactional evidence for the idea that both interactants orient to the interactional point as being for Rose, the “subject” with a brain injury, to talk, rather than for Rose and Lily to share knowledge with any other point in mind. Regarding control in topic emergence, we can see at the opening of the interaction that Lily is clearly in charge, laying out instructions, issuing directives, and offering little personal input or reaction of her own. We can also see this clearly in how the disorientation plays out between the two of them. While no one is “at fault” for the disorientation, it seems that the ambiguity of that and its supporting language can be reasonably designated as the spark of the misunderstanding. Recalling our discussion of concepts, that necessarily was acting as a discourse deictic (not referring to any local physical production resource) and did not unambiguously point to an introduced concept; it could have referred to undergraduate or graduate. And there are many possible reasons why Rose might have thought Lily meant undergraduate. But overall, the responsibility to understand seemed, in this case, to lie with Rose. Lily did not voluntarily repair the ambiguous that, possibly because she did not sense that
it was ambiguous, or partly because the activity does not readily suppose that Lily would say something unclear.

Now I would like to move on to a bit later in the conversation, skipping a section of talk in which Rose states that she is going on a trip to London during the winter intersession between the fall and spring semesters. Lily asks her how long she will be there, and Rose answers only the winter interterm, so um three weeks. After a few additional questions (Lily) and answers (Rose), the following miscommunication occurs.

Excerpt 6.10

74 Lily: How long of a trip is that gonna be?
75 The-
76 Rose: Three weeks.
77 Lily: No, the actual travel time?
78 Rose: Um three weeks with the-
79 Lily: The plane, [the flight, how] long will that take?
80 Rose: [The flight is- ]
81 um it just- I leave on the twenty-sixth and I get there on the twenty-seventh.
82 Lily: Okay.
83 Rose: Um so I don’t know HH
84 Lily: That’s great.
85 What a great experience to have before y’know you get to work,
86 and- and life starts to move on.
87 So it’s really wonderful when people get to do that,
88 When they’re still kind of young and adventurous.
89 Rose: Mhm.
90 Lily: It’s great.
91 What do you have planned for the-
92 Rose: Sorry time out.
93 That’s a good question how long’s that gonna take
94 cause I’ve noticed frequently that the um time periods are just .
95 Um- time lengths are very difficult for me.
96 Lily: Okay.
97 Is that an after-effect of your injury?
98 Rose: Mhm, yeah.

Lily asks How long of a trip is that gonna be? and Rose responds three weeks, the same as she had reported earlier in response to Lily’s question, How long will you be there? Conceivably, Lily could have forgotten what Rose said, or forgot that she had asked. This information might not have been accessible (Ariel 1990) or in active consciousness (Chafe 1994). But Lily meant
something else and corrects her with *No, the actual travel time*. Rose interprets *travel* to mean the same as *trip*, and repeats her answer, indicating that perhaps Lily has misunderstood or misheard her. Lily clarifies further: *The plane, the flight, how long will that take?* including both *plane* and *flight* to indicate the concept that she means, fronting them and then asking how long it will be. Rose now understands, in fact she understood after the mention of *plane*, but she does not know the answer; only *I leave on the twenty-sixth and I get there on the twenty-seventh*. After providing that information, and after Lily receives it (*okay*), Rose says *so I don’t know* and laughs.

Lily continues their conversation with *That’s great*, presumably referring to the trip in general, rather than the fact that Rose does not know the length of the plane ride. This is Lily’s first move in closing the current topic of the trip to London, as she has, in essence, formulated the gist of the preceding talk (Heritage and Watson 1979). She continues with further evaluation of how wonderful an experience it will be for Rose, for a variety of reasons which she lists. She closes by repeating *It’s great*, and then initiates another topic through a question posed to Rose.

The closing of the previous topic and the initiation of a new one is, clearly, a display of control. At this point in the interaction, Lily and Rose have weathered two disorientations apparent in the interaction, in which it appears that Rose did not understand Lily as intended. In both cases there were aspects of the concepts under discussion – an ambiguous discourse deictic term (*that*) and two polysemous nouns (*trip* and *travel*) – that were not clear. But who is responsible? And who seems to survive these miscommunications in control of the interaction, and of the interactants’ face wants? It seems that because Lily is in control, asking questions that construct the topics, then Rose is largely responsible for the disorientations because she is in the position of having to understand and provide a response. And so Lily maintains control as the
expert in charge of the interaction. No blame is placed on either, and indeed, Lily tries to repair her contributions when Rose does not understand. But neither is it acknowledged that Lily’s assertions, upon examination, are ambiguous. Adding to this the fact that, while Lily’s questions are coherent, the interactional point of the encounter (to produce a sample of conversation) does not help to resolve these ambiguities by offering a clear interpersonal or social reason for asking the questions. The local or content point might be to gather more information about the topic at hand to show interest and involvement, and Lily’s questions are generally topically coherent, but her limited acknowledgement of Rose’s answers or own contributions indexes the sense that the interactional point is simply to produce ten minutes of talk.

After closing the topic of Rose’s trip to London, Lily initiates her next topic through a question that seems to be new (What do you have planned for the-). But Rose interrupts Lily mid definite description (the-) with a clear, unambiguous metadiscursive interruptor: Sorry time out. The interruption occurs not at a transition relevance place (see Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), but at an obvious midpoint. She acknowledges the interruption’s status as socially dispreferred (sorry) and declares a time out similar to a referee in football game would. She then refers back to the question of how long the flight to London would be – a topic which has already been closed by Lily – compliments her question, and explains the difficulty she had with answering it. She does not broach the fact that the question was at first ambiguous; she focuses on why she did not know the length of the flight. She describes that time periods are challenging for her to conceptualize, and Lily acknowledges this (Okay) and then asks if this difficulty is a result of Rose’s brain injury. They continue to talk about Rose’s cognitive skills after her injury until the end of the activity.
This segment of the interaction felt highly marked; first, due to Rose’s clear and multilayered interruption. She interrupted at a point in the question in which it was clear that she was doing so (i.e., not at a transition relevance place); she announced the interruption unambiguously and forcefully (*time out*), and she effectively halted whatever topic Lily had in mind. In this moment she displayed possibly more control than Lily had ever wielded, which contrasts to the amount of control she has as the participant following Lily’s lead. This tips the balance significantly. It cannot be completely clear why Rose did this, or if she had a particular motive for doing so, but it changed the remainder of the interaction. Even though Rose gained a great deal of control in her forceful apprehending of the topic, she fits this within the clinician/patient framework by expressing a difficulty she faces as someone with a brain injury, potentially threatening to her face. It highlights the possibility that she took responsibility for the disorientation, evoking the clinical setting and roles in order to suggest an explanation for the problem. Evoking her cognitive challenges might also have been a way to excuse whatever role she may have had in the disorientations; Beard (2004) discusses this strategy among individuals with dementia, and how it can be made use of to mitigate any sense of responsibility or blame. Lily follows her lead and makes this explicit (*Is that an after-effect of your injury?*) making her role as an expert a part of the subsequent interaction.

6.3.4 CLOSING OF THE ELICITATION

Recall that one of the important features of the mediated discourse elicitation protocol was that the elicitor be very explicit in bracketing the activities in the session; just as the conversation portion of the elicitation was initiated, it needed to be closed. This is particularly important because the complete elicitation contains four task types, and in order to move through them efficiently, there must be clear divisions between them and the new rules of the activity
type explained. In the following excerpt we can see how clearly the activity type influences the interaction, as observed through the closing.

Excerpt 6.11

1 Iris: There are ups and downs to everything so.
2 Lily: Yeah but people have to use some judgment,
3 and not be rude to the people that they’re face to face with.
4 Iris: Yeah I just don’t really like it when I’m- I don’t know trying to
5 talk to somebody and they’re like “oh hang on” every two seconds.
6 It gets a little annoying.
7 Lily: Yeah that’s really rude (.)
8 → We’re going to switch gears now.
9 Iris: Okay.

Lily and Iris, the elicitee, are talking about cell phones and the utility of, and their difficulties with, texting. Iris attempts to close the topic through an aphorism about the value of both (There are ups and downs to everything so) but Lily has not finished the topic and thus does not collaborate with Iris, making the point that people’s use of cell phones is often quite rude. Iris follows her lead and takes up the point (lines 4-6), and Lily agrees (Yeah that’s really rude). But in her next turn, Lily abruptly states that the two of them are going to close the conversation (We’re going to switch gears now), and stop talking about the current topic, in order to move to the next part of the battery.

While none of the other elicitations of everyday conversation closed with such an ironic flourish, they did close with Lily stating that the two interactants were going to end their conversation in order to move on to another task (usually through the phrase switch gears). This particular example, however, illustrates how powerful the activity type is. Granted, Lily and Iris are talking about conversation partners’ attention to electronic devices, however Iris does mention that her complaint with this situation is that she is trying to talk to someone who constantly breaks from the conversation in order to attend to something else. Lily is completely
focused on Iris, and so in no way is she being rude or unkind. But it is also important to note that Lily’s control of their actions is not viewed as boorish in this context. Iris readily accepts that when Lily states that they have finished conversing, then the time to talk is over.

6.4 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, it became clear that the elicitations of everyday conversation could not be evaluated without attention to the activity types framing the interaction; this is simply because, unlike in the previous chapters, the activity types were made explicit.

The goal of the activity type that I refer to as elicitation of language through clinical protocol is to provide a clinician or researcher (the elicitor) with full control of the elicitation, in keeping with his or her professional responsibilities and expertise, while also engendering a symmetrical interaction between elicitor and elicitree in order to obtain a sample of everyday conversation. I hope that I have demonstrated in the analysis of the setting up of the elicitation (by far, the most explicit setting up of the three elicitation contexts) how this introduction sets up a formal and highly constrained activity type. In the other clinical discourse elicitation activity types, the setting up featured an implicit signaling of, and reception of, the nature of the conversation that followed as an elicitation of language. In contrast, the clinical protocol activity type made explicit both the boundaries and constraints of the activity as well as the goal of it: to have an everyday conversation. Therefore, the question is whether or not it is possible for the elicitor and elicitree to switch frames, or change footing, from clinical management – a highly constrained, asymmetrical activity type – to everyday conversation – a minimally constrained, more symmetrical type – within the ten minutes allotted to the elicitation (Goffman 1981; see also Hengst and Duff 2007). What follows from the answer to this question is the second
question of what type of discourse results from the everyday conversation portion of the elicitation.

To address these questions I will focus on the data reviewed in this chapter. As was concluded by Turkstra et al. (2012), the mediated discourse elicitation protocol (Hengst and Duff 2007) was an effective method for eliciting speech from elicitees as measured quantitatively, in terms of the total number of words, number of independent clauses and associated clauses, measures of lexical diversity, revisions and repetitions (see Turkstra et al. 2012). However, the concerns are different if the goal of the elicitation of language through clinical protocol is to evaluate a genre of discourse, the activity type of everyday conversation. Let us begin with the transition from the clinical management portion of the elicitation (the setting up) to the elicitation target (the conversation). In these elicitations, Lily generally chose to open the conversation by initiating topics via interview-style requests for information. The elicitees, in response, tended to orient to features of the clinical discourse elicitation activity type, such as Lily’s control of the interaction, the provision of known information rather than new information, etc., rather than the activity type of everyday conversation. Recall that this orientation could be even more clearly seen in Craig’s reaction to Lily’s interest in his bandaged hand. In that elicitation, Lily opened the conversation with a question about a local physical production resource that was, conceivably, of genuine interest to her; but Craig’s response referenced the constraints of the clinical protocol and highlighted his deference to Lily’s control of their time.

Another way that elicitees oriented to the clinical protocol activity type was through talk of their injuries. Half of the elicitees talked about their injuries during the free conversation, and in all but one instance, the injury talk was initiated by the elicitee. The occurrences of injury talk, any mention of the event that caused the elicitee’s injury or the subsequent cognitive effects,
have additional significance in these elicitations. As Sarangi and Roberts note, “the very act of metacommunicating about a patient’s or client’s case directs institutional members towards their own categories and boundaries and serves to reinforce the institutional realities” (1999, 3).

Sarangi and Roberts were more specifically referring to colleagues discussing a third party, but the idea is relevant here as well. In Excerpt 6.10, Rose agentively took control of the interaction through talk of her injury as an explanation, perhaps, for how she and Lily became disoriented.

In the following excerpt, in which Matt is telling Lily about his late arrival to their appointment, the issue is discussed explicitly.

Excerpt 6.12

1 Matt: I made it five minutes late which is good for me.
2 Lily: Very good especially in weather like this [that is very good.]
3 Matt: [And having brain] surgery and the weather being shit.
4 I try not to blame it on things-
5 blame things on it.
6 Lily: Only when convenient.
7 Matt: Well said, exactly, I try not to say that but it works sometimes.
8 Lily: HHH
9 So what are you studying here?

Matt jokingly juxtaposes his brain surgery with the bad weather (line 3), but he follows this with

*I try not to blame it on things- blame things on it*, in which it likely refers to brain surgery as this is the newest concept he introduced, and likely the focus of his talk. Lily aligns herself with Matt’s demeanor and makes a joke as well (*Only when convenient*) and laughs. But in line (9), Lily initiates a new topic, prefacing her question with *so* to emphasize that they are moving on.

Lily seems to know, from her rare mentions of elicitees’ injuries, that talking about this topic will
invoke her identity as a speech-language pathologist and lead the conversation away from the goal of the “everyday.”

The issue of the activity type leaves the matter of determining how to conceptualize the intended “everyday conversation” portion of the elicitation. This is important if there is any intention of evaluating such a discourse sample in terms of possible discourse-pragmatic impairment, particularly if we use topic as a framework to do so (see Coelho, Ylvisaker, and Turkstra 2005). In Chapter 3, we saw how integral each interactant was to the construction of topic; indeed, it was taken for granted, because topic emergence cannot happen without the interplay of concepts, points, and control shared among speakers. Even talk that appears monologic, such as a narrative singly told, requires the acknowledgement that a listener has a certain body of knowledge to be managed in the talk, a desire for rapport and the meeting of face wants, and an expectation of coherence. This co-construction of topic is essential. However, in the introduction to these elicitations, the protocol suggested that the elicitee’s talk was subject to evaluation and the elicitor’s was not. This contradicts the basic idea of a symmetrical interaction, and asserts that the conversation is indeed inherently asymmetrical. Both participants intuit and express this through their talk, as we saw.

This state of affairs has an effect on the interpretation of topical talk. We saw, in the interaction between Lily and Rose, a clear example – perhaps the most explicit across all clinical discourse elicitation activity types – of disorientation. These resulted in multiple repairs as well as a metadiscursive comment on the final miscommunication that halted the topic and initiated another topic, centered explicitly on clinical issues rather than “everyday” concepts. If the

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57 This is also another possible explanation for why Lily did not respond to Rose’s disclosure that she was studying communication disorders (see Excerpt 6.7). She might have wanted to expressly avoid this concept so that the asymmetry implicit in their roles would not be made more explicit while they were supposed to be having an everyday conversation.
clinical protocol is followed, it is likely that Rose would be tagged as the interactant responsible for this breakdown, if only because Lily’s talk is not up for evaluation (per the introduction to the elicitation). Additionally, Rose takes responsibility for the disorientation during the interaction, even though the analysis showed that the disorientation emerged due to contributions by both Lily and Rose, rather than a clear deficiency on Rose’s part. And in fact, if control of the clinical management as well as the everyday conversation elicitation are allocated to Lily, which affects the concepts and points related to topic, then it is difficult to determine how Rose talks topically in everyday conversation.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the elicitation of language through a clinical protocol was conducted by an experienced professional speech-language pathologist elicitor and elicitees with TBIs. The clinical protocol, particularly the section of the protocol meant to elicit everyday conversation, favored explicit bounding of each segment of the activity and detailed description of the point of the interaction, as well as a strong showing of control and expertise on the part of the elicitor. These decisions were made in the best interests of the elicitees, making sure that they were aware of the expectations at every stage of the interaction. However, these decisions also ensured that everyday conversation was unlikely to result from the elicitations. Given that the constraints of the evaluation activity type were observed throughout the interactions, it becomes difficult to evaluate how well individuals with TBI in this corpus oriented to topic in everyday interaction. Of course, this is not to say that the elicitees did not orient to topic; however the topic was shaped by the “evaluation” activity type.

In the following chapter, I want to conclude with a longer discussion of the three clinical discourse elicitation activity types examined in this dissertation, and how topic emerged in each
of them. Because the clinical discourse elicitation types were very distinct, seeming to have more differences between them than features in common, I discussed them in separate chapters; however, bringing them together for discussion will allow for (1) a review of the components of topic laid out in Chapter 3 and how they relate to clinical discourse elicitation; (2) a discussion of clinical discourse elicitation as an activity type with some additional thoughts about how to balance the “institutional” with the “everyday” talk; and (3) ideas about what “good practices” might look like, with implications for clinical discourse elicitation as well as other endeavors that require the elicitation of natural conversation. I also discuss some of the limitations of this study and directions for future work.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In thinking about what this dissertation was or is “about,” it became clear that the subject matter evolved from what I had believed to be complex and yet relatively circumscribed – topic and acquired cognitive communication disorders – to something more obscure and of a wider scope. Orientation to interaction, which is constantly shifting and changing and requiring renewal with each turn at talk (Goffman 1981), requires a metadiscursive concept like *topic* to be understood, but it also means that topic has to be conceptualized broadly. Also, clinical discourse elicitation can be approached in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes (e.g., Shadden 1998), but even what might appear to be a single activity type – eliciting everyday conversation – is more complicated than it seems.

Therefore, in this chapter I want to review some key aspects of how my conceptualization of topic and its importance changed over the course of this study, from my development of the framework through the analyses of clinical discourse elicitations; I will also discuss how my approaches to acquired cognitive communication disorders and clinical discourse elicitation activity types were influenced as a result. I begin by reviewing what is important about topic, in itself as a metadiscursive concept and as an analytical tool, particularly in the field of communication disorders. I then discuss the common threads that could be found in each of the three clinical discourse elicitation activity types, and summarize the ways in which they contrast with one another. Drawing on this summative discussion, I examine the challenges of eliciting everyday conversation in what could be considered institutional activity types, and suggest what might be good practices. I then suggest some future directions for applied research relating to
topic and I offer my thoughts as to what these analyses can suggest about the practice of clinical discourse elicitation of everyday conversation.

7.2 **TOPIC REVISITED**

Recall that Sacks (1995) was reluctant to consider the question of topic because he intuited that the endeavor would necessarily involve attention to the content of talk in addition to analysis the systematicity of social actions, which was his keener interest. But the idea of topic was too important and integral to discourse and conversation to be ignored or put aside.

And in fact, while topic involves content, or what Schiffrin (1987) has referred to as propositions or ideas, what is most interesting about topic is how its construction and emergence is a way to understand “where we are” in an interaction, whether this means orienting to one other in a conversation, following a written text, dissecting an interview, or any kind of language use. Linguists, and discourse analysts in particular, are in a good position to address topic because of these reasons.

I hope, then, that I have described in this dissertation a way to conceptualize topic that is theoretically motivated but still maintains the intuitive idea of topic; I think that maintaining this intuition is important for understanding what can go wrong when an individual with an acquired cognitive communication disorder appears to have a discourse-pragmatic impairment such as difficulty orienting to topic in conversation, or someone close to him or her has observed such a difficulty. A model of topic that does not seem to capture the sense of disorientation one experiences in an interaction with someone who is off topic would not be as useful for addressing this problem directly (from a research, clinical, or interpersonal perspective).

And as we have seen, topic has already played a role in the evaluation of acquired cognitive communication disorders, particularly focusing on discourse-pragmatic impairment...
Moreover, topic is recognized as a central organizing feature of discourse by Coelho, Ylvisaker and Turkstra (2005), in their clinically-oriented review of nonstandardized discourse assessments available to clinicians specializing in brain injury diagnosis and rehabilitation. Recall that, in their view, content and topic management evaluations were considered particularly effective for characterizing discourse-pragmatic impairments, broadly construed. I mention this again not because it is closed to dispute, or because there are no other appropriate measures that could be used, but because it is an articulation of the bridge between topic as a key discourse-analytic construct and an important clinical application.

Discourse analysts have long recognized the importance of studying topic and employing it as a framework for sequential analyses of talk to better understand how language works (see e.g., Brown and Yule 1983; Schiffrin 1988; 1992), and specialists in communication disorders have also arrived at this conclusion when faced with the question of how to identify and describe discourse-pragmatic impairment (see e.g., Mentis 1991; 1994; Body and Parker 2005). Thus, it is valuable to bring these two perspectives together. In addition to linguistics and communication disorders, the field of clinical pragmatics perhaps also has a role in this discussion. As discourse-pragmatic impairment can be a difficult concept to conceptualize (see e.g., Perkins 2007; Cummings 2005; 2009), one criticism (Cummings 2009) is that analyses are not always consistently well motivated. While Cummings (2009) might not identify this analysis of topic as properly within the field of pragmatics, I hope at least that by attempting to motivate my topic framework, and describe an application of it, I have contributed an example of how future work in this field (if no one’s other than my own) might proceed.

So, considering this topic framework as a potential tool for conceptualizing discourse-pragmatic impairment, let us take a moment to review the elements of topic described in Chapter
3 – concepts, points, and control – and add to the descriptions insights gleaned from the analyses of clinical discourse elicitation. (Clinical discourse elicitation itself will be discussed in a separate section following this review.)

7.2.1 CONCEPTS: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Concepts are entities, actions, states of being, or ideas that are or have the potential to be the shared objects of talk that are integral to the construction of topic. The idea of concepts as potentially shared was seen to be important in terms of shared knowledge more specifically – personal, cultural, and social – and its role in interaction. As I discussed in Chapter 3, to orient to topic, interactants must have or desire some degree of knowledge to share about concepts, and this knowledge must be managed throughout the interaction. Thus, determining the shared status of knowledge, and in turn presenting that knowledge with the correct degree of shared-ness, or pragmatic intersubjectivity, is a complex but crucial task.

In Chapter 3, the data that I examined in order to develop the topic framework were everyday conversations among peers, and the way that knowledge was managed in those interactions was interpreted within that activity type. Certain assumptions could be made as a result; for example, that knowledge was presented as shared (or not) based on one’s understanding of the certainty of the facts and their epistemic rights to present certain types of information as theirs or as belonging to someone else. Essentially, the idea is that knowledge management was generally a reflection of, and reception of, one’s accessible knowledge store. This is not to say that miscalculations did not occur; in the following excerpt, Sally presents knowledge of a concept as shared, but then repairs this initial presentation.

Excerpt 7.1

1 Sally: Actually y’know (.)
Sally appeals to Pat’s knowledge of this concept, *Jake the Sheik*, presenting him first as someone identifiable by his name and adding information about him; but, perhaps realizing after a pause that *Jake the Sheik* might not be a shared concept, or might reside in Pat’s semiactive consciousness (Chafe 1994), she expands her description (Ariel 1990). Sally still attempts to suggest that this concept should be known (*y’know* and *you know*), but Pat asserts that he does not know *about this*, referring to the general concept of Jake the Sheik’s compost pile explosion. Sally expresses her surprise (*Didn’t you hear about him*?), and then in line (10) begins to describe what happened.

In contrast, instances of a speaker presenting knowledge as unknown to him- or herself when in fact it was known, such as rhetorical questions, were marked as containing a metamessage for the addressee(s). The base level of knowledge sharing allows for these metamessages to be sent and received.

However, in the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, this did not apply in quite the same way. Hamilton (1994, 166) points out, in the context of a discussion of the “drill-like atmosphere” of many tests of verbal expression, that it can be difficult to determine how to assess an elicitor’s knowledge and respond in keeping with that assessment. This is particularly true when tasks are presented in sequence and have different rules. It seemed that this concern was relevant even in the clinical discourse elicitation activity types in which the goal was everyday conversation. Similar to patterns observed in classroom discourse (e.g., Heap 1985;
Mehan 1979), in the unstructured interviews and the clinical protocol activity types discussed here, there were moments during the interactions in which the state of the elicer’s knowledge was either unclear (i.e., it could not be gleaned if the elicer knew the information requested or not, due to conflicting messages) or the knowledge was presented as unknown when the interactants both knew it to be known by the elicer already. Having an everyday conversation, then, that is similar to the ones excerpted in Chapter 3 is difficult because not knowing the status of the knowledge of concepts constructing the topic disorients interactants to the types of contributions they could make that would be “on topic.” Even more difficult is evaluating whether or not an individual whose language is under scrutiny has the ability, which would be considered a discourse-pragmatic competency, to present knowledge with a degree of sharedness that fits the development of the topic; that is to say, a degree of sharedness that does not cause disorientation to topic and breakdown when the next turn is taken.

One way to mitigate this potential problem of the status of knowledge, which is inherent if subtle in the clinical discourse elicitation activity type, is to focus the talk around local production resources. These production resources could be based in prior discourse (e.g., You had said that…) or more commonly could be physical, such as an object or event that all interactants could sense in the physical environment of the interaction. Many elicers indeed relied on local physical production resources; but even though the objects might be accessible to elicers and elicitees both, the elicers must be cognizant of the way they refer to or describe such objects. Recall this excerpt of an unstructured interview from Chapter 5, repeated below.

Excerpt 7.2

1 Beth: So Peter, tell me about (.) Anna.
2 Peter: What do you want to know about her?
3 Beth: Everything.
4 Peter: I don’t know where to start.
The referent *Anna* is present in the interaction through the medium of a photograph, which is a local production resource used to contextualize the introduction of a concept; in Chafe’s phrasing, “a speaker does not simply thrust concepts forward out of nowhere” (1987, 36), and in this case, the concept was accessible and available for focus. However, in this case it was the referring term *Anna* that could be seen to be disorienting. Use of this term showed that some knowledge of the person in the photograph was already possessed by the elicitor.

The status of knowledge of concepts is not only important for manipulating the concepts themselves, but it has connections to orientation to the point of the topic, and the interaction more broadly.

7.2.2 **Points: Why Are We Talking About This?**

Points are the salient, essential reasons for the talk that constructs topic, which are (or are not) appreciated by interactants in some shared way. In outlining points in Chapter 3, I had focused, as the question *Why are we talking about this?* suggests, on the concepts and their connection to the greater interactional goals of generating “euphoria” (Goffman 1961) and “rapport” (Tannen 2005). Points are important to the construction of topic because knowing *why* we are talking about certain concepts also orients one to what an appropriate next turns at talk might be.

From a pragmatic perspective (e.g., the Cooperative Principle, Grice 1975) or from a conversation analytic perspective (e.g., “conditional relevance,” Schegloff 1968), points can be characterized as fitting concepts into a larger structure, highlighting their importance or relevance. For example, if a speaker describes an individual and includes his or her race, one would naturally work to see how this information serves the point of whatever is about to be
asserted about this concept. Or if a speaker takes time to determine whether or not the narrative he or she has begun happened on a Tuesday or Wednesday, it would stand to reason that the point will be most clearly seen by having that detail in mind. Similarly, if a question is followed by a contingent query (Garvey 1979), this question is important or relevant to the first in some way, in service of the perception of the point.

Thus, in discussing points in terms of gist (the assimilation of concepts that highlights the “upshot” of a large amount of information) and appreciation (the rapport engendered by a shared understanding of the emotional importance of concepts) in Chapter 3, I had been focusing pointedly on the content of talk as the basis of point, or the concepts and their relationships to the point.

In the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, where the activity type was much more salient than in the everyday conversations analyzed in Chapter 3, it could be seen that there were, perhaps, two “levels” of points important to topic emergence in any activity type. What I will refer to as the content point is the point as it relates to the emergence of topic from the manipulation of concepts; this content point is what I described extensively in Chapter 3.

Attention to the activity type (or, acknowledgement of the influence of activity type) suggests what I will refer to as the interactional point. This interactional point is closely related to the content point (and vice versa), but does not address the local management of topic as it emerges turn by turn at talk. The interactional point asks not Why are we talking about this? but rather Why are we talking? Thus, the interactional point is a frame (Goffman 1974; see also Tannen 1993), incorporated into the topic framework. As we saw in the clinical discourse elicitations, interactants brought to the interaction, or were given, some idea of the reason that they were having the conversation they were having; thus, the interactional point was more salient than in
everyday conversation among peers, even if the point was not entirely shared by all participants. In participant-managed collection, the elicitees understood that a researcher (the absent elicitor) was collecting language data. In unstructured interviewing, the elicitor aimed to have a casual chat with the elicitee, and the elicitee anticipated interview-style questions from the elicitor (which was, often, what the elicitee ended up providing). In the clinical protocol, the elicitor made it clear in the introduction to the elicitation that the goal was to have an everyday conversation, but the activity in which they were engaged was an evaluation of the elicitee’s language. Overall, the understandings of the interactional points, Why are we talking?, or perhaps from the elicitors’ perspective, What is my goal? and the elicitees’ perspective, What do you want from me?, clearly affected the way that topic emerged, specifically the manipulation of concepts and shared knowledge. It also affected the content points, because the emergence of topic is situated within the activity type.

I want to emphasize that content points and interactional points are integral to topic emergence in any activity type, including the everyday conversation that I examined for the development of the framework in Chapter 3. Even in activity types characterized by minimal constraints and goal orientation, frames are necessary for intuiting the parameters of the interaction. Just as frames become highly salient and observable when they are contrasted with one another (e.g., Tannen and Wallat 1993), my analyses of the three clinical discourse elicitation activity types made clearer their importance and germaneness to topic emergence generally.

I will take up the issue of the interactional point again in the section on clinical discourse elicitation activity types below, with particular focus on how the interactional point is signaled. Next, though, I continue with a discussion of control.
7.2.3 Control: How Is Topic Manipulated?

The manipulation of topic both results in more control and is constituted by control. In examining everyday conversation, I had defined control as the management of one’s own face concerns and those of others (Goffman 1981), which are linked to control of topic emergence through turns at talk (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Orienting to topic, which involves sharing and understanding knowledge about concepts and intuiting the point, can fulfill certain face wants. And in terms of orienting to topic, sharing a common understanding with others in an interaction, being on topic, leads to positive social outcomes and a sense of community or rapport (Tannen 2005); someone known for being perceptive of others’ face wants in his or her community will likely be a more welcomed conversation participant.

In addition to face, the idea of access is important to the notion of control. Access has much in common with face, in that incorporating new interactants into a conversation could also be characterized as access, etc., as well as gaining access to the conversational floor (Edelsky 1993; Erickson 1982). With regard to floor, to gain access it is necessary to have oriented to the emergent topic in order to know how to position one’s contribution to it; making one’s contribution oriented to a topic enhances one’s face. Control is important not only because of its role in the emergence of topic, but because it engenders social benefits (e.g., prestige, power, respect) that can potentially outlast the interaction itself.

Also, I had mentioned that control that is brought by an individual to an interaction can make one more able to orient to and manipulate topics. It is on this point that I want to concentrate in my discussion of clinical discourse elicitation activity types. I found that control, unsurprisingly, was brought to the clinical discourse elicitations more than it was engendered within the interactions and traded back and forth. The control inherent in the role of elicitor, due
to its status conferred by the activity type, affected topic emergence in that the elicitor generally controlled the initiation and closing of topics through questions, directives, and third turns, and the idea of control was much more explicit in the clinical discourse elicitation activity types. In participant-managed collection, the absent elicitor exerted some control at the beginning of the elicitations; simply put, the absent elicitor initiated and set up the activity type. However, in this clinical discourse elicitation activity type that most resembled everyday conversation, the absent elicitor could not maintain her control throughout the development of topics because she was not taking any turns or offering feedback (verbal or nonverbal). Certainly, the interaction between the husband and wife pair of elicitees could sustain itself without input from the absent elicitor, and so we were able to examine control in terms of the word searches that they carried out together. This was not the case in unstructured interviewing and clinical protocol, however. Because the elicitors were present for the entire conversation, they could not only set up the elicitation and reinforce their roles as elicitors, but they could continue to control the emergence of topic by taking turns that initiated, shifted, and closed the topic according to their and the elicitees’ expectations.

In addition to the turn-by-turn management of topic, I want to mention the notion of access as it relates to control and topic. Heritage and Clayman (2010) discuss epistemological asymmetry as a key dimension of institutional talk, and indeed this feature was observable in the clinical discourse elicitations. The elicitors had more access throughout the interactions, in the sense that they had more access than the elicitees to the status of knowledge, they had more access to the “correct” interpretation of the interactional point (given that they were in charge), and thus, this access reinforced their control due to the enhanced status they had for being “in on” the topic more than their conversation partners were.
Recall that control is a circular, constantly renewed and reinforced, idea. Control affects topic emergence, e.g., the interactant with more control can open and close topics; and orienting to topic affects control, e.g., one who is better able and equipped to orient to the topic will accrue more control.

7.2.4 Summary

The question of who is better able and equipped to orient to topic is a question that takes on additional meaning when communication disorders are evaluated. We saw that while the topic framework, developed through an examination of everyday conversation, was more than flexible enough to be applied to the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, we also saw that the activity type was important and needed to be incorporated into the discussion of topic.

Thus, I want to proceed with a clearer discussion of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, and their role in eliciting everyday conversation.

7.3 Clinical Discourse Elicitation Activity Types

In clinical and research practices relating to cognitive communication disorders, it has become common to elicit four main types of discourse (Shadden 1998) in order to canvass an individual’s communicative competence, as a result of the acknowledgement that language is used in different ways for different purposes. These genres of discourse (narrative retelling, narrative generation, procedural discourse, conversation) are differentiated by variables such as elicitor role, type of stimulus, relevance to the elicittee, cognitive load, etc. In general, while much has been written on the analysis of discourse of individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders (e.g., Bloom, Obler, DeSanti, and Erlich 1994; Cherney, Shadden, and Coelho 1998; Asp and de Villiers 2010), less has been written on the elicitation of the discourse
itself (but see Shadden 1998; van Leer and Turkstra 1999; Togher 2001; Coelho 2007), and even less on naturally occurring discourse (but see Hamilton 1994). Keeping the discussion focused on everyday conversation specifically, I will compare the clinical discourse elicitation activity types used to elicit everyday conversation, and discuss the merits of various approaches.

7.3.1 COMPARISON OF CLINICAL DISCOURSE ELICITATION ACTIVITY TYPES

Let us begin by comparing the features of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types discussed in this dissertation, as outlined in Levinson’s (1992) characterization of the notion of activity type. Activity types are vaguely defined by Levinson along continua of goal definition, boundedness, constraints on participants, and constraints on allowable contributions. To provide orientation to the following discussion, in the schema below I situate each of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types along these continua; for simplicity, I refer to each activity type by the health concern that represented it in the preceding three chapters (i.e., stroke for participant-managed collection, Alzheimer’s disease or AD for unstructured interviewing, and traumatic brain injury or TBI for the clinical protocol), and I use the label typical to refer to the recording of everyday conversation in Chapter 3.

Recall that the goal, in each of these activity types, was to elicit everyday conversation.
As we can see here, typical (recording everyday conversation) looks quite similar to stroke (participant-managed collection), except perhaps in terms of the goal, because in participant-managed collection as a clinical discourse elicitation activity type, it is clear that the participant with the communication disorder is the person of greatest interest in the elicitation, or at least, this participant represents the reason the elicitation was conducted. So the interaction could perhaps be less symmetrical than recordings of everyday interaction among typical peers.

In AD (unstructured interviewing), we see that the presence of the elicitor represents a significant change in the elicitation process, as would be expected. In fact, although the elicitors were indeed prepared with questions, as they might be for an interview, this was not particularly important. Rather, the salient feature seemed to be that the elicitor and elicitee did not know each other, and perhaps had limited common ground to draw upon in many cases, and so any interaction would have taken on features of an interview-style activity type. With that said, the identification at the beginning of the elicitation did reinforce the “official” or “formal” type that the elicitee was perhaps expecting given the impression they had that the elicitors were going to ask them questions. Recall also that the elicitors were also supervised by absent elicitors who were in charge of the overall research and data collection plan.
TBI (clinical protocol) was, in my view, the most interesting activity type to examine due to its explicitness and its intentional manipulation of frames within the clinical protocol activity type. Goffman’s work on footing (1981) encourages an appreciation and understanding of the idea that it is possible – and common – for interactants to change their orientation to an interaction even as the physical setting and participants remain the same; that is, shifts in alignment or “projected self” are signaled through the management of talk as it unfolds (1981, 128). Changes in footing occur constantly, consistently, and rapidly throughout interaction, and can point to changes in interpretive frames. We can see, too, in Tannen and Wallat's (1993) analysis of a videotaped medical examination involving a doctor, a patient, the patient’s mother, and a future medical audience, how a doctor is able to juggle three distinct frames while performing her exam.

The question, then, as it relates to the clinical protocol activity type, is whether it is possible for the elicitor and elicitee to accomplish a footing shift from (1) an elicitor giving instructions to an elicitee about what they need to do, to (2) a symmetrical everyday conversation. Hamilton (1994, 166-167) discussed the issue of frame shifts in advancing from one segment of a test battery to the next; she described how it can be difficult for elicitees to follow breaks in frame when these breaks are determined by the elicitor, and suggests eliciting everyday conversation when a break occurs naturally, rather than due to the elicitor’s instructions.

Hengst and Duff (2007), in developing the mediated discourse elicitation protocol would allow that it is challenging, but possible, for elicitor and elicitee to change footing from the clinical management phase in which the elicitor gives instructions, to the everyday conversation.
Like Hamilton (1994), these authors have identified that elicitees have difficulty switching frames rapidly in an elicitation situation, and often do not know, or cannot know, what is expected of the interaction (the interactional point). In contrast to Hamilton, though, their protocol does not elicit everyday conversation at a “natural” break in the testing, but rather is prefaced by clinical management (i.e., the setting up of the elicitation and closing, discussed in Chapter 6). And in fact, analysis of this particular application of the protocol showed how the clinical management of the elicitation, such as the instructions and the closing of the activity, set up the roles and expectations for the participants that persisted throughout the activity. Though both participants were clear that they were about to have an everyday conversation, they could not shift their footing, and subsequently their orientation to topic construction, so quickly and drastically. The upshot is that it is difficult to embark on an evaluation or analysis of everyday conversation elicited this way. If we want to understand ability – and not solely phonological, lexical, or syntactic features, but discourse-pragmatic abilities – there are so many factors, relating to topic construction and to the activity type in which topic develops, that are throwing into question the place of this purported everyday conversation on the naturalness-control continuum.

Therefore, I revise the figure of the topic framework introduced in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.3) to include the interactional point of the topic. I want to emphasize that the understanding of the frame, in this case the activity type, is integral to topic emergence.

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58 The mediated discourse elicitation protocol would also allow that it is possible for the interactants to shift their footing from the everyday conversation to narrative (one free, one elicited), to picture description, and to procedural discourse. In this study I focused only on the everyday conversation segment of the session.
And so again we are faced with the question of orientation; if we orient to topic in order to make sense of prior talk and predict the suitability of possible upcoming contributions, in order to understand aspects of our interaction with each other, we must also orient to the activity type to understand where we are in a very basic way.\textsuperscript{59} It is easy to become disoriented if topic and if the activity type are not clear; they are intertwined. It is also possible to become disoriented if, paradoxically, the activity type is made so clear that it is unclear, or not what it purports to be.

\textsuperscript{59} This concern is closely linked to the importance of framing in interaction (see e.g., Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974; Tannen 1993).
In the next section, related to this discussion of clinical discourse elicitation activity types, I want to step back and examine the paradox of eliciting everyday conversation in a clinical setting.

7.3.2 Elicitor’s Paradox

The title of this section is inspired by the “observer’s paradox” (Labov 1972), primarily discussed in research on sociolinguistic variation, which describes how participants who are more aware of the state of being observed will be less likely to produce natural speech. Eliciting the vernacular, or a participant’s most casual speech, can only be achieved if the participant is paying minimal attention to the form of his or her talk; and this situation is unlikely to occur if the participant is being observed by the researcher. Here I discuss the paradox, mentioned throughout these chapters, of eliciting everyday conversation for research or evaluation purposes.

The recognition of the importance of natural discourse data to the understanding of acquired cognitive communication disorders is not new. And in terms of the naturalness-control continuum (Ratner and Menn 2000), one can compare natural discourse to a standardized test, to an interview, and to other activity types. However, the designation of “natural” cannot be absolute, as there are different types of natural; for example, a formal, questionnaire-based interview could be considered a natural exemplar of that particular activity type.60 Less strikingly, but just as importantly, there is no one style of “natural” speech that people access and use; in fact, there are a variety of repertoires that people employ in everyday interaction for different purposes, and no single “baseline” natural speech (see Schilling, forthcoming). Thus, it is necessary to discuss the possible meaning of natural conversation.

60 In fact, Wolfson (1976) argues that sociolinguistic interviews, with their relatively free-form structure, can be considered unnatural versions of what people may recognize as the activity type known as interview.
I have taken natural conversation to be a synonym for everyday conversation, considering everyday conversation to be a prototypical activity type experienced by and accessible to all typical speakers (Drew and Heritage 1992), as described in Chapter 3. In this sense, natural, everyday conversation is one in which there is some expectation of symmetry between participants (see Hamilton 1994). The conversation aspect is also equally important to the natural, as I noted in Chapter 1; Cummings (2009) writes extensively on the various approaches to pragmatic impairment assessment, and she notes that:

The skills that are needed to monitor a listener’s state of understanding in conversation and reformulate a message when a lack of comprehension occurs can only be adequately examined in the interactional to and fro of dyadic conversation. Conversational exchanges are really the only naturalistic context in which a speaker’s ability to represent shared background knowledge within the presuppositions of an utterance can be examined. (2009, 188, emphasis mine)

Cummings’ (2009) discussion here of naturalistic conversation points to this idea of symmetry in a few ways. First, the mention of the expectation of a “to and fro” flow in the participation, and the exchange of ideas, assumes that both parties in the dyad are equal contributors, regardless of how much or how often they may speak. Second, the mention of the monitoring of shared and unshared knowledge assumes relatively symmetrical access; while the stores of knowledge may not be symmetrical, the ability to manage the exchange should be. For these reasons, I take natural conversation, or everyday conversation, in clinical discourse elicitation to be less a matter of assuring unselfconscious speech, or attempting to eliminate researcher effects, and more a matter of lessening the asymmetries of access or control inherent in the elicitation activity. As Labov (1981) pointed out with respect to sociolinguistic interviewers, when the interviewer is acting as a representative of his or her institution (e.g., academic research), the interviewer will often be perceived by the interviewee to have more authority over the proceedings. In clinical discourse elicitation, elicitors may be conducting the elicitations as
representatives of a research and/or medical institution, bringing the authority inherent in these professions to their elicitations of everyday conversation. Thus, the elicitor’s paradox relates not to observation, but to asymmetry.

For an example, let us consider the following excerpt, which was presented as Excerpt 4.1 in Chapter 4; this is the setting up of an elicitation by Ned and Mae.

Excerpt 7.3

1 → Ned: ((waves at camera, tongue sticking out))
2 Mae: It’s Monday, what do you want out of him?
3 Stereo lawn mower:s-
4 Ned: Yeah, right, I was just-
5 Mae: With a little bit of “ssssss” from the sprinkler behind us.
6 Ned: Right.
7 → Mae: We did this special, just for y’all.
8 Ned: Yeah.
9 Uh (.) what do we talk about?
10 Mae: You got your battery-
11 new battery.

Here, Ned and Mae are addressing the recording equipment, and by extension, the absent elicitor and audiences. In this setting up of the elicitation they both indicate that, for them, this is a very casual interaction; in a sense, this is a performance of a casual interaction. Ned sticks his tongue out at the camera (line 1), and Mae, after describing the scene, notes ironically, We did this special, just for y’all (line 7). Her comment on the unremarkable setting of their backyard emphasizes that she is aware of being observed, by one person or many, in the future; it indexes the idea that one might expect that elicitees would set up the physical setting of the elicitation as a performance space appropriate for the formality of the occasion. Overall, it is clear that Ned and Mae are aware of being observed.

However, in the analyses of the conversation elicited from Ned and Mae in Chapter 4, the emergence of topic suggested a more natural, everyday interaction; at least, this was the case.
compared to unstructured interviewing and clinical protocol. But it would not be accurate to say that the absence of the elicitor removed all observer effects; Ned and Mae knew that they were observed, and engaged the recording equipment in the opening of the interaction as a participant (see also Wolfson 1976). More likely, the absence of the elicitor meant that most of the “to and fro” of the conversation occurred between Ned and Mae, the elicitees, who have a more symmetrical relationship than Ned and the elicitor likely would have.

So let us assume that we want to elicit natural, everyday dyadic conversation in order to perform an analysis of topic and understand how an individual struggling with aspects of communication fares. The challenge of achieving this can be crystalized through attention to activity type, and the differences in ordinary and institutional talk it entails, as has been discussed.

From the comparison of the activity types above, it appears that participant-managed collection approximated recorded everyday conversation across almost all measures; however, participant-managed collection is not always possible or realistic for clinical purposes. Indeed, in their study of the feasibility of telehealth procedures, Turkstra et al. (2012) found that participants with traumatic brain injuries remarked that would appreciate having the assistance of the research team with the equipment, rather than worry about setting it up and using it themselves. Given the variety of reasons that an individual with an acquired cognitive communication disorder or his or her interlocutor might not be willing or able to record discourse independently, it is impractical to rely on this method completely. In fact, this was one motivation for the development of the mediated discourse elicitation protocol (Hengst and Duff 2007).

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61 It is also not always most effective in sociolinguistic data collection, as described by Schilling (2013).
Thus, overall, even though participant-managed collection seemed to be the best method, sometimes it is simply necessary for a clinician or researcher to collect the data, and to collect it in a clinical or research setting. So the question that I want to ask now is, how can we best do this? How can we, in a sense, elicit more symmetrical conversations when asymmetry is inherent in the participant roles brought to the elicitation? Another way of asking this, perhaps, is how can we make an unstructured interview, or a clinical protocol, approximate an everyday conversation as closely as possible?

7.3.3 Approaches to Clinical Discourse Elicitation

Goffman noted, “by invoking a backstage style, individuals can transform any region into a backstage” (1959, 128-129). In this spirit, let us assume that it is possible to elicit everyday conversation in a clinical discourse elicitation activity type. In this section, I discuss some ways, based on the analyses in the preceding chapters, to mitigate the features of the clinical discourse elicitation activity type.

First, regarding the setting up of the elicitation, we saw in the analyses of the unstructured interviews and the clinical protocol that the explicit signaling of the upcoming conversation was challenging in that it evoked an activity type that was not everyday conversation, due to implicit asymmetries. Hamilton (1994) makes the argument that symmetry between interactants (e.g., in terms of power, expertise, and control) is critical for natural, everyday conversation and is often difficult to find in a situation in which the interactants are clinician and patient, or elicitor and elicitee. The setting up of the elicitation set up the

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62 I want to point out here that again, I am only referring to the elicitation of everyday conversation; because, of course, there are other reasons that participant-managed collection is inconvenient or inappropriate, such as when the goal is to elicit a story retelling.
expectation of asymmetry that did not dissipate until much later in the conversation, if at all, which can become a problem if the sample elicited is rather short.

It seems to be, then, that the best way forward is to elicit everyday conversation before any other testing; this is a feature of the mediated discourse elicitation protocol as practiced (Hengst and Duff 2007). The next change to make would be to eliminate the explicit setting up, be it a session identification (in the case of unstructured interviewing) or the clinical management frame (in the case of the clinical protocol). This undoubtedly raises questions about how to manage such an activity without recording people without their knowledge or “testing” them surreptitiously. While doctors and patients attend to the division between the “pleasantries” portion of a clinic visit and the “business” that follows (see Heritage and Clayman 2010, 17), clinical discourse elicitation is different because the “pleasantries” would in fact be the “business.” So this attention may be exploited, but carefully. A solution could be a more drastic frame break between the description of the encounter and the everyday conversation, such that an assistant handles the clinical management of consent forms, etc. and the elicitor and elicitee simply begin with “small talk.” This would eliminate the necessity to change footing so decisively and rapidly, a feature of the clinical protocol that was difficult to navigate.

Regarding the conversation phase that represents most of the elicitation after the setting up and opening turns, I again turn to Hamilton’s (1994) discussion of symmetry. She mentions that she (the elicitor) and the elicitee would “trade off being the ‘expert’ on topics, and both initiate, maintain, and close topics at will” (1994, 3). In both the unstructured interviews and clinical protocol, the elicitors very occasionally would offer personal information about themselves, a feature that was marked in these contexts, but was successful in creating symmetry. In the following excerpt, from an unstructured interview between Allie (the elicitor)
and June (the elicitee), June has just mentioned having a private room at her assisted living
facility.

Excerpt 7.4

1 Allie: I mean, at least you got a room by yourself.
2 June: Yeah, yeah.
3 Allie: So, that’s what- that’s what I would like having a room to myself.
4 June: You still living with the family?
5 Allie: Well no, I live with my boyfriend,
6 him and I together.

Allie recognizes the value of June’s private room (line 1), and then volunteers (line 3) how much
she would also like to have a room to herself; the implication is that she does not, of course, and
this statement provides an opportunity for June to ask for more information about the particular
reason, or the circumstances in which Allie does not have a private room. As the elicitor is
typically the “interviewer” or “question asker” in charge, Allie’s disclosure and June’s follow up
question allow for them to, in a sense, switch roles.

In the clinical protocol, the elicitor (an experienced clinician) appeared reluctant to talk
too much in favor of allowing the elicitee to speak. But disclosure of personal information
allowed the elicitee to be in the role of recipient or listener, as in this exchange between Lily (the
elicitor) and Matt (the elicitee).

Excerpt 7.5

1 Lily: I can’t imagine the stress that goes along with a profession like that,
2 but if- if um it’s something you want to do man I really respect that.
3 Matt: ((nods))
4 Lily: My best friend is the fire chief in um Swampburg.
5 Matt: Okay [nice.]
6 Lily: [And ] um he y’know came from the ground up and um works-
7 has worked there for a long, long time.
8 Matt: Yeah?
Here, Lily had asked Matt about his training to become a firefighter, and Matt, an enthusiastic elicitee, had been telling her about it in detail. Lily then begins to close the topic by summing up her respect for the profession (lines 1-2) and Matt backchannels with a nod. Then, instead of moving on to another question, Lily volunteers some information that she frames as quite personal (*best friend*), and Matt receives this information and encourages her to continue talking (*Okay nice… Yeah?*). Granted, while this very short exchange is a departure from the clinical goal of eliciting a certain quantity of language from the elicitee, and does not show us much about how Matt manages topic, it is valuable for providing a context for a more balanced, symmetrical conversation.

### 7.3.4 Summary

In this section on the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, my goal was to show how, through an analysis of different elicitations of the same activity type of everyday conversation, the clinical discourse elicitation activity type interacted with, and influenced, the everyday conversation activity type. Eliciting everyday conversation in order to evaluate communication impairment is a complicated process, from determining how to characterize the language and interaction itself, to managing the layers of activity types.

In the next section, I want to discuss in tandem some limitations and directions for future work.

### 7.4 Limitations and Future Directions

Short of detailing all of the limitations inherent in, and realized through the course of, this study, I want to focus my discussion of both the limitations and the future directions around a single issue: the use of pre-existing linguistic corpora. This limitation relates not to the value of the corpora themselves, as even a partial list of the interesting and varied studies that have been
carried out using these corpus data, prior to this one, would be far too long. It relates, I believe, more to aspects of the analysis of topic and the nature of acquired cognitive communication disorders.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, where I first described my approach to the data, I found that being an outsider afforded me a detached viewpoint that I hoped would allow me to sense features of topic more clearly, based on the language I heard and my interpretation of it as a fellow speaker of American English. I thought that this would be advantageous because topic was so amorphous and all-consuming that, at the very least, not being involved personally in the interactions would eliminate the variable of my own reflection on my contributions and their meaning. From a more prosaic perspective, in terms of the clinical discourse elicitation activity types, I would likely not have been able to gather varied data such as those on my own.

Of course, when I began to consider the data in Chapter 3, I also mentioned Tannen’s (2005) viewpoint on why it is advantageous to participate in collection of discourse data, and the additional insights that can and do follow from this most personal knowledge. Hamilton (1994, 31-32) also discusses the importance of the participant observer and how being an insider in an interaction can help the analyst to make more informed and confident statements about the nuances of how that interaction unfolded. And in fact, throughout the conduction of my topic analyses, I often thought that it would have been very valuable to have been able to collect information that might have provided further insight on the analyses that I performed from outside the interaction.

For example, recall a moment in an interaction between Ned and Mae, in Chapter 4, which I repeat below. Ned had just said that a coworker of his got a new car:

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63 For a summary, see http://talkbank.org/info/usage/childesbib.pdf and http://carolinaconversations.musc.edu/about/references (both accessed March 11, 2013).
Example 7.1 (original in Section 4.3.3)

Mae repairs the concept of *car* introduced by Ned, replacing it with *house* as a guess, which Ned confirms is correct. If it is the case that Mae does not know the people in question, then it is likely that one of two explanations for this repair is correct: either that Mae recognizes that she has heard this story before, but is managing the information as new in the emerging interaction to protect Ned’s face, in spite of the way in which she took control of the topic development by making the repair; or Mae has determined that if Ned is continuing the topic that he started by noting that the divorced couple were living together, then it is much more likely that they bought a house, not a car, because *house* is a concept more related to *living together* than *car* is. The absent elicitior cannot know which explanation may be correct, without questioning Mae, however at the very least it can be said that the strategy was useful for constructing the topic.

The absent elicitior cannot know, nor can I, and this would be an excellent opportunity to question Mae about which explanation (or none of these explanations) she feels is correct.

Whether this review would take the form of playback (Tannen 2005), cognitive interview (Willis 2005), or stimulated recall (Gass and Mackey 2000), the overall need would be to engage participants’ metalinguistic, and metacognitive, capacities in order to further understand what they understood about topic. As another example, I repeat below a portion of the longer excerpt discussed in Chapter 3.

Excerpt 7.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mike:</th>
<th>Jaime:</th>
<th>Mike:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><code>uh</code></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><code>the person:</code></td>
<td><code>They got a different woman</code></td>
<td><code>(. ) Huh?</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><code> (. ) whose voice they used in the (. ) telephone,</code></td>
<td><code>didn’t they.</code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><code>when it tells you (. ) the number has been changed. </code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><code>(. ) And that I had</code>/t/<code>copyright.</code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><code>HH</code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><code>Get some royalties= </code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><code>=Like</code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><code>that lady, </code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><code>y’know</code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td><code>h- you hear</code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td><code>(. ) “the number you have reached</code></td>
<td><code> </code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td><code>[They got a different WOMAN ]</code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td><code>didn’t they.</code></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recall that in this segment of interaction, there were a number of disorientations to topic in terms of concepts (i.e., Who is the lady or woman under discussion?), point (i.e., Is this a humorous story told for entertainment, or a description of a factual state of affairs?), and control (i.e., Whose orientation to topic will be taken up by the other?). Playing the longer excerpt back to Jaime and Mike and asking them questions about what they were thinking, or feeling, as their disorientation emerged could be illuminating in terms of what it can tell us about topic management.

In terms of corpora featuring acquired cognitive communication disorders, some difficulties are inevitable artifacts of the corpora themselves; while the originators of the corpora provided detailed information about the participants, individually or as a group as appropriate, they cannot possibly provide the level of detail that might be relevant in these analyses. The most detailed portrait among these corpora was of Ned and his aphasia; the individuals with Alzheimer’s disease were identified as diagnosed with some form of it, but the stage and extent were not provided; the clinical details of the individuals with TBI (histories, test scores, etc.) were presented as a group description rather than individual stories. It is certainly important to avoid identifying individuals with too much detail, because this information is very private and personal; to make it publicly available would be unlikely to be appreciated by the participants who generously agreed to be involved in research. Thus, in this particular case there is nothing to be done. The constraints of the corpora demand a high level of confidentiality. But it is nonetheless a factor in the analyses that result, and the conclusions that can be drawn. This is one
of the reasons that I have not drawn any particular conclusions about acquired cognitive communication disorders; I came to the understanding that this would not be possible, given my outsider status and the analytical tool that I employed.

In terms of future directions, then, I think it will be very important to be a participant observer in future investigations of topic and acquired cognitive communication disorders and their evaluation; if participant observation is not possible, then it will be equally important to develop relationships with and maintain access to those who do participate. Aside from this general future direction, I organize my discussion of possible work into two categories: topic and activity type, and communication disorders.

First, with regard to the framework of topic, we saw that it would be difficult indeed to include every possible relevant feature of language and interaction in the framework; but I believe that consideration of features like gesture and prosody, which I did not include, would be useful and important. While some might disagree (Cummings 2009) or agree (Prutting and Kirchner 1987) that these features have a role in evaluating discourse-pragmatic competence, I think they are important components to how we construct topic. For example, we already understand something about the relationship of pause length to topic, and its cultural base (e.g., Tannen 2005). Perhaps more immediately, just as I discussed the need to incorporate features of the activity type into topic analysis, it is necessary to do so when considering topic in clinical discourse elicitation of everyday conversation. We can be reminded that “language is potentially sensitive to all of the contexts in which it occurs, and, even more strongly, that language reflects those contexts because it helps to constitute them” (Schiffrin 1987, 5). Just as topic was not a static concept, but rather was constructed and reinforced at every juncture, so too is activity type
both a product of language and an influencer of it. This is important in the clinical examination of language.

Second, with regard to communication disorders, as I said I have had nothing to say here about acquired cognitive communication disorders resulting from stroke, Alzheimer’s disease, or traumatic brain injury; the data and the analyses did not permit me to make any claims or draw any comparisons or conclusions that would have any force. With that said, I would identify as my most clear and crystalized next steps (1) elicitation of language from individuals with acquired cognitive communication disorders who have been observed anecdotally to have some sort of “problem with topic;” and (2) a larger scale comparison of different clinical discourse elicitation techniques for sampling everyday conversation, with participants tapped across different activity types in order to draw clearer comparisons of the strengths and weaknesses of the clinical discourse elicitations. The first goal is intended to extend my topic analysis into the clinical world, which I was not able to do in this dissertation; it would be important to see if my topic framework will permit a clinically-useful characterization of this discourse-pragmatic impairment. The second goal would help to clarify, more rigorously, what true “best practices” exist for eliciting everyday conversation for the purpose of understanding cognitive communication disorders.

7.5 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I hope that I have managed to suggest the importance of topic, as a metadiscursive and intuitive concept and as a grounded and motivated one, both of which provide a way to understand aspects of orientation to talk in interaction. Topic enables us to study aspects of interaction that are so natural, comfortable, and renewing to typical interactants,
but can be lost by individuals whose grasp of the linguistic, cognitive, and/or social resources intrinsic to orientation to topic is changing due to acquired cognitive communication disorder.

I hope too that I have highlighted the role that activity type plays in the emergence of topic, and how the activity types that I have called clinical discourse elicitation influence the collection of a “sample” of everyday conversation for the purposes of understanding discourse-pragmatic impairment.

Those who research, diagnose, and work to rehabilitate individuals who experience acquired cognitive communication disorders can and do help them to find their orientation to topic again, and to try to orient to one another in talk in interaction even as so much seems so disorienting. I hope that this discussion of topic, and of the contexts in which it emerges, is a small step on the path toward our orientation to language and communication disorientation.
APPENDIX A: SUMMARY OF CORPORA AND CITATIONS

Here I provide summative background information on the corpora that I examined in the chapters of this dissertation. Rather than organize the corpora as they were introduced sequentially by chapter, I will attempt to show, in outline form, how the corpora relate to one another. First I discuss TalkBank, which forms an umbrella for CABank (which contains the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English discussed in Chapter 3), AphasiaBank (which contains the corpus discussed in Chapter 4) and TBIBank (which contains the corpus discussed in Chapter 6). Then, I will separately discuss the Carolinas Conversations Collection, which I examined in Chapter 5. I conclude with two tables summarizing additional details.

The information given below is current as of March 2013, however the corpora are continually growing and changing. The best way for readers to become familiar with the corpora will be to explore the links in the table below.

**TalkBank.** TalkBank is a United States-based international, interdisciplinary project, funded by the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, spearheaded by Dr. Brian MacWhinney. Its goal is to foster research and collaboration by encouraging the sharing of language data and providing an accessible platform for doing so.

- **CABank.** CABank is a subarea of TalkBank, and contains eleven separate corpora that facilitate the analysis of everyday talk from a conversation-analytic perspective. 
  - *Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE).* This corpus was created by researchers in the linguistics department of the University of California at Santa Barbara, led by Dr. John Du Bois. Per the corpus description outlined on the homepage, the recordings represent samples of naturally occurring talk from diverse individuals living in the United States; some of this talk is what would be considered everyday conversation, while other talk bears some characteristics of institutional talk (tutoring sessions, workplace talk, lectures and sermons, etc.).

- **AphasiaBank.** AphasiaBank is one of three “clinical” subareas of TalkBank, and its goal is to promote research on evidence-based therapy for aphasia. Within AphasiaBank, seven languages are represented, and within the English group there are a variety of different types of data available; some data sets follow a protocol, devised to allow for comparison across sets, but other data sets include naturally occurring talk.
- **Oelschlaeger corpus.** This corpus was compiled by Dr. Mary Oelschlaeger and colleagues, leading to the publication of a number of papers that took a conversation-analytic approach to the study of aphasia. This corpus highlights the language use of a single individual with aphasia along with conversation partners including his wife.

- **TBIBank.** TBIBank is another of the three clinical subareas of TalkBank; it is newer than AphasiaBank, and growing rapidly. Currently there are five corpora within TBIBank, and similar to AphasiaBank, some of these follow a prescribed protocol while others do not.

- **Marshfield corpus.** This corpus was compiled by Dr. Lyn Turkstra and colleagues; it results from a research project whose aim was to determine the comparability of in-person and telehealth approaches to traumatic brain injury management. The corpus features a single speech-language pathologist and various participants with chronic brain injuries.

**CAROLINAS CONVERSATIONS COLLECTION (CCC).** The CCC aims to capture the language of older speakers across a diverse range of social identities and health concerns. The project is sponsored by the National Library of Medicine, the Medical University of South Carolina, and University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and led by Principal Investigators Dr. Boyd Davis and Dr. Charlene Pope. One cohort of participants is composed of individuals over age 65 with chronic health conditions, interviewed by clinical professionals and by community members. The second cohort are individuals over age 65 who have cognitive impairments (typically Alzheimer’s disease), interviewed by student researchers.

Summary table 1. Chapters and corpora

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>CORPUS DIRECTORY</th>
<th>HEALTH CONCERN</th>
<th>DATA TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>TalkBank &gt; SBCSAE</td>
<td>None; typical speakers</td>
<td>Audio only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>TalkBank &gt; AphasiaBank &gt; Oelschlaeger</td>
<td>Stroke/aphasia</td>
<td>Audio and video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Alzheimer’s disease</td>
<td>Audio only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>TalkBank &gt; TBIBank &gt; Marshfield</td>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
<td>Audio and video</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Summary table 2. Corpus access and citation information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Link to Homepage</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td><a href="http://carolinaconversations.musc.edu/about/">http://carolinaconversations.musc.edu/about/</a></td>
<td>Davis 2005a; 2005b; Pope and Davis 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

My aim, in incorporating excerpts of transcribed interaction, was to present the text in a way that would give readers a sense of the rhythm of the interaction, as much as would be immediately relevant to my analyses; also, and perhaps more importantly, I wanted the text to be accessible and easily readable. Thus, I attempted to be economical in my use of notations here, and almost all of the text is represented in standard orthography (with the exception of onomatopoeia and contractions in which a syllable is elided, e.g., gonna). The transcription conventions that I follow are primarily comprised of notations used by Tannen (1989), Schiffrin (1987), and Jefferson (1979).

[ ] overlapping speech
= continuous talk across transcript lines
- “false start” or truncated utterance
(.) brief pause (less than ½ second)
(..) longer pause (more than ½ second; pauses longer than 2 seconds are measured and listed)
“words” quotation or constructed dialogue
WORDS emphasis, louder volume
. final intonation
, continuing intonation
? rising intonation
! emphatic or animated intonation
ʔ glottal stop
: elongated syllable
HHH laughter
((words)) paralinguistic phenomena, nonverbal vocalizations, characterizations of vocal quality, researcher comments on interaction
/words/ uncertain transcription
xxx unintelligible speech
+ connection of a previously-discussed excerpt to a new excerpt

Most of the excerpts included in this dissertation are transcribed in a vertical format, in order to best illustrate the emergence of the interaction sequentially. Some excerpts, however, are transcribed in a column format in order to highlight some qualitative difference in the
contributions of the interactants (see ten Have 1999). In column transcriptions, the conventions I use are the same as those used for vertical format. In the leftmost column, I have placed the interactant who takes the first turn in the excerpt in question; I do not mean to imply that this interactant’s contributions are more important than the interactant in the right column. For further discussion of this issue, as well as others related to vertical, column, and partiture formats, see Edwards (2003).
REFERENCES


———. 1981. *Field methods of the project on linguistic change and variation*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.


