

# MANAGING SUBJECTIVITY IN TALK

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## INTRODUCTION

One of discursive psychology's key concerns has been the ways in which talk manages subject-object relations, or mind-world relations (Edwards 1997). Early interest focused on factual discourse (e.g., Edwards & Potter 1992; Potter 1996), the 'object side', but this was already part of a general interest in re-specifying psychological topics such as memory (Edwards & Middleton 1986; Edwards, Middleton & Potter 1992) and attitudes (Potter & Wetherell 1987), as practices performed in discourse and social interaction. The 'object side' issue was how, in producing versions of things and events, speakers (or writers of text) build the factual status or objectivity of what they are saying. That is to say, we examined how descriptions and accounts are produced as reflections of the things they are about. The 'subject side' is an integral part of those same practices of description and accountability. By working up the subjective status of an account, generally somebody else's account, its objectivity is undermined. Subjective or 'subject side' accounts are ones that reflect a speaker's 'stake and interest' in a topic (Edwards & Potter 1992).

It is important to emphasize that these are not inferences drawn by the analyst, that a given speaker or stretch of talk *actually is* subjective or objective. Rather, these are matters *attended to in the talk itself*. In the argot of ethnomethodology, they are members' concerns. The analytic task for discursive psychology (DP) has been to examine how, on what occasions, and in the service of what kinds of interactional practices, discourse handles and manages its objective and subjective bases. Increasingly, the major analytic resource for this project is conversation analysis (CA), although there is also a relevant linguistic-pragmatics literature on how stance, subjectivity, etc., are encoded in language, for example by the use of modal verbs (*ought, would, must*, etc.) and various subjunctives and conditionals. My aim in this chapter is to update our understanding of how subject-object relations are managed in talk-in-interaction, foregrounding how the 'subject side' is handled, and incorporating some recent empirical studies and work in progress.

To begin, we pick up the trail using a classic example from earlier discussions of 'stake and interest'. It is the infamous utterance during the 1963 Profumo trial, by 'call girl' Mandy Rice-Davies, when being cross-examined about her sexual relations with various British government ministers including John Profumo and Lord Astor, and also a member of the Russian military. The dialogue went something like this (from Edwards & Potter 1992: 117).<sup>1</sup>

### Extract 1

*Counsel:* Are you aware that Lord Astor denies any  
impropriety in his relationship with you?  
(0.8)  
*Rice-Davies:* Well he would wouldn't he  
*Jury, etc.:* ((prolonged laughter))

The point of Rice-Davies's response was that Astor had a clear motive to lie. Rather than taking that denial as objective (a reflection of factual reality), the force of her reply is that it should be taken as stemming from the subject side – a reflection of Astor's stake or interest in the matter. In factual discourse generally, establishing fact may require controlling for stake.

The Rice-Davies example is useful in that it contains another feature that was developed in subsequent DP work: the use of the modal *would* to formulate a *disposition* to act or talk in a particular way. The everyday reasoning here is related to 'script formulations'

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1 The segment of dialogue is taken from the 1989 feature film *Scandal*, directed by Michael Caton-Jones, that dramatized these events.

(Edwards 1995, 1997). Where there is a standard, predictable way of behaving, whether for anybody in that setting or for a particular person who generally acts that way, then whatever they do in accordance with that cultural or personal ‘script’ (in this case, Astor’s denial of impropriety) can be attributed to a *disposition* to talk or act that way. Again, the effect is to ‘subjectivize’ Astor’s testimony, rendering it a reflection of him (his interests, tendencies, or motives) rather than the truth.

DP has extended its analytical interest in how the ‘subject side’ is managed, beyond the operation of stake and interest in factual discourse, toward how psychological states generally, including dispositions of all kinds, are attended to as part of talk’s situated practices (Edwards 2004; Edwards & Potter 2005; Potter & Hepburn 2003). This includes extending the study of dispositional uses of modals such as *will*, *would*, and *going to* or *gonna*, as in “I’m not gonna hit an old lady” (Edwards, 2006a). However, I will focus here on two general, related themes: (1) how people handle their accountability for what they say in terms of dispositions to say it; and (2) how manner of vocal delivery, including intonation, laughter, and other nonverbal features of talk, handles a speaker’s subjective stance. The following sections review some work on those themes.

## MANAGING DISPOSITIONS TO SAY THINGS

The original DP theme for subjectivity (e.g., in the ‘DAM’ summary: Edwards & Potter 1992) was stake and interest, mainly in the sense of self-interest. But stake and interest are only part of a very broad range of kinds of investment that people may claim or deny, with regard to the content of what they say. More broadly, there is a range of common sense kinds of tendencies or *dispositions* to act or talk in particular ways, where dispositions can be emotional, cognitive, epistemic, moral, situational, or character-based. Retaining an interest in subject-object relations, I include here a range of ways in which speakers may show that they are *not disposed to get things wrong*. Dispositional ways of getting things wrong include being prone to tell tall stories, being prone to exaggerate, being prejudiced, and being paranoid or disposed to moan or complain. These are examples of research topics for DP where the task is to see how they work, not as indications of a speaker’s actual veracity or bias, but as actively managed practices of social interaction. I focus here on two general ways in which people may be at pains to manage subject-side dispositions: (1) by showing themselves as not disposed to make too much of things (e.g., to exaggerate, draw extraordinary inferences, etc.); (2) by showing themselves as reluctant to say negative things (e.g., to complain or criticize, or adopt a prejudiced position).

### ***Not disposed to say too much***

Various studies have taken up a theme first developed by Harvey Sacks regarding the practice of ‘doing being ordinary’ (Sacks 1984). Often this amounts to displaying oneself as not prone to tell tall stories, nor to experience and report extraordinary events, nor over interpret mundane events as extraordinary: “You cannot have a nervous breakdown because you happened to see an automobile accident. You cannot make much more of it than what anybody would make of it” (ibid.: 427). Subsequent work by Jefferson (2004) built on Sacks’s observations of an “at first I thought... and then I realized...” device for the presentation of extraordinary witnessings. An initial case was the recurrence, in witnessings of what turned out to be the assassination of president Kennedy, of accounts such as “I heard a noise that I thought was a backfire of one of the motorcycle policemen” (ibid.: 134). Wooffitt (1991) found systematic use of the related device, “I was just doing mundane X, when extraordinary Y happened” in reports of supernatural experiences.

One major thing that these devices do, is manage subjectivity in the course of relating a potentially dubious factual account. They attend to the notion that what is being claimed is/was in the world, and not in the speaker's head or imagination, nor in any disposition to tell a tall tale (see also Edwards & Fasulo, 2006, on uses of the expression "to be honest"). Rather, the reporter is brought off as disposed to see ordinary things, and to assume ordinary explanations. These and related devices can be called *counter-dispositionals*, in that they provide ways of managing a report's potential subjectivity, including its stake or interest. In implying a disposition to see things as ordinary, for example, a speaker counters the notion that they might be disposed to see, imagine or infer those things that they are claiming to have witnessed. Indeed, the very use of the device displays a sensitivity to normal, rational accountability not only there and then at the time of the witnessing, but here and now on the occasion of its telling.

Another range of practices, somewhat echoing what is involved in recounting extraordinary experiences, involves saying things in extreme ways: that is, the use of what Pomerantz (1986) termed 'extreme case formulations' (ECFs for short). ECFs are descriptions and assessments that include extreme, ultimate, or end-of-the-continuum expressions such as *never, always, brand new, everybody, the best, and nobody*. They maximize the quality or state of affairs to which they are attached, generally when there are grounds (as with recounting unusual experiences) for expecting an unsympathetic hearing. A subsequent study of ECFs (Edwards, 2000) explored how their users handle the 'subject side' possibility, relevant when using ECFs, of being heard to exaggerate, go to extremes, or again as Sacks put it, "make much more of it than what anybody would make of it" (Sacks 1984: 427). So ECFs provide another context in which speakers may work at being not disposed to get things wrong: "ECFs are factually brittle, in that an extreme or universalizing statement ('I know nothing,' 'nobody comes here,' 'you always say that') risks easy refutation by a single exception, invites being taken nonliterally, and may be treated as an index of the speaker's attitude (subjectivity) rather than as a straightforward description of the world" (Edwards 2000: 352).

Three ways of handling the subject side of ECFs were identified: (1) the use of 'softeners', where extreme expressions are qualified, often under some kind of challenge;<sup>2</sup> (2) the use of ECFs *as* expressions of investment, where subjective investment, rather than undermining truth or objectivity, is part of a display of sincerity, genuineness, or affiliation;<sup>3</sup>

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2 ECF softeners are analysed for the interactional work they do: "ECF softeners work by (a) providing for a sequential response to a challenge; (b) indexing the speaker as reasonable, taking account of empirical realities, not making excessive claims; and (c) retaining the generalizing work that ECFs perform while being immune from easy rebuttal by countercases" (Edwards 2000: 359).

3 For example, L and C are talking about C's young daughter Megan in the aftermath of a family bereavement:

1 C: She's been very helpful  
 2 (0.2)  
 3 L: Oh: ↓good. An' she's ↑comp'ny for you isn' [she.  
 4 C: [Oh she i:s.  
 5 Ye[s.  
 6 L: [Grea↑:t [↓comp'ny.  
 7 C: → [Definitely ye[:s.  
 8 L: [Mm[:n.  
 9 C: [Ye::s,

(Holt:88U:2:4:10–11, from Edwards 2000: 362).

With the ECF "definitely yes" (line 7), C upgrades her own prior "Yes" (line 5), highlighting not only what Megan is like, but also the act and extent of affiliation between L and C. The choice of

(3) ironic and other ‘nonliteral’ uses of ECFs, in which, again, the extremity of ECFs is used as a resource, rather than a threat to their objectivity. Ironic uses and their receipts are often accompanied by laughter but, in any case, all these ways of handling subjectivity are produced interactionally.

Extract 2 is a brief example (see Edwards 2000: 366). Mary (M) and Jeff (J) are a couple in their first session of relationship counselling. A counsellor is also present.

Extract 2 (DE-JF:C1:S1:9-10)

1 → M: 'cos ↑you think I'm the wor:st ↓person on this  
 2 ↑plan[↓et. (.) At the mo]ment.= ((*plaintively*))  
 3 J: [ ↑No ↓I do:n't,]  
 4 J: =That's not fai:r, no- (.) I ↓don't,  
 5 M: °That's what you've been telling me.°  
 6 → J: Hheh heh.

Mary's turn at lines 1 and 2 deploys the ECF “the worst person on this planet” in an ironic characterization of Jeff's opinion of her. The irony is signalled initially by the relativizing, counterfactual quotative “↑you think”, with its individualizing, contrastive emphasis on “↑you”. But irony is also conveyed by the ECF's sheer implausibility as factual description; there are presumably worse people on the planet than Mary, even in Jeff's eyes. The softener “at the moment” (line 2) comes just after she starts to hear Jeff's overlapping denial (line 3). The irony of Mary's ECF is hearable in how she vocalizes that assessment: it is mostly delivered at the top of her normal pitch range, and is plaintively delivered – I will return to the details of that vocal delivery in the second part of this chapter. The irony is picked up in Jeff's denials (lines 3-4) and laughter (line 6). Note some significant details here: Jeff's denial is not outright (e.g., “I never said that”), but attends precisely to Mary's ECF as excessive (“that's not fair”). Further, his laughter (line 6) is minimal and constrained, sounding more like an appreciation of Mary's heavy irony, rather than ridiculing her distress; he is offering a bit of laughter with, rather than at her.<sup>4</sup>

### *Not disposed to be negative*

Another context for subjectivity-handling expressions, in addition to showing oneself as not disposed to make too much of things, is displaying oneself as reluctant to make negative inferences, or to talk on the basis of prejudice rather than observation or sound judgement. There is some overlap here, in that showing oneself as ‘not disposed to be negative’ may also involve the use and softening of ECFs. As we have noted, factual claims can be grounded by offering them as *counter-dispositional*: as reluctantly arrived at, or even precisely counter, not only to what others may think, but also to one's own presumptions and biases (Edwards 2003: cf. Potter 1996, on “stake inoculation”). It is a way of denying that you believe what it suits you to believe, or what you believed before you looked – that is, of attending to a possible accusation of pre-judgment or prejudice.

Extract 3 is a fragment from an interview conducted by Margaret Wetherell in New Zealand, at the time of a controversial rugby tour by the then apartheid-practicing South Africa. It is taken from Edwards (2003).

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“definitely” rather than, say, “perfect (company),” attends directly to the *certainty of the assessment* (subject-side) rather than of the qualities being assessed in Megan (object-side).

4 All of these analytical remarks are based on hearing the audio recording, and some are only partially embodied in what the transcript shows. Intonation and voice quality are topics picked up later in the chapter. On the analysis of laughter *at* versus *with*, see Glenn (1995), and Jefferson (1984).

### Extract 3 (Interview 2: 20)

1 R: Uhm (1.2) I would li:ke to see apartheid done  
2 away with  
3 (1.0)  
4 R: but can anybody come up with  
5 a- [a (.) positive way of saying "This is how=  
6 I: [Mm mhm  
7 R: =it can be done"  
8 I: Mm mhm  
9 R: It's all very well to turn round and say "Give  
10 em a vote"  
11 I: Yes  
12 R: I mean the majority of them (1.0) don't know  
13 what a vote is

The target expression is "I would like to see" (line 1). The notion being offered is that the interviewee is not promoting the retention of apartheid out of any kind of preference or liking for it but, rather, his recommendations are counter-dispositional. He would *like* it done away with, if only that were realistic. Apartheid, then, is a solution reluctantly arrived at.<sup>5</sup> Note how the production of R's conclusion as reluctantly and rationally grounded is contrasted with how he characterizes advocates of full democracy: their recommendation to "give em a vote" is something they, somewhat unaccountably, "turn round and say" (line 9).

Another rich arena for displays of reluctance to be negative is when people are making complaints (which, again, often involve the use of ECFs: Pomerantz 1986). Complainers generally attend to their motives or grounds for the complaint, as an integral part of the complaint's production (Drew 1998). In addition to building the complaint's objectivity (its evidential basis, corroboration, etc.), this involves attending to its possible subjectivity. Complaints may be built as not stemming from any disposition on the complainer's part, to complain or moan (Edwards 2005). Indeed, there is a collection of common sense ways of lexicalizing such dispositions: *moan, whinge, harp on, go on and on*, etc., just as there are words for other dispositional reasons for speaking (*racism, sexism, paranoia, boasting, axe-grinding*, etc.). The sheer existence of these terms indicates subjectivity-management as a members' concern.

Complaints involve some kind of grievance or transgression, often against the complainer, which immediately makes relevant the complaint's possibly motivated, or dispositional, basis. Yet 'subjectivity' is not simply a threat to a complaint's factual grounding. It may also enhance factuality and seriousness, and be oriented-to in that way by recipients, by signalling how aggrieved, long-suffering, and *non*-disposed to complaining, the complainer may be. Making a complaint is not a matter, therefore, of simply deleting or playing down its subject-side basis but, rather, of handling and managing it to best effect. Ways of handling the subject-side of complaints (see Edwards 2005) include: (1) announcements, in which an upcoming complaint is projected in ways that signal the complainer's stance or attitude; (2) laughter accompanying the complaint announcement, and/or its subsequent delivery and receipt; (3) displacement, where the speaker complains about something incidental to what would be expected to be the main offence; and (4) uses of lexical descriptions such as 'moan' and 'whinge' that formulate subjectivity, investment, and a disposition to complain. Extract 4, from a domestic telephone call between Lesley and Joyce, includes an 'announcement'.

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5 Interview data are not optimal for studying the practices of everyday talk, given that interviewing caters for interactional practices of its own. In this case, the speaker may be orienting to the interviewer's presumed sensibilities on these issues, as a social science researcher otherwise unknown to him, or indeed to the interviewer's talk, actions and reactions before and during the interview.

Extract 4 (Holt:C85:4:2)

- 1 L: → °Oh:.° .hh Yi-m- You ↓know I-I- I'm broiling about  
 2 something hhhheh[heh .hhhh  
 3 J: [Wha::t.  
 4 L: Well that sa↓:le. (0.2) at- at (.) the vicarage.  
 5 (0.6)  
 6 J: Oh ↓ye[:s,  
 7 L: [.t  
 8 (0.6)  
 9 L: u (.) ihYour friend 'n mi:ne wz there

Lesley's expression "I'm broiling about something" announces an upcoming complaint, the substance of which is not yet provided in the extract. As Drew (1998) notes with regard to this sequence, the announcement formulates the complainer's sense of grievance, which is a canonical component of complaints:

Reporting in this way their emotional response—their sense of grievance—enables complainants to characterize how far the other's behavior has caused offense. In this respect it may be noted that these expressions of indignation are formed as first person assessments, for example, as "I was so angry," "w'l tha tee:d me o::ff," rather than as generalized assessments (in the form "it was so . . .")" (Drew 1998: 311).

Edwards (2005) examines the same extract, focusing particularly on the way Lesley delivers her announcement:

The term *broiling* metaphorically signals a particularly strong reaction to an event that turns out to be a person saying to her at a vicarage jumble sale, somewhat teasingly, "hhello Lesley, (.) ↑still trying to buy something f' nothing"... [The] extract contains, already in the announcement section, some orientation to the possibility that Lesley might be heard to be making rather much of a small event. Specifically, there is the laughter in line 2. Combined with the metaphor "broiling", this is hearable as Lesley announcing an upcoming complaint whose possibly ironic, even comical features, and her proposal not to be taking it too seriously, are projected in how the announcement is delivered. Lesley... manages to provide a sense of... being truly aggrieved, while not making too much of it. Again all of this is accomplished, or at least projected, along with the further ironic remark "Your friend 'n mi:ne" (line 9), prior to the complaint itself being told. (Edwards 2005: 11)

I will return to the use of laughter and other vocal inflexions later in this chapter, but first let us note something about the term *moaning*, not only as a concept that invokes a person's *disposition* to complain, but as a term used in talk-in-interaction. Here are four separate examples from Edwards (2005).

- (1) Les: .hh She wz moaning on about m-me:: an:' (.)  
 m:oaning on about him'n oh  
 (2) Ann: it's ↑just ev'ryday thi:ngs she's moaning about.  
 (3) Ann: I >thought'w'l< if I go out she prob'ly gonna  
 start moa:nin' about somethin' ↑else.  
 (4) Mac: he wz (.) ↓moaning about som'ing else I can't  
 ↓remembe:r,

In each case, and typically, the object of the verb *moan* is something vague or indefinite (examples 2-4), or absent altogether (example 1). The effect is of an essentially *intransitive* kind of complaining, an activity done by, and indexical of, the complainer, rather than something caused by a specifically complainable event or circumstance. The phrase “start moa:ning” (example 3) works in the same way as “moaning on” (example 1), implying a sustained activity being embarked upon, rather than a specifically targeted complaint. Attention is drawn away from whatever specific object or activity was complained of, to the activity of complaining itself, and the complainer’s disposition to complain. Whereas complainers work to objectify their complaints, and work against any notion that their complaining might be dispositional, reporters of complaints, and in particular complainees, can counter them by doing just the opposite: working up their subject-side dispositional basis such that complaints become whinges or moans.

## INTONATION, VOICE QUALITY AND LAUGHTER

Analysis of some of the features examined in the previous section was postponed for treatment here. In actual talk-in-interaction, lexical descriptions and assessments are produced inseparably from *how they are spoken*. Through manner of vocal delivery, speakers display subjectivity or stance with regard to what they are saying but, unlike with lexical content, this is only partially or grossly represented in transcripts, while analysis itself is based on the audio recordings. Despite that, the Jefferson system transcripts used for CA do provide substantial details of interaction-relevant vocal delivery that are absent from standard typists’ transcripts, and have provided the basis for detailed studies of the interactional uses of laughter (Jefferson, 1985), and various extensions to the system to include features such as body movements (e.g., Goodwin 1986; Heath 1986), applause (Atkinson 1984), and crying (Hepburn 2004). Further additions have been usefully incorporated into CA from phonetics (e.g., Kelly & Local 1989; Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996; Ogden 2001; Hellermann 2003). There is space here for only a glimpse of how vocal delivery displays subject-side or disposition-managing features of talk, but this is an area of increasing analytical importance and convergence between CA, nonverbal social interaction, DP and linguistics.

### *Intonation and subjectivity*

Returning to extract 2, we focus now on intonation, and in particular Mary’s pitch movement in lines 1-2.

#### Extract 2 Revisited

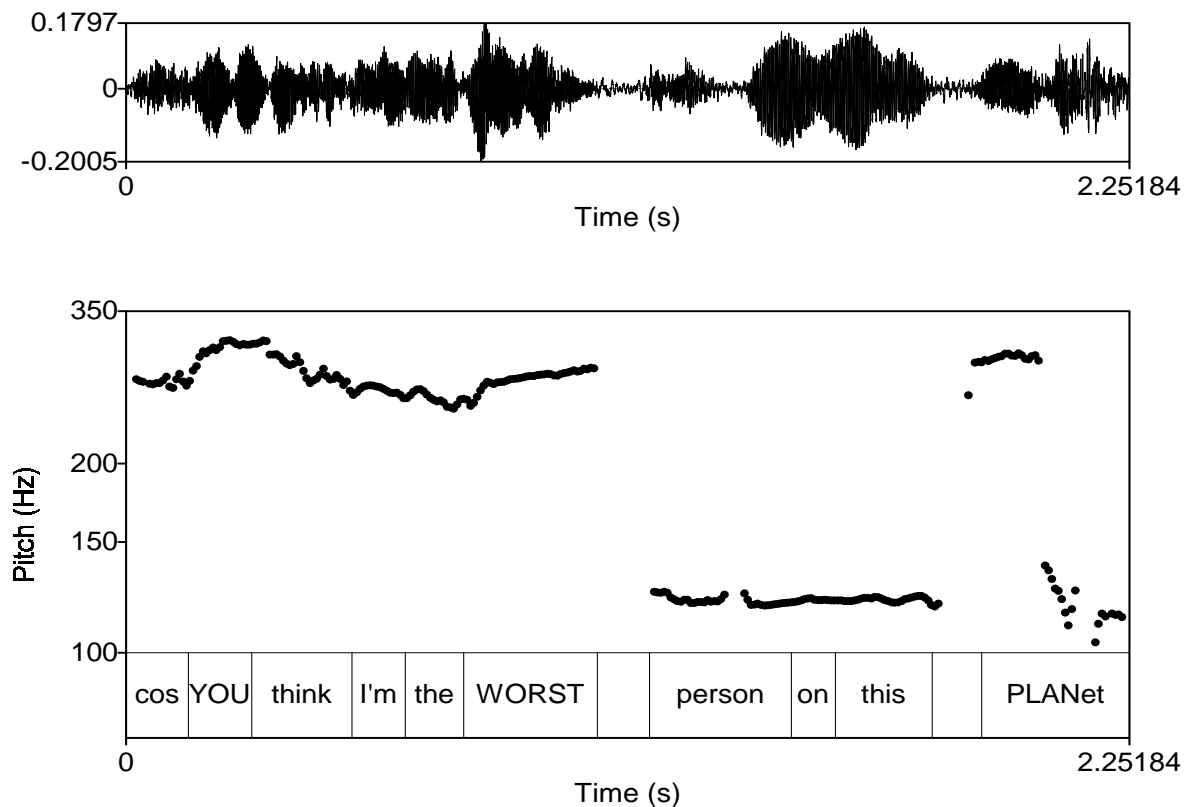
1 → M: ‘cos ↑you think I’m the wor:st ↓person on this  
 2 ↑plan[↓et. (.) At the mo]ment.= ((plaintively))

As Figure 1 shows, Mary’s intonational movement during the expression “cos you think I’m the worst person on this planet” travels close to the top and bottom of her talking pitch range during this session. There is marked pitch movement on *you* and on the ECFs *worst* and *planet* (which I take to be an extreme equivalent to ‘the whole world’), which is also where her vocal emphasis is subjectively heard.<sup>6</sup> The transcription gloss “plaintively” (line 2) characterizes the relatively quiet, but highly modulated manner of Mary’s talk at this point. “Poor little me” would also describe it quite well, normatively and subjectively. Clearly, any descriptive gloss of that kind interprets and categorizes Mary’s speech, like all descriptions

6 It is pitch movement rather than amplitude (volume) per se, that generally corresponds to subjectively heard rhythm and emphasis (Cruttenden 1997). Note, for instance, the heavy amplitude through “-son on this”, which is not heard nor marked in the transcript as stressed.

do, in a defeasible, potentially objectionable, and indefinitely extendible way. What the amplitude variations in the speech pressure waveform and the pitch trace do, is show least part of the basis on which such interpretative impressions are founded, and on which Jeff's hearing, as well as mine, must be based (cf. Local & Walker, forthcoming).

**Figure 1:** Speech pressure waveform (upper graph) and pitch trace (lower graph) for the worst person on the planet. Produced by 'Praat' software (Boersma & Weenink 2004).



Still missing from the graphs, of course, is Mary's particular voice quality, even if we were to add further details such as a spectrogram and speech formants (which are also available using the software that produced figure 1), along with facial expressions and body movements. However, the point of figure 1 is that speech carries, in its vocal quality and manner of delivery, a range of somewhat measurable and analysable, but in any case hearable, features via which the speaker conveys subjective stance or 'attitude' toward the content of what they are saying. The key, however, is not pitch height and movement in themselves, but their sequential placement within an unfolding social interaction, and with regard to talk's content: "pitch height does not function as an isolated, decontextualized display. Instead it becomes visible as a specific, meaningful event, by virtue of the way in which it is embedded within a particular sequence of action" (Goodwin & Goodwin 2000: 242).

There is a growing body of work on phonetic and intonational features of speech, that seeks integration with CA's approach to talk as the sequentially organized production of social actions (see, for example, Couper-Kuhlen & Ford 2004). Some of that work links sound patterns to 'attitude' and emotional expression in everyday talk (Local & Walker, forthcoming), and aims to ground interpretative glosses of the meaning of participants' vocal

delivery and reactions (e.g. Freese & Maynard 1998; Goodwin & Goodwin 2000) in measurable phonetic features of talk. Much of the wider literature on emotional expression, however, relies on normative linguistic examples or psychological experiments (e.g., Cowie & Cornelius 2003) rather than studies of interactional, everyday talk.

The problem remains, even in studies that integrate phonetics, gestures and a CA approach to talk, of how nonverbal expressions and speech characteristics should be analytically described. That is to say, the descriptive language used by analysts is largely, and properly, the range of normative, vernacular expressions available to anyone for describing attitudinal and emotional states. But these are, in the first place, the terms of reference for defeasible, alternative, action-oriented, members' accounts. Furthermore, vernacular languages differ in their 'emotionology' and other psychological vocabularies (Lutz 1988; Edwards 1997), so it is not clear how the description of talk's 'attitudinal' content, outside of participant's own descriptions, should best be done. Interestingly, Local and Walker (forthcoming) suggest that, when emotional or attitudinal states are formulated by participants themselves in the course of social interaction – that is, when they say things such as “you sound happy” – these formulations may occur in the absence of any measurable acoustic features of the other person's speech, to warrant them.

### ***Voice modulation and subjective expression***

Speakers may also modulate their vocal delivery as a conventionally understandable index of a particular subjective, experiential stance on what they are reporting. Stokoe and Hepburn (2005) describe a phenomenon they call 'intonational mirroring'. When neighbours complain about each other, or report suspicious activities (for example, a possible case of child abuse), one of the things they report on are vocal noises, particularly parents shouting and children crying. Through voice quality, co-ordinated with their talk's lexical content, the reporter can signal a subject-side stance or 'take' on the matter. For example someone whose neighbour had complained about her children's noise produced a counter-complaint about the complainer's own noisiness: “>all of a sudden< (0.4) ban:g bang bang”. The initial phrase “>all of a sudden<” was delivered hurriedly (as shown by the markers > and <). The second part “ban:g bang bang” was given increased amplitude and emphasis, mirroring the banging noises themselves. In contrast, her own direct-reported disciplinary comment to her children, “don't oplay”, was reported notably quieter (marked by the degree signs), with the lower volume located precisely on the contentious activity “oplay”. The volume drops again when quoting her children's response: “owell<sup>o</sup> (0.3) we were ↑on'y playin.” (ibid.: 653).

One interesting feature of Stokoe and Hepburn's analysis is how these kinds of features of vocal delivery, along with the talk's content, was relevant to the talk's major interactional business and setting. It helped signal whether they were making a complaint (e.g., they were irritated by all the noise), or else expressing a concern (as in a report of child abuse). The wider relevance of intonation mirroring is shown across differences between the two corpuses of data used in the study: neighbour complaints on the phone to a mediation centre, and a collection of child abuse helpline calls. Voice modulation, and vocal mirroring, permit various kinds of alignment and misalignment with, or subject-side stance on, the activities being reported.

Extract 5 is a brief example from one of the child abuse helpline calls (ibid.: 666). The tilde signs ~ (in line 9) mark the start and end of 'wobbly voice', which is talk on the verge of crying (Hepburn 2004).

#### Extract 5

- 1 CPO: D.hh all ↓ri:ght then so e- w- ↑what was your  
 2 concerns a↓bout these children.  
 3 Cal: R:right. Erm I think it's er:: (0.2) jus one

4           o' their childre:n, (0.2)  
5 CPO:       Mm:[:.]  
6 Cal:       [E:]m:: (0.2) I think she's bein locked in  
7           a room:, (0.3)  
8 CPO:       Tch ri:gh[t,]  
9 Cal: →       [E]n she- an her ~crie::s~ (0.3) are  
10           really distressin:.

The authors note that “The caller’s voice becomes ‘wobbly’ ... or tremulous at *exactly* the point where she is formulating the noise” (Stokoe & Hepburn 2005: 658), and cite other examples: “cry:ing,=an ~screa:ming,~ °khhum°h”, where wobbly voice, emphasis, elongation and extra aspiration (breathiness) were notably characteristic of the child abuse reports. Given that children crying might also be the basis of a straightforward noise complaint, the specific vocal inflexions found in the child abuse reports helped specify *that kind* of crying as abuse-relevant, rather than irritating and complaint-relevant. The accompanying description “really distressin:” (line 10) further specifies the nature of the cries via their effect on the speaker’s mental state (Potter & Hepburn, in press), rather than via a description of the crying itself. So the object-side of the account (the reported crying) is characterized for the practical purposes of the report (describing abuse to a help line), in terms of its subject-side effects (distressing), and via its precisely located vocalization (wobbly voice and rise-fall modulation on “~crie::s~”). Through indexing how the talk’s context should be empathically heard and understood, this kind of subject-side reporting and voicing offers a kind of re-experiencing of the events themselves, for the benefit of the person hearing the account, that can stand in place of any more concrete evidencing of what actually happened. It renders contentious events inter-subjective, as just precisely what they are reported to have been.

In a very different kind of interactional context, Wiggins (2002) explores vocal features of food appreciation during family meal times: specifically, the occurrence of “gustatory *mmms*”, defined as “(a) accompanying eating or talk about food and drink (or both) and (b) hearably evaluative in a positive direction” (ibid.: 315).<sup>7</sup> Wiggins notes that “intonation and sequential features of *mmm* are seen as essential to the construction of pleasure as an immediate and spontaneous, but descriptively vague experience. The gustatory *mmm* also expresses a particularly embodied sense of pleasure” (ibid.: 311). The key feature of the analysis is that these ostensibly spontaneous bodily expressions of pleasure figure, not as direct non-verbal indications of speakers’ current bodily and mental states, but as occasioned, functional tokens of social interaction whose interpreted status *as* direct, spontaneous, bodily signals is precisely what they are used socially to convey (cf. the status of emotional expressions in narrative accounts: Edwards 1997, 1999). As Wiggins notes, people do not generally emit gustatory noises with each mouthful of food. Gustatory *mmms* are therefore akin to descriptions and evaluations, in that they are optional, varied, relevant, functional, and to be examined on a “why this now?” basis. They occur as conventional, precision-timed and sequentially occasioned tokens of social interaction (cf. laughter in Jefferson 1985, and the ‘change of state token’ *oh* in Heritage 1984, 1998). Rather than subjective experience lying outside of, beyond, or behind the ‘surface’ of talk-in-interaction (cf. Edwards 2006b), we find it here under active management within talk-in-interaction itself, integrated into the interactional flow of meaningful sounds, signs, words and actions, and yet used precisely for its status – that is, its conventional, semiotic status – as embodied expression, spontaneous, and somewhat beyond words.

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7       Gustatory *mmms* are distinct in their intonational contour (typically longer, and with greater and more varied pitch modulation) than other conversational uses of ‘mm’ (Gardner 1997), and in their sequential placement and interactional consequences.

Extract 6 provides a simple example of Wiggins’s analysis, in which gustatory *mmms* are shown to occur, not merely as randomly vocalized expressions of bodily pleasure, but as interactionally relevant utterances precision-timed at transition relevance places (TRPs – Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974).

Extract 6 SKW/D2b–M4 (132–142) (Wiggins 2002: 319).

1 (6.0)  
 2 Anna: a sausag:e ↑Simon  
 3 Simon: → mm↑m:: (0.4) >no thank you<  
 4 Michael: uh- (.) uh::  
 5 [ >(anybody else want) cranberry ↓sauce<  
 6 Jenny: [ °yeah (0.4) I’ll get-°  
 7 Simon: → mm↑m[m  
 8 Jenny: [I’ll have a ↑little bit of cranberry  
 9 sauce (.) °please- >thank you<°  
 10 Michael: >°there you ↑go°<  
 11 Simon: → mm↑mm: (0.6) nice  
 12 (2.8)

Wiggins notes that the *mmms*’ precision-timed placement within the conversational flow signals Simon’s orientation to the talk, and also his inability to contribute more fully to it: “his *mmm* on line 3 displays to Anna that he is attending to food currently being eaten, given that this is articulated first, and followed by a brief pause. The repeated and emphasized *mmm* expressions (lines 7 and 11) continue to demonstrate his engagement with the food. By drawing attention to his consumption in this way, he is also signalling to other speakers that he is unlikely to talk in more depth. This is particularly supported by the speeded up “no thank you” on line 3” (Wiggins 2002: 319).

The most thoroughly explored vocal inflexion, within studies of talk-in-interaction, is laughter (e.g., Jefferson, Sacks & Schegloff, 1987; Glenn 2003). I do not propose to review that work here, except to note its relevance to the theme of *subjectivity management*. We have seen some brief examples of laughter in the extracts already reviewed. Again, the key feature of these studies is the way that laughter works inside talk-in-interaction, and with regard to talk’s content and sequentially organized social actions. It is a phenomenon far larger than just a spontaneous response to wit or humour, even without taking a Freudian view of the topic (Billig 2005). Let us briefly consider again, the opening lines of extract 4.

Extract 4 (revisited)

1 L: → °Oh:.° .hh Yi-m- You ↓know I-I- I’m broiling about  
 2 something hhhheh[heh .hhhh  
 3 J: [Wha::t.

Lesley is announcing an forthcoming complaint about how she was slighted at a vicarage jumble sale by a man of whom she and Joyce, to whom she is speaking on the telephone, have had previous acquaintance. Rather than signalling that she has just said something funny, Lesley’s laughter in line 2 is part of a range of features of her talk that project and handle just how seriously she (and later Joyce, in affiliation with Lesley) is taking the matter. The laughter manages the notion that Lesley may be making too much of a small thing. It proposes a subject-side characterization of her as essentially cheerful, not given to complaining, while also setting up the forthcoming story as somewhat entertaining. While her words speak of the seriousness of the offence (“I’m broiling about something”), her immediate laughter, just at that point, signals not merely that it is not so bad after all, but rather, that she is disposed to make light of it. This echoes Jefferson (1984) on how laughter can be used to make light of matters in troubles-telling; Hepburn (2004) notes the opposite effect with crying. In interactional terms, Lesley is providing Joyce with cues as to what kind of story is to be told,

and how to hear and react. Somewhat counter-intuitively, laughter produced as part of a complaint can have the effect of enhancing rather than diminishing the complaint's seriousness and objectivity, precisely by displaying the complaint as counter-dispositional; the complainer is not disposed to make heavy weather of it (Edwards 2005).

## CONCLUSION

Analysing how speakers handle “subject-side” considerations, as a practical concern when speaking, is part of a general analytical preoccupation with how subject-object relations are managed in everyday talk. Often we find subject-side and object-side accounts in opposition, where subjectivity of various kinds (stake, prejudice, ulterior motives, etc.) is treated as a threat to a report's objectivity, reliability or truth. Sometimes they work in unison, particularly where motives and other dispositions are offered as running counter to the speaker's claims – *counter-dispositionals* – but also where the proposed disposition is something such as sincerity, honesty or a tendency to speak plainly. Counter-dispositionals are themselves dispositionals, but ones that run counter to the speaker's adherence to whatever they are saying is true or real. So, as we noted for complaints, a complaint's objectivity can be undermined by building the complainer's disposition to moan or whinge, or its objectivity can be enhanced by providing a counter-disposition (e.g., being long-suffering, stoical, generous-spirited, happy, etc.). What we have called “stake and interest” (Edwards & Potter 1992) is a particular kind of dispositional consideration relevant to factual claims; “stake inoculation” (Potter 1996) is a counter-dispositional practice in which the producer of a possibly dubious factual claim prefaces it with a self-characterization as pre-disposed to see things differently.

The general domain in which these practices can be located is that of everyday rational accountability, considered as a speaker's ordinary, pervasive orientation (Garfinkel 1967). This is in contrast, say, to how people might justify themselves when formally called upon to do so, such as in a court of law or an interview, although those cases are also readily analysable as further cases in point – that is, special cases of how rational accountability is interactively managed in talk. As Pomerantz (1984) has shown, reasons and bases for saying things are analysable as sequentially organized, actual and occasioned practices performed in the course of speaking. This is quite different from their usual status in psychology, where reasons for speaking figure as theorized mental entities lying behind, beyond, or causally prior to, actually speaking; or indeed in psychotherapy, where reasons and bases for saying things may figure as matters to be inferred, on some expert basis, from what people say and do not say.

Looking at reasons and bases for saying things as a *practical speaker's concern* means that we are not asking the psychological question, “why do people say things?” Rather, we are asking: “what are the practices by which people handle the idea that they may be saying things for a reason?”<sup>8</sup> Although this contrasts with the “psychological” question, psychology's way of asking the question has its own practical, and studiable, occasions. It is, after all, part of talk's everyday common sense accountability that people may avow or attribute reasons for saying things, and psychology decontextualizes and reifies that notion, as a matter of mental states lying behind talk. Psychotherapy, for example, is analysable as a set of practices-in-talking in which precisely that kind of accountability is systematically acted

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8 Cf. Sacks on how to study comprehension and intersubjectivity: “instead of saying ‘Let's find a way of seeing whether people understand what somebody else says,’ we've asked ‘Is there some procedure *people use* which has as its product a *showing* that they heard and understood?’” (Sacks 1992 vol.2: 30-31, emphases added).

out and brought off (see, for examples: Gale 1991; Morris & Chenail 1995; Siegfried 1995; Fasulo 1997; Antaki 2001). The pervasive, everyday relevance of “reasons for speaking” arises out of the facts that: (1) nobody need say anything, nor anything in particular; and (2) something being the case is never a sufficient reason for saying it (although it may well be offered *as* the reason). Nevertheless, there are special arenas of social life where doubt and dispute, or motivated bases of saying things, are themes endemic to the setting – not only psychotherapy and counselling, but also court rooms, police interrogations, and various kinds of family and neighbourhood mediation. These are also arenas that are currently under investigation for how subject-object relations feature as essential considerations in how those institutional settings work (Edwards & Potter 2001).

A familiar objection to discursive psychology and conversation analysis, among other studies of language-based practices, is that their focus on talk, or discourse, omits important things such as the broader contextual setting, and the nature of embodied experience and subjectivity (e.g., Parker & Burman 1993; Hollway & Jefferson 2000). There is a sense that language, or talk-in-interaction, is to be found only at the surface of things, and that inferences of a different kind need to be made, in order to get at what is going on below the surface. Nobody is claiming that discourse is all there is. However, the rush toward theorizing about context and subjectivity is being done without close attention to what is available on the surface. The surface turns out to be unexpectedly rich (Edwards 2006b) – I acknowledge my rhetorical use of the counter-dispositional “unexpectedly” – and full of members’ orientations to the relevance of the setting, along with the active management of subject-side considerations relevant to what they are saying. In our experience of the physical world, from which we derive the metaphors “surface” and “depth”, going below the surface of things merely reveals more surfaces to examine – whether under the sea, beneath the skin or under the skull. As Wittgenstein (1958) cogently argued, and also Garfinkel (1967; cf. Coulter 1990), and in a different way the perceptual psychologist Gibson (1979), the surface is what members themselves are actually seeing and dealing with. To the extent that subjectivity is part of social life, and relevant to language and social interaction (the practices of inter-subjectivity), it has to be made available in mutually understandable ways. There are no private languages. Increasingly, the study of talk-in-interaction reveals the richly detailed and orderly “surface” workings of social interaction, including gesture and voice quality as well as lexical language. It is here that we find contextual relevance and (inter)subjectivity under active management in the course of social practices in ways that are essentially, and necessarily, publicly performed, and by dint of that, and *in terms of* that, recordable and analysable.

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