A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS APPROACH TO CONFLICT IN STUDENT-LECTURER TALK

by

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INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis is an expanding discipline in social psychology which focuses on people's talk in interaction. Like the approach endorsed by discourse analysis, conversation analysis (or CA) is concerned with accounting for the ways in which coherence and sequential organisation in conversation (or discourse) are produced and understood. However, CA differs from discourse analysis by being a rigorously empirical practise, making use of inductive methods of analysis to find recurring patterns across a large corpus of transcribed conversations, and not relying on intuitive judgements, or focusing on a single piece of text in order to find out "what is really going on." (Levinson, 1983).

Conversation analysis can trace its roots to a number of other areas of research, among which include: speech act theory, (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) in which the theory that utterances are used in order to do things as well as providing information or being merely descriptive. This was the central idea which led to the creation of the resulting system of felicity conditions and their subsequent classification; the co-operative principle (Grice, 1975; 1978) in which four maxims of co-operation can be broken by invoking conversational implicature; and ethnomethodology: (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984) "the study of ordinary people's methods...used for producing and making sense of everyday social life" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, despite having grown from earlier theories, CA takes an original perspective by concentrating on conversations at the "micro" level, typically studying a number of instances of a recurring phenomenon and trying to elucidate its properties. Models of turn taking (Sacks et al., 1974), adjacency pairs, and preference organisation (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) have provided conversational analysts with "tools" in order to examine more complex phenomena e.g. account giving (Heritage, 1984), newsmarks (Heath, 1992), "footing" (Goffman, 1981) and "fishing" (Pomerantz, 1980).

One expanding area of CA is the analysis of conversations in institutional settings e.g. hospitals, schools and prisons. Institutional talk usually has interesting properties such as
the placing of constraints on the participants, inferential frameworks which are particular
to institutions and orientation of participants to tasks associated with the institution
(Levinson, 1992). Conversation analysis in institutional settings has focused on the lexical
choices made by speakers (Waitkin, 1985), the participants’ design of their turn (Heritage
and Sefi, 1992), structural and sequential organisation (Silverman, 1987; Zimmerman,
1992) and interactional asymmetries (Markova and Foppa, 1991). It is the latter area
which I intend to concentrate on here. I use the term “interactional asymmetry” to refer to
inequalities or differences between participants which are demonstrated particularly
through the mechanics of their conversation.

Before studying interactional asymmetries in institutional conversation, there are several
theoretical issues which must be resolved, or at least considered. Linell and Luckmann
(1991) make the point that it is not enough to simply attribute inequalities between
participants in institutional interactions (e.g. doctor and patient) to exogenous factors such
as "authority" or "social power" while Drew and Heritage (1992) state that CA on
institutional asymmetries must begin by looking at endogenous features of the interaction
first, and only after these internal considerations are exhausted can the analyst examine
issues of "role". Another distinction that must be made is that asymmetries do not
necessarily equate with "power" or "dominance". Drew (1991) in a study of asymmetries
of distribution of knowledge shows how a health visitor possesses superior knowledge
about post-natal routine compare to a new mother yet the mother's asymmetrical position
does not mean that she is controlled by the health visitor.

Therefore the intention of this paper is to look at a number of interactions which had taken
place in an institutional setting between participants of unequal status, and to determine
the ways in which the interactional asymmetries between the participants was reflected in
their talk towards each other. The fact that the participants were of unequal status was
something which was not concentrated upon, rather it was the way that asymmetries were
oriented to and managed through conversation which is the main focus of the paper. The
institutional setting in which the interactions took place was a university. This was
chosen because it was an exceptionally accessible place to conduct such a study, it was an
institution that has not been altogether neglected by conversation analysts but has not been subject to the scrutiny which medical and law institutions have come under, and it contained a hierarchical system which could be easily understood by those inside and outside the institution. Lakoff’s (1990:151) description of vertical communication in universities puts the often unspoken "system" into words:

*Undergraduates seem to be at the bottom; or, more accurately they aren’t in the running at all; they are outsiders, interlopers. Graduate students, the apprentices, are at the bottom. Then come the non-ladder teaching personnel...instructors and lecturers. Next on the scale are the non-tenured ladder positions...Finally at the pinnacle, are the tenured faculty.*

As I am not concerned with exact positions on the "ladder", it was convenient to group participants around two classes: lecturers and students. Therefore, I was interested only in conversations where preferably one lecturer and one student conversed together upon a subject which was in some way concerned with the institution. Such conversations would have to take place during "working hours" and occur in the lecturer's office. Although all of the lecturer-student conversations I transcribed fulfilled these "formal" requirements, a number of them appeared to have the atmosphere of an informal chat rather than an interview. It was interesting then to discover that even within such informal conditions both participants managed to maintain an asymmetrical relationship because of their differing status roles, through the mechanics of their conversation. One recurring feature of the conversations I analysed involved instances of conflict which occurred between the two participants; such a feature is ideal to issues of interactional asymmetry as not only is it concerned with victors and losers, but with the ways that participants achieve victory, and how they orient to submission. Because of this, I have examined instances of conflict between participants in detail. In the process of analysing the transcriptions I have tried to keep within the boundaries of conversation analysis by maintaining a non-interpretative stance, thus attempting not to place any kind of interpretation of my own upon the participants’ utterances. At times, however, it has been

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1 Although Lakoff is writing about American universities with their concept of tenure, her remarks still retain validity when considered in conjunction with the British Higher Education system.
difficult to remain true to this intention, and in the cases where I have placed interpretation upon participants’ utterances I have tried to do so by referring to the interpretations which were subsequently made by the hearer of such utterances within the confines of the conversation. **Subjects** Five lecturers (four males and one female) and ten students (three males and seven females) from Lancaster University agreed to have their conversations audio-taped. Of the lecturers, three were members of the Department of Linguistics, and two were from the Department of Psychology. Two of the students were post-graduates and the other eight were undergraduates. A table of lecturer-student pairings can be found in Appendix 1. **Apparatus** All the lecturers were provided with a tape recorder and a 90 minute tape. The conversations took place in private, in the lecturers' offices. **Procedure** The recordings took place during the summer term, between April 1994 and June 1994. The lecturers who agreed to tape their conversations with students were asked only to tape their interviews which were directly concerned with some aspect of the students' academic life. Some of the lecturers had a weekly "office hour" in which students could consult them upon a range of academic topics, and it was generally within this period that the taping occurred. The students were asked for their consent to be taped and in all cases they agreed. Lecturers were asked to record only their one-to-one conversations if that was possible, however, conversations containing more than one student were not ruled out totally. One lecturer recorded three conversations, one recorded two, and the other three each recorded one. None of the conversations lasted for longer than 30 minutes. The material on the tapes was then transcribed (see Appendix 2), checked and corrected.

**CONFLICT**

The term "conflict" is used in this thesis to refer to any sequence of talk between two (or more) parties in which a breakdown in consensus over a conversational topic is noticed by at least one participant, who brings attention to it, thus making the breakdown into a topic in itself. Although conflict is not uncommon, the "default" for conversation is that participants will agree upon a topic for discussion and that thereafter their contributions
will be "in consensus" with preceding utterances. During conflict or "disagreement sequences" participants oppose each others utterances using linguistic, paralinguistic or kinesic devices in order to display their objections, either directly or indirectly. For conflict to occur, there must be consensus on the level that both (or all) participants agree to coordinate their speech activity in order to engage in conflict, allowing the conversation to continue even though there has been a breakdown in consensus of other matters (Vuchinich, 1990). Research has focused on the ways in which conflict is initiated, managed and resolved between participants, and also in the devices implemented by conversational combatants in order to achieve dominance. The earliest work by Conversation Analysts puts conflict in terms of preference organisation. A pairing of utterances which occur in sequence and are the result of the interaction of two people can be called an "adjacency pair". Such pairs are typed, in that a particular first will require a particular second e.g. an offer will require an acceptance or rejection, a question will require an answer. For the second part of an adjacency pair, the range of possible responses will include at least one preferred response and one dispreferred response. The notion of preferred/dispreferred does not refer to psychological preference but is a structural notion relating to the concept of markedness, in that dispreferred seconds will be marked by being structurally more complex than preferred seconds. The following pair of invitations, taken from Atkinson and Drew (1979) demonstrate the differences between preferred and dispreferred seconds:

(1) A: Why don't you come up and see me some [times] B: I would like to
(2) A: Uh if you'd care to come and visit a little while this morning I'll give you a cup of coffee B: Hehh Well that's awfully sweet of you, I don't think I can make it this morning. hh uhm I'm running an ad in the paper and- and uh I have to stay near the phone.

In (1) the invitation is met with a short acceptance which occurs without any form of delay, overlapping the invitation in fact. In comparison, the response to the invitation (2) is a refusal, and is marked by being longer and possessing a number of features which are
common to most dispreferred seconds. When broken down these consist of delay "Hehh", the preface marker "well", an appreciation "that’s awfully sweet of you", a refusal "I don't think I can make it this morning", and an account "I have to stay near the phone". Although the example above deals with an offer-refusal adjacency pair, preference organisation can be readily applied to pairings of assessment-agreement/disagreement, where an agreement will be the preferred second and a disagreement the dispreferred.

Disagreements effectively mark the beginning of overt conflict between two participants in that once a speaker has chosen to orient to an assertion with a dispreferred second response, he/she has not only made his/her disagreement explicit, but created a state of affairs in which the disagreement must be resolved, or at least addressed before the conversation can progress. Thus, an adjacency pairing of assertion-disagreement is usually the initiator of a longer, more complex sequence of conflict, which may include other pairings of assertion-disagreement in it but will rarely prove alone to be a terminator of conflict. Conflict can only last for as long as both parties continue to voice their disagreement. If one party submits, then the conflict will cease: therefore, each participant will orient their talk towards securing the submission of the other by trying to convince the other of the validity of his/her own position and/or the inaccuracy of the opponent’s assertions. It is his way that the conflict is managed, research showing that participants make use of various “techniques” such as mitigators (Bergmann, 1992), footing shifts (Clayman, 1992) and continuous "ping-pong" negations (Knoblauch, 1991). Conflict is usually terminated when one party has submitted, although Vuchinich (1990) lists dominant third party intervention, compromise, stand-off and withdrawal as being other common forms of conflict completion. Conversation Analysts have examined the processes of conflict within a variety of institutional settings e.g. news-interviews (Greatbatch, 1992), cross-examination cases (Drew, 1992), labour-management talk (O'Donnell, 1990) and doctor-patient interviews (Maynard, 1992). Given that there is often an asymmetrical relationship between participants who are in conflict, it can be tempting to view issues of conflict in terms of asymmetry between participants caused by external factors e.g. the institutional setting the conflict takes place within. However, as stated earlier Drew and
Heritage (1992) warn against relying upon exogenous explanations to account for asymmetries within conversation, stating that only when the internal features of the conversation have been thoroughly examined, can institutional asymmetry be invoked as an explanation. But with this in mind, conflict in talk can be an excellent demonstrator of the mechanics of asymmetrical relationships as both phenomena are concerned with issues of dominance/submission. Conflict between an asymmetrical pairing can be dynamic in that the outcome of the disagreement can modify the asymmetrical relationship between both participants: if the partner who already holds conversational advantages manages to achieve dominance at the termination of the disagreement then the asymmetrical nature of the relationship is accentuated. If the dominant partner submits, the relationship may become less asymmetrical, or if the disagreement was due to a subject of importance to both parties, their relationship might be reversed with the dominant participant consequently relinquishing his/her dominance for a period of time into the conversation.

In an asymmetrical relationship one way of resolving conflict would be for the dominant party to assert his or her dominance by reminding the subordinate party of the asymmetrical relationship; however, in the informal interactions between lecturers and students examined below, the asymmetrical relationship between the participants is rarely referred to. Disagreements are resolved, usually with the lecturer as the "victor" without either party resorting, even indirectly to status referral. Therefore the progression of conflict must be attributed to other factors of the conversation itself, and it is the intention of this chapter to examine how the outcome of conflict sequences are dependent upon the ways that lecturer and students form their disagreements and how they orient towards disagreements put to them. The first few excerpts deal with how disagreement is demonstrated through the use of questions, and how the response to such questions is instrumental in the outcome of the conflict. After that I will examine instances of conflict where the disagreement part of the sequence is delayed by the lecturer. I will then focus on examples of conflict caused by interruptions, or where one party has incorrectly attempted to "predict" what the other party was going to say. Finally, I will examine a series of extended conflict between a lecturer and a student, where neither party will submit, but
withdrawal and compromise do not seem to be viable options. To begin, I will investigate the consequences of using a question to indicate disagreement to another’s assertion. Questioning some aspect of an assertion is not as confrontational as an explicit disagreement; although it could alert the recipient that the speaker’s wish to know more about an aspect of an earlier utterance could be a way of reminding the hearer of flaws in his own rhetoric. Knowledge of the intention behind such questions can be significant in the resolution of the disagreement. In the following excerpt, L (the lecturer) wants to know when S (the student) will hand in an already overdue essay:

Example 1

1 L: I give you a definite date to hand it in. Soh::: you give me a definite date when you’re gonna give it in ((laughs)) 2 (3.0) 3 S: Thursday?
4 (1.0) 5 L: This Thursday?
6 S: Yeah.
7 L: That’s a little precipitous. I don’t think you’ll be able to do it very well if you haven’t even touched it. 8 S: No OK ((laughs)) 9 L: Erm . let’s say next Monday . er . I used to try this . sit down 10 S: Yeah 11 L: Big thingimibob of coffee, four doughnuts knock em off . never worked you know . ((laughs)) Erm: so don’t you try it.
12 S: OK
13 L: So next Monday I’ll expect N H . ping . in the erm essay box
14 S: Alright Yeah

The student offers a date ("Thursday?") for the essay to be handed in. The offer is in the form of a question, thus making it less definite than an assertion and giving the lecturer an opportunity to disagree. The lecturer responds after a pause (line 4) with another question (line 5) thus giving a marked dispreferred response to the student’s offer. Then at line 7, although the lecturer does not dismiss the offer outright, he gives two accounts of why he does not agree with it, referring to the "precipitous" nature of the...
offer, and making a prediction about the student’s ability to produce a good essay in such a short time. One account is accompanied by the use of the qualifier "little" which minimises the amount of disagreement, while the other is hedged by the phrases "I don't think" and the qualifiers "very well," and "even touched it". Thus, within the lecturer’s disagreement are elements of repair, which serve to lessen the amount of potential "trouble" caused by it.

The student immediately agrees with the lecturer’s view (line 8) but does not make an offer, which allows the lecturer to put forward his own suggestion, making the decision for the student ("let's say next Monday"). The word "let's" suggesting that the decision has been a joint one which both student and lecturer have reached together. Although the pause after "let's say next Monday" could be a place where the student could endorse the lecturer's suggestion, or show his own disagreement to it, the student does neither of these things. The lecturer may not have expected the student to reply here as his token continuer "Er" denotes that he has more to say. In fact, the student’s lack of response is enough for the lecturer to decide that the matter has been decided, and he moves the conversation on by offering the student "advice" on how to approach the essay. However, this is not the end of the matter, because the lecturer refers back to the essay deadline (line 13) to reaffirm it: "So next Monday. I'll expect N H\(^4\) ping . in the erm essay box." The suggestion of line 9 has now been made concrete, and as the student was given plenty of time to disagree (halfway through line 9, line 10, line 12) and did not, his lack of disagreement is interpreted as agreement by the lecturer. However, it could be pointed out that the student’s opportunity to show disagreement at this time was at a minimum because a new topic of conversation had been initiated by the lecturer (from halfway through line 9 to line 12) involving a piece of mock "advice". Therefore, the outcome of this disagreement relied on the lecturer's interpretation of the student's silence at line 9 as "agreement" coupled with the lecturer’s rapid topic change after his own suggestion which
minimised the student’s chances of disagreement. Another excerpt from the same conversation shows the student indicating disagreement with the lecturer’s proposal:

*Example 2*

1 L: What I’ll do is. I’ll phone T H. I’ll phone T H now actually
2 S: Do you think that’d=
3 L: =May as well get it out the way
4 S: Yeah

((L proceeds to phone T H)) The lecturer’s intention (to phone T H) is immediately and directly questioned by the student (line 2). Before the student is allowed to complete the question, the lecturer interrupts, offering an account for his decision (line 3). Although there is no explicit display of the student’s disagreement, the question, followed by the account (which tries to remind the student that the phone call is something that will have to be “gotten out the way”, something which is thus unavoidable) suggests that the student’s question at line 2 is the beginning of a dispreferred second response to the lecturer’s suggestion, and the lecturer is not only aware of that, but has already come up with a justification for his utterance in case of a show of disagreement, however subtle. The student’s "yeah" (line 4) accepts the account, allowing the lecturer to make the telephone call. Note that if the student had been in total agreement with the lecturer, this "yeah" could have happened at line 2. As we have seen in the two previous examples both the lecturer and the student can demonstrate disagreement to the other party’s assertions not by openly stating that they disagree but by asking a question which may be designed to alert the other to flaws that the speaker may have perceived in the other’s statement. However, the way that such questions are formed and answered are important for the way that the disagreement is resolved. For example, in the first excerpt in this section the lecturer’s question "This Thursday?" does not appear to contain a "hidden agenda" of disagreement, while in the second excerpt the student’s question "Do you think that'd" is more suggestive of opposition as it forces the lecturer to respond with an account. At the

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5 It could be argued that the student did not disagree with the lecturer because the lecturer’s suggestion actually gave him four more days in which to complete the essay. However, this does not explain the student’s silence in place of voiced agreement. Alternatively, the student could have asked for more time between lines 9 and 13.
stage of responding to the question, the student’s "yeah" does nothing to strengthen his argument, while the lecturer’s immediate account upgrades it and makes it more acceptable. As a result, it is the lecturer who is effectively the "victor" in both exchanges.

In the following disagreement, there are two interesting features: the lecturer’s response to the student’s question, and the student’s method of conceding. The discussion concerns a departmental newsletter which both parties are involved in producing.

Example 3

1 L: So that would be for this term. The other thing we could do of course is just put it off till the beginning of next term=
2 S: why’s that?
3 L: And have a sort of summer edition instead
4 S: Bumper summer
5 L: Bumper summer edition [or something] (grown out) summer edition
6 S: [Yeah]
7 S: It just says yuhknow. Well. what do you think?
8 L: I think it would be best to put it off until the beginning of next term especially as you’ve got the articles coming in=
9 S: =OK

At line 1, the lecturer makes a suggestion (putting off the production of the newsletter until the beginning of next term) which is immediately questioned by the student (line 2). The question is a request for an account, but the lecturer’s response does not explicitly say why he does not want the newsletter to be printed in that term. Instead he responds in part to the question, by continuing with his initial suggestion: "And have a sort of summer edition instead." He does not say why a summer edition would be preferable, and the student allows his question to remain unanswered by repeating and expanding upon the lecturer’s suggestion (Line 4). The lecturer then repeats the student’s suggestion but gives his own alternatives: "or something (grown out) summer edition". The student’s response at line 7 begins with an assertion which is left unfinished and ends with another question, this time actively seeking the lecturer’s advice on the matter. This question appears to be
redundant as the student should already know what the lecturer wants: it is unlikely that
the lecturer would have made the earlier statement about having a summer edition if it had
not been relevant to his own preferences. And the lecturer’s response (line 8) to the
question is a repetition of his suggestion made in Line 1: "put it off until the beginning of
next term." The reply, however, orients to the student’s questions by beginning with "I
think" which corresponds to the student’s "What do you think?" in line 7 and finally
providing an answer to the question in line 2: "especially as you’ve got articles coming in,"
an answer which puts emphasis on the student’s situation, rather than the lecturer’s own
preferences. Although it could be argued that the student’s "yeah" at line 6 was a display
of early concession, the "OK" at line 9 gives the final agreement on the matter. One
problem remains unsolved at this point: the student’s consultation of the lecturer at line 7,
when in all likelihood he already knew what the lecturer’s opinion was. There are two
points later in the conversation which may provide possible solutions to the problem. First,
the lecturer’s response (line 8) included an account, which was what the student had been
seeking from line 2. The second question, by directly appealing to the lecturer’s own
opinion ("what do you think?") achieved this account. Second, only after the account was
given did the student fully agree to the lecturer's suggestion. As we know that the student
initially questioned the proposal (line 2) and that he eventually agreed to it, his part in this
conversation is somewhat asymmetrical to the lecturer’s (even if we do not take into
consideration exogenous factors such as status and power). The student’s question at line
7 serves to redress this asymmetry. As the student already knows the lecturer's answer, it
forces the lecturer to repeat something he has already said, and make it more explicit.
Also, by "consulting" the lecturer on the subject, the student is able to make a decision
based on what the lecturer only thinks should happen. For turns 7 to 9, the asymmetry is
reversed; the student must make a decision and the lecturer becomes the student's advisor.
When the student eventually accepts the lecturer's proposal, on the surface the outcome of
the disagreement seems to be based upon a joint decision, rather than one party passively
relinquishing control. Thus, the lecturer gets what he wants, and the student is able to
maintain his dignity. The asymmetry between the participants, at least on the exogenous
level can remain covert, despite the disparity between the wishes of the student and the
lecturer, and the threat of the lecturer having to make an open reference to their asymmetrical relationship to achieve his own way. In the following series of excerpts, the lecturer first agrees, then disagrees with the student’s assertions. The next extract is taken from the conversation concerning the overdue essay:

**Example 4**

1. S: Erm: . That’s all me coursework except yours is outstanding
2. L: OK. Right
3. S: Erm sorry about that
4. L: It’s alright
5. S: ((laughs))
6. L: Well it’s not alright actually [but em]
7. S: [No it’s not no] Erm: seeing as I’ve had four weeks
8. L: That’s right. So what are you going to do about that?
9. S: Do it

This conversation is awkward for both lecturer and student as it has occurred because the student is in "trouble" for not giving in coursework. Both parties must therefore cooperate in order for the student to get out of trouble. However, this cannot be achieved by the lecturer simply forgiving the student. The lecturer must manage to communicate across to the student the importance of quickly completing the essay without becoming too dogmatic or too liberal. Although the lecturer is "in control" of the situation, his responsibility to maintain this balance places restrictions on the number of possible ways he can approach this task. The student’s first utterance in this sequence attempts to minimise the “trouble” he is in by not handing in coursework. By telling the lecturer that he only has one piece of coursework to complete, he reminds him that there are other pieces of coursework which he has completed. The lecturer accepts that this is the case (Line 2), but makes no other statement here; instead this is a "passing turn", which suggests that the lecturer expects something more from the student, and although the student’s attempt to minimise the situation is acknowledged, it does not prompt the lecturer to begin his part in the resolution of the problem. The student tries another approach, which takes the form of an apology for not handing in coursework. Once again, the lecturer accepts the student’s attempt to resolve the but does not co-operate in any other way. Although it is difficult to attribute meaning to the student’s laughter (line 5) it has the result of making the lecturer say the opposite of what he has previously said. The lecturer’s response so far could be coded as a series of dispreferred seconds, as he had
delayed giving his real opinion about the student’s overdue essay until this point. Although this response does not accept the student’s apology, it at least informs the student of the lecturer’s point of view which is something that the student is ready to agree with (three times), and reinforce with his own account (line 7: "seeing as I've had four weeks."). By speaking for the lecturer, the student saves the lecturer from having to further recognise the student’s "trouble", and this unpleasant part of the conversation can be accepted by both as now over; the lecturer can proceed directly to the stage of finding a solution to the problem (line 8).

The lecturer’s dilemma of choosing between the "hard" and "soft" approach can bring about other problems, as can be seen in the excerpt below in which a lecturer tells a postgraduate student the amount of work she expects her to have completed for her dissertation shortly:

\textit{Example 5}

1 L: Yeah yeah but I think what I would want to see: (O.5) at some point fairly soon is er . a kind of plan of what you want to talk about er
2 (0 8)
3 S: Yeah . As far as the text goes
4 L: M
5 S: I [ha-]
6 L: [Well] . a plan of the thesis
7 S: Well I haven't all I've . All I've done so far I mean the most I've
8 L: [M]
9 S: [Come] up with in terms of a plan is that really The lecturer makes her demand known to the student but tries to disguise the fact that it is a demand as much as she can. The hedge "I think" accompanied with qualifiers: "at some point", "fairly soon" and "a kind of plan" Line 1) make the lecturer appear to be forming a non-specific request rather than giving an order. This type of strategy seeks to minimise the asymmetry between the two participants by making orders appear vague and informal. The student
responds to the lecturer's request by giving her own interpretation of it, based on what she has heard (line 3) and although she may be unsure of what the lecturer wants from her, she does not form her utterance as a question. Rather it is something which the lecturer can accept or correct. Although the lecturer agrees ("M") with the student's interpretation, she interrupts the student's following turn with "Well". Goodwin and Goodwin (1990) state that in argument sequences turn prefaces like "well" can be used to signal that although the validity of earlier talk will not be challenged and opposition will be continued. The lecturer's disagreement makes explicit what was left implicit in her first utterance, and was made necessary by the student's incorrect guess taken from the lecturer's initial utterance. This disagreement sequence (from line 4 to line 6) shows that the lecturer tries to minimise the asymmetry further, by at first agreeing with the student, then not disagreeing openly, but providing further (contradictory) information for the student ("a plan of the thesis"). It can therefore be seen that through the lecturer's earlier "softening" of her demand a misunderstanding was created, which was resolved by the lecturer engaging in further "softening" talk. The student's defensive "Well" and subsequent four attempts to begin an account to explain why she had not managed to do much "in terms of a plan" suggest that she had not been expecting the lecturer's disagreement at line 6 and although it was more implied than stated, it was recognised as "disagreement" by her.

A disagreement which is phrased subtly, when applied by a lecturer, can often resolve conflict. Koerfer (1979) and Knoblauch (1991) describe how the effectiveness of "Yes-but" as a building block of disagreement. "Yes-but" has the dual purpose of allowing for agreement with the other participant, while at the same time enabling disagreement to continue. This non-confrontational approach can be useful in terminating conflict sequences as it allows for two opposing arguments to be valid at the same time, lessening the necessity for one party to continue defending his/her corner and prolonging the conflict.

*Example 6*

1 S: I mean (5 syllables) y'know which. Was a grammatical positions of which
its occurs. For the most of them which y’know we’ve called from it a comment clause it (jist). Doesn’t actually seem to have a. Particular place. It’s. Someone’s just. Y’know (1.0) At the end or the beginning bit. Varies completely and it could be anything but it’s y’know we haven’t found the common pattern so. I don’t think we’ve (wr) have we [written]

2 L: [yeah]
3 S: it out very much at all=
4 L: =But yeah I mean in a sense you’ve already given me some patterns but you said i::t comes at the [end or the]
5 S: [yeah mm yeah]
6 O: [yeah mm]
7: L: beginning so yes [you’ve already told me]
8 S: [yeah yeah]
9 O: [yeah mm]
10 L: two positions in which it’s quite likely to occur
11 O: Yeah
12 L: And it would be interesting to see if: . Y’know that that is really a solid pattern

Here, a lecturer (L) and two students (S and O) are discussing whether the appearance of the phrase "Y’know" in people’s conversation follows any particular pattern. The student (S) presents her opinion in the first turn in this sequence: "...Doesn’t seem to have a particular place we haven’t found the common pattern". The lecturer’s "yeah" at line 2 could be a minimal response, to signify that he understands and wishes her to continue, but in line 4 he takes control of the conversation using "yeah" in conjunction with "but" in order to disagree. This suggests that his "yeah" in line 2 could have been an earlier attempt at a "yes-but" argument. As we have seen in earlier disagreements, the lecturer often softens his opposition with a qualifier: "in a sense". The effect of the lecturer’s argument causes both students to immediately agree with his point of view (lines 5,6) and continue to agree during the lecturer’s concluding remarks on this subject (lines 8,9,11). The
lecturer also employs another device which serves to stave off opposition whereby he continues to talk until the conversation has passed a point where it would no longer be relevant to interrupt with an argument (line 12). Even though the students appear to have agreed with the lecturer, it could be that they are thinking of evidence to support their point of view. This strategy of moving the conversation on was also used by the lecturer in the first example of this section.

In the above extracts the lecturer initially appeared to acquiesce with S’s assertions although ultimately he showed disagreement. However, disagreements which follow agreements do not have to contain a hidden agenda. In the extract below a misunderstanding causes the lecturer's premature agreement:

*Example 7*

1 S: And I've booked a time to see you if that's alright  
2 L: Yes sure  
3 (2.0)

4 S: Put it on your thing outside  
5 (1.0) 
6 L: Oh you've put it down already? a-7 S: On your em. timetable?  
8 L: =A- s- Timetable it's not a booking form  
9 S: =Oh I see I thought it was  
10 L: =Booking form time yeah (0.5) Go on then give me a time  
11 S: Em. Eleven o'clock tomorrow? (2.0) Or sometime tomorrow morning?  
12 (1.0) 
13 L: That's OK

The student (line 1) announces that she has made an appointment to see the lecturer although this is accompanied by a checking statement ("if that's alright") which, placed at the end of the utterance, ensures that the lecturer can immediately refer to it in case he has a problem with the situation. Although the lecturer expresses agreement (line 2) there follows a pause which is not immediately attributable to either participant. Both lecturer and student appear to have allocated the next turn to each other, resulting in silence and the first warning of trouble. Although we cannot predict what each participant expects from each other, the student’s elaboration (line 4) suggests that she had possibly being expecting a request for elaboration of her preceding statement, but having not received one had decided to provide one in any case. Furthermore, her attempt to clarify her
actions without being asked suggests that she orients to the lecturer's silence by attempting to repair the conversation with a more detailed version of her earlier statement. The lecturer's response is a dispreferred second containing the following features: pause, news receipt, question, confused exclamation. However, this response would not be in the range of responses, preferred or dispreferred which the student was expecting at line 1. Her checking statement ("if that's alright") suggests that she had foreseen that the lecturer could be busy and she had made it easier for him to disagree in this way. The lecturer's response at line 6 denotes his surprise that she has already made an appointment to see him, even though this is what she attempted to convey in her initial statement. The lecturer's agreement at line 2 must have been the result of misunderstanding as he had not expected her to make an appointment by herself and so had interpreted her announcement differently.  

The student's response (line 7) orients to the lecturer's confusion. Again, she attempts to provide the lecturer with a fuller account of her actions, and again, her response is less confident than her previous one. Her pause, use of "em" and rising intonation at the end of the utterance, turning the statement into a question tell us that she is not immediately sure of the correct words to use. By labelling the "thing outside" as a "timetable" she demonstrates to the lecturer her own interpretation of its function, which is sufficient information for the lecturer to understand the reasons for her behaviour. The lecturer's first response (now that he comprehends what has happened) is to express his understanding by alerting her to the fact that she was wrong (line 8). His monosyllabic exclamations at the beginning of this turn show that he is still surprised and it is interesting that in his rebuke he refers back to a verb that the student had previously used in line 1 ("It's not a booking form"). The student's first response upon perceiving the nature of the misunderstanding differs from the lecturer's in that she immediately acknowledges her own understanding "Oh I see" before trying to account for her actions "I thought it was".

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6 Many offices in this department lecturers have timetables of their weekly appointments fixed to the door. Some lecturers allow students to make their own appointments on these timetables (without prior consultation of the lecturer) while others are only to display the lecturer's availability. (The student in this example incorrectly attributed the lecturer's timetable as the former type rather the latter).
However, the account is completed by the lecturer (line 10), who interrupts, providing the end of her sentence "Booking form time", a receipt of his understanding "yeah" and an instruction for her to give him a time, which terminates the misunderstanding and allows the conversation to proceed in a more rigid structure concerning appointment-making. The lecturer's interruption has the dual function of indicating to the student that he understands/accepts her account and, as in the previous example when the student provided the lecturer with a reason for why the lecturer had every right to be concerned with the student’s overdue essay ("seeing as I’ve had four weeks") here, the lecturer frees the student from having to explain herself or apologise, by providing the explanation himself.

With the appointment making structure initiated by the lecturer, the student begins line 11) by making an exact offer which is supposedly preferable to her ("eleven "clock tomorrow"). This offer is met with two seconds of silence from the lecturer. Acting with caution, the student interprets this silence as a form of rejection as she suggests another, less precise suggestion "or sometime tomorrow morning?" which allows for the lecturer to make a choice, decreasing the probability of further conflict. After a shorter pause the lecturer accepts, (although it is unclear from the transcription which offer he did accept, presumably the first as he did not suggest a time of his own) and this part of the conversation is at an end. A common opening sequence which characterises verbal conflict exchanges found within the lecturer-student data I collected is one in which both parties make an assertion about the same object or person at exactly the same time, and there is a discrepancy between the two versions offered. Although it is usually the case that one participant has made a correct statement and the other is incorrect, there can be incidences in which both parties are incorrect, or partially correct. Situations in which there is this incompatibility of speaker perceptions during overlapping talk are particularly difficult to ignore as both parties immediately notice that consensus on a matter worth talking about has broken down. In all of the examples above, because rules of turn-taking are operating on the simple A-B-A-B structure, one party notices the disagreement before the other, and is given the choice of whether to use his/her next available turn to bring the breakdown in consensus to the attention of the other, or let it pass. But when both parties are alerted to
their "difference of opinion" simultaneously, it is not so easy for the problem not to become a topic of conversation in itself. However, this situation may present its own unique problems as both participants may decide to allocate the responsibility of being the first to verbally "notice" the disagreement to the other speaker, resulting in a "stand-off" where each waits for the other to say something. The converse of this occurs is when both parties take responsibility for "noticing" at the same time, leading to a further sequence of over-lapping speech.

In the extract below, L has asked S about an essay she was planning to write:

Example 8

L: [Talk about them] 3 S: [Design a research project] 4 S: Is it? 6 L: Well anyway 7 S: Yeah 8 L: Whichever

S: Yeah Although there is a discrepancy between what the lecturer and the student think the essay is supposed to be about (lines 2-3) the student initially agrees with the lecturer: ("yeh") in a similar way to the lecturer's early agreement discussed above. However, this is immediately followed by markers of trouble: the single syllable ("e") from the student suggesting confusion, the pause (line 4) where both parties wait for each other to draw attention to the breakdown in consensus, and the student’s question (line 5). The student’s seizure of this turn is quite important for the way that the disagreement will progress. By questioning the lecturer's assertion she places him in the position of having to defend his remark. Although this provides him with the opportunity to offer an account as in the examples discussed earlier, in this case to question the accuracy of other’s assertion directs attention away from the accuracy of the questioner's own assertion, making its position more tenable. Clearly, somebody has made a mistake, and although it is not

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7 Although interruptions and over-lapping talk can often be a sign that conversation is running smoothly, with all parties understanding and anticipating one another, it can also result in conflict from participants making incorrect assumptions about what the initial speaker wanted to say.

8 The student is in fact correct. However, this is something that cannot be deduced from this extract or from the conversation as a whole, and so it should only have a small bearing (if any) on our perceptions of
substantial, the disagreement cannot be left unresolved, especially after the student’s question. The lecturer orients to the student’s question by choosing to minimise the difference in their opinions, twice ("well anyway", "whichever"). By pointing out the inconsequential nature of the difference the lecture is able to justify it, and the student accepts this justification (lines 7, 9). Although the lecturer’s turns at 6 and 8 do not take the form of direct accounts, they could be construed as shorthand accounts as they provide a reason for the breakdown in consensus: that the issue was not important enough for it to matter who was correct.

So far we have seen how disagreement is displayed through the use of indirect methods, such as questions, or initial agreement followed by disagreement. Conflict, however, can be directly marked by lecturers. Consider the extract below in which the lecturer and the student are discussing the fact that I had gained their permission to have their conversation taped:

*Example 9*

1 L: I’ll sort it out today because I had to do this taping so. ((laughs)) you’re the first victim.  
2 S: Is that how many do you have to do?  
3 L: As many as. well this is a sort of pilot experiment erjust to check that it can be done and then in the summer I’ll record all my interactions with M.A.s [and supervisors]  
4 S: [Spoken English Corpus]  
5 (0.5)  
6 L: No actually. It’s for an M.Sc thesis somebody’s doing and they need to gather the data and I agreed. probably rather foolishly to do it  
7 S: Right.  
8 L: And. so that’s that really.

the outcome of the disagreement. It could explain the student’s questioning of the lecturer as she may have felt "surer" of her position and be more justified to argue. Alternatively, the subject of the essay would have direct bearing on her so it would be in her own interests to know if any changes had been made.
The lecturer introduces the topic of taping (line 1) as an account for not sorting something out (for the student) earlier. The student orients to the account with a question (line 2) and later by interrupting the lecturer with his own interpretation (Line 4) of the nature of the taping. Although the pause (line 5) denotes the beginning of a dispreferred second sequence, the lecturer's following utterance "No actually," is less suggestive of this type of response. In fact this is an example of a dispreferred response without the "baggage" of the usual markers. The student does not use the short pause here to convey news receipt (e.g. "oh") and the lecturer goes on to explain why the student’s assumption was incorrect by revealing the reason for the taping. Only then does the student accept the lecturer's contradictory assertion (line 7). This pattern, of the student withholding agreement until the lecturer makes further persuasive contributions is something we have seen previously in Example 2 of this section. The topic of conversation is closed by the lecturer (line 8) making it one of the shortest sections of conversation on any single area in the whole exchange⁹. It is interesting to note that this lecturer very rarely used this direct method of disagreement and that he may have been provoked to do so by the student’s interruption at a rather dubious transition relevance place. So far, in the majority of disagreement sequences I have outlined the conflict has terminated with the student’s submission, or at least the student compromising in some way to accept the lecturer’s position. The final set of excerpts are taken from the same conversation in which a student and lecturer are discussing some unexpected findings from the student’s pilot experiment. As these findings are not easily accounted for there are differences between the lecturer and student’s interpretation of the data. In this case, the student is sure of the validity of the pilot experiment and will not submit to the lecturer’s arguments. The lecturer will not acquiesce easily either, resulting in a series of complex and protracted conflict sequences. In the following extract the lecturer interrupts the student by predicting (incorrectly) the student’s words:

Example 10

⁹ Possibly, the lecturer felt that discussion of the taping was irrelevant, or that by referring to it, it decreased the natural feel to the conversation. It could also be the case that the lecturer ended discussion on this subject because of the confrontational way that the disagreement was handled.
May I explain you what this is about here. So maybe I explain first what I did about the construction of the material. Erm [(3 syllables) yeah]

Yeah yeah erm we finally agreed er that er er what ah it would be a good idea. To have two (2 syllables) between factor one erm group only with erm number? equations?

[Other with only zero]

[And the other] (0.4) with zero and one because we werm these both numbers were have this special status so I constructed a list with one. equations one and every kind of er number

Yeah [and zero]

[and zero] and every kind of number

A::h:: [OK]

[so this] this=

Yeah One aspect of this particular conversation is that overlapping talk is a common occurrence, especially with the lecturer attempting to complete the student's sentences. In earlier extracts I have tried to show how sentence-completion can have positive and affiliative consequences when one party "rescues" another from having to finish utterances which are necessary (to at least one person present) but in some way dispreferred e.g. rebukes, apologies, explanations. Sentence completion can also be a good way of demonstrating alliance or empathy with a participant; by (correctly) predicting what they were about to say the current speaker can show that he/she was listening to and/or agrees with the previous speaker. An incorrect attempt at completion, however, presents problems for the participant who had his/her utterance completed. The decision of whether or not to "notice" the incorrect completion is up to him/her. Perhaps more importantly, the way that such a "noticing" takes place can have repercussions for the remainder of the conversation. In previous conversation for example, the direct "no
actually" form of disagreement resulted in the student withholding acknowledgement of his incorrect completion until a full account had been offered, and the lecturer cutting short any further discussion on the subject. In the extract above, however, the student’s "noticing" is less direct.

The student’s description of the design of the experiment (line 3) ends in uncertainty ("Number? equations?") prompting the lecturer to fill in the remainder of the sentence. The lecturer’s completion (line 4) takes place while the student continues talking, although because of the student’s use of the words "and the", and the fact that his answer is longer (including the phrase "and one") the lecturer finishes his completion of the student’s sentence before the student:

4 L: [other with only zero]
5 S: [and the other] (0.4) with zero and one

Although the lecturer’s completion occurs inside the student’s utterance, the student is sufficiently aware of it to realise that it is not wholly correct, and he pauses before continuing with the correct version. Although he orients (here and at a later point) to the lecturer’s incorrect completion, he does not draw attention to it directly e.g. in the way that the lecturer in the earlier example said "no actually". However, by providing the lecturer with a different (and correct) completion he shows that not only has he noticed that there is variance in their answers but that he is desirous of the lecturer to understand this too. The student does not end his turn with this notification of non-congruence between utterances, but continues with an account of why his answer deserves credit. Another attempt at completion is made by the lecturer during this account (lines 6 and 7) which is more successful in that the lecturer says the same thing as the student, although once again, the student does not stop talking to allow the lecturer to finish the sentence alone, but continues his turn with an addition which is not completed by the lecturer. The lecturer expresses understanding, (line 8) using his turn to orient to the fact that his earlier completion was incorrect, and now he comprehends and accepts the student’s version ("A::h:: OK"). The remainder of this sequence (lines 9-12) concerns the student making his point again but without the account, and the lecturer acknowledging the student’s point as correct. Although a disagreement has occurred and
been resolved, at no point has it been made explicit by either party, even though other aspects of disagreement in conversation have featured (noticing of difference, a pause, an account, understanding and acceptance of the other’s argument, reiteration of argument) it is the "noticing" here which is peculiar as neither party questions or negatively evaluates the other’s opinion yet they do not continue the conversation until they are able to agree. Later in this conversation, another disagreement occurs during which both participants attempt to place an interpretation on the results of the student’s experiment. Because there are several areas over which student and lecturer are opposed, and because both participants are unwilling to submit, the disagreement is considerably longer than the previous examples of conflict examined. The following three extracts are taken from this disagreement sequence; the first being at its outset. This time it is the lecturer who "notices" the difference of opinion first. and his reaction is more confrontational than the student’s in the previous example.

*Example 11*

1 S: And this is not the only case. if we go on here correct at this addition.
   correct
2 L: [Yeah]
3 S: [Add]ition associative and addition non-associative. same pattern actually.
   it goes down h:: h:::
4 L: It’s not quite the same [turn]=
5 S: [em]
6 L: =the page .
7 S: No it's not the [it's not the same because]=
8 L: [It goes up again doesn't it]
9 S: =it goes up again [but]
10 L: [Is that right?]
11 S: It’s [the]=
12 L: [yes]
13 S: =same pattern that I had in the pilot as well er you know in the in my mini
project and for the sum up of the means. then again quite quite long reaction time though although I have now the fastest way of re- I the I installed thee. thee button

14 L: mhm
15 S: response [the]=
16 L: [yes]
17 S: =the two . response keys with a fixed interval

The lecturer's opposition (line 4) allows few concessions to the student's assertion that the patterns are the same (line 3). Although the lecturer's "quite" downgrades the extent of his disagreement, he employs his turn to follow up the disagreement with an instruction to the student to "turn the page". This has the dual effect of thwarting the student's response (line 5) and alerting the student to evidence which supports the lecturer's argument. As often happens to a participant who learns of the breakdown in consensus from the other party's referral to it, the student's response (line 7) is characterised by confusion: half formed sentences as the student quickly considers his account. However, the lecturer interrupts the student's utterance to begin his own account (line 8). Neither party appears willing to back down, and although it appears that their talk will not be heard by the other, they both refuse to allow the other participant to seize total control of the turn. Thus turns 7-12 appear to be an example of an occurrence of turn-taking breakdown. Interestingly, neither party tries to repair the turn-taking sequence by using devices which refer to the fact that the conversation is breaking down e.g. asking the other to be quiet. The lecturer, especially appears not only to ignore the student's remarks, but his utterances indicate that he does not expect the student to hear his:

8 L: It goes up again doesn't it?
9……
10 L: Is that right?
11…..
12 L: Yes For these three turns he is, in effect talking to himself, asking questions of himself (lines 8, 10) and answering them (line 12). The fact that he provides the answer for his questions indicates that they were not completely intended to be directed at the
student. Therefore the lecturer's behaviour suggests that his method of resolving this conflict is not by regarding the account of the student, but by thinking through the problem alone. The student’s approach, however, seeks to convince the lecturer of the validity of his position by orienting his arguments towards him:

7 S: No it's not the [it's not the same because]=
8 L: [It goes up again doesn't it]
9 S: It goes up again but
10……11 S: It's the12…13 S: Same pattern I had in the pilot as well

In line 7 the student begins an account which although continued in line 9, contains a repetition of the lecturer's statement of line 8. Thus, the lecturer has influenced the way that the student's account proceeds, causing the student to evince a "yes-but" argument as seen in Example 6 by first accepting the lecturer's statement, and then disagreeing with it (lines 11,13).

This disagreement sequence is unique compared to the other examples I have written about, as it appears to have no resolution. The student has agreed that the patterns "go up again", but claims that this is the same as what happened in his pilot study (line 13). The lecturer never refers to this argument and the student diverts the conversation away from the disagreement to talk about changing the response keys. This form of termination is referred to as “stand off” by Vuchinich (1990) whereby both parties realise that the other will not submit, nor is compromise possible. Although it could be argued that the disagreement was constructed on one level as “getting in the last word” with the student having the last word and then changing the subject (see Examples 1 and 6) the fact that the lecturer did not accept the student's account ( e.g. during the pause in line 13) indicates that the disagreement cannot be resolved and that a subject change is necessary.Unfortunately for both parties, the interpretation of the results is central to the conversation and afterwards the student returns to his original argument, causing the disagreement to resurface:

Example 12

1 S: So that's the only difference and these are the sum ups (0.5) which are
definitely not. erm h::: and

2 L: Look at the areas though briefly
3 (1.0)
4 L: Not many areas
5 S: No no it’s not that many
6 L: Good
7 (2.0)
8 L: And then let’s just check these are the associate ones it’s (5.0) yeah (3.0) s funny isn’t it (7.0)

Line 1 ends with the student’s laughter “h::: ” in the same way that he completed his argument in Example 11 (line 3), and again the lecturer’s immediate response (line 2) contains an instruction to the student. However, the difference between these two excerpts is that in Example 11 the lecturer made a direct statement of disagreement "It’s not quite the same" before his instruction while in Example 12 there is no such open opposition. In Example 11, the student attempted to give an account until the lecturer paid attention to him, and the disagreement resulted in a stand-off. However, in Example 12 with the omission of an evaluative statement from the lecturer, the student has nothing to account for, and must reluctantly agree (line 5) with the lecturer’s evaluation of the number of areas - an evaluation that disagrees with the student’s argument, but one that comes after an instruction, and at the same time is less confrontational. The student’s acceptance of the lecturer’s point elicits a positive evaluation from the lecturer (line 6) and although the student is given enough time to respond at this point, he chooses not to, leaving the lecturer to continue the conversation, having scored a "point" in the argument. Button (1992) in his discussion of a job interview illustrates how interviewers use evaluative statements after applicant answers to ensure that the applicant cannot return to his answer to modify or elaborate upon it. In a similar way, the lecturer’s “Good” prevents the student from replying as the positive evaluation informs the student that he and the lecturer have agreed, which should signal the end of discussion on this topic. In the final part of this disagreement (and for the final excerpt in this paper) the lecturer resorts again to direct
disagreement. However, instead of seeking to provide the lecturer with an account (as in Example 11) the students’ response mirrors the lecturer’s own.

Example 13

1 L: So they are slower aren’t they
2 S: Yeah yeah the associative um the the peak is um: is visible actually it . in the sum . it was
3 (1.0)
4 L: It’s not is it
5 S: It is . you s [you see]
6 L: [(oh yeah)] sum. no
7 (3.0)
8 S: If you sum up all you come to that
9 (2.5)
10 L: Yeah
11 S: Em [which is (1 syllable)]
12 L: [Why have we] got a smaller number of problems here? We’ve only got four

The lecturer’s leading question (line 1), devised to gain compliance from the student is met with dismissive agreement "yeah yeah" and then a statement which the lecturer does not agree with (line 4). The student responds with the same style of disagreement as the lecturer "It is" and (presumably) points to a part of a graph, a gesture designed to give credit to his reply. Although the lecturer concedes (line 6), during this short utterance he changes his mind, prompting the student to offer a verbal account (line 8). Finally, the lecturer agrees (line 10) but then quickly interrupts the student’s attempted elaboration with a question pertaining to a different subject. In doing so, the lecturer makes his submission be the "last word" of the disagreement and will not permit the student to dwell on the subject any longer. Also, by questioning another area of the experiment, which appears to be problematic "We've only got four" the lecturer places the student in a
position where he is expected to defend himself, possibly leading to his submission, thus reversing the current lecturer-student asymmetry and re-establishing the lecturer in his superior role.

**Conclusion**

I intended to show in the previous 13 examples how the conversational processes which occurred during conflict between lecturers and students could be used as indicators of their asymmetrical relationship. In the cases above, there was usually a victor, and a submissive party: the fact that the victor was nearly always the lecturer ought to be testament to the asymmetry between participants. However, I believe that victor/loser status should only be viewed as the most blunt index of asymmetry. In some cases of conflict one participant was clearly "in the wrong" and could not be the victor e.g. Examples 4 and 8, while in other cases the issue of whether the conflict was resolved in terms of winners and losers was not clear cut e.g. Example 11. I consider that the ways in which conflict is managed by participants and the ways that participants orient to their own (and each other's) submission/dominance to be more important dimensions upon which to circumscribe the asymmetrical nature of their relationship, rather than viewing it in simple terms of "victory".

Conflict can be managed by the use of various conversational strategies and techniques which some participants implement, while others through lack of knowledge or, "rights" to use such techniques, do not deploy them. Of the techniques I have described in the above pages, it is the lecturers who appear to exploit them most readily: "fast-forwarding" conversations past the point where the other party can make a relevant disagreement (Examples 1 and 6), anticipating disagreement (Example 2), ignoring difficult questions (Example 3), withholding co-operation (Example 4), employing partial ("yes-but") agreement (Example 6), using directness (Examples 7 and 9), and instructions to augment one's position.(Examples 11 and 12). These devices appear to be geared towards strengthening the speaker's standing, while undermining that of the other participant. Such devices I would term as being potentially offensive. On the other hand, the devices employed by students on the whole seem to be more concerned with defending their own position, or ensuring that their defeat is not too demeaning: withholding submission (Examples 3 and 9), providing accounts (Examples 5, 7, 10 and 11) and asking questions.
(Examples 2, 3 and 8). These defensive devices do not appear to be as effective as the offensive devices employed by lecturers, as they usually result in the student’s submission. After the resolution of a conflict, participants’ immediate reactions can often be viewed in terms of their interactional asymmetry. For example, the lecturer's reluctant submission in Example 13 is followed by a subject change and a fresh attack on the student, and in Example 8, the lecturer's attempt to minimise his error (and consequently his submission) coupled with the student's acceptance of his minimisation suggests that this lecturer does not admit defeat easily. Conversely, in Example 10 the student wins his point and then makes it again (allowing the lecturer the opportunity to recommence conflict, but also marking his victory). Lecturers do not dwell on their victories, but are swift to change the subject (Examples 6, 7, 9 and 12).

Techniques of argumentation and post-conflict reactions are not the only factors contributing to the state of asymmetry between lecturers and students during conflict sequences. Situational factors, such as the differential states of knowledge of the participants (discussed in more detail later), and the fact that interviews are more likely to be common-place and routine to the lecturer, who having more opportunity to practice upon a large range of students has probably developed a more aggressive (and more effective) approach to conflict. Finally, the unacknowledged status asymmetry related to the roles of lecturer and student must also feature, however obliquely, as a factor in any asymmetrical equation.

At the beginning of this paper I said that I intended to investigate how aspects of the asymmetrical relationship between lecturers and students could be seen as a function of their talk. Readers who now expect a concise description of the "asymmetry" inherent between the institutional participants will be disappointed. Even with my small sample of eight pairings there was sufficient variability of shows of (and plays for) dominance within these interactions to make it difficult to summarise the properties of a "typical" asymmetrical lecturer-student relationship. Also, as Markova and Foppa (1991) state, the term "asymmetry" is a complex concept which can be used in a variety of ways and at different levels of conceptualisation. For example, a conversation may be symmetrical with
respect to the length of the responses of each participant but asymmetrical when one examines participant frequency of introduction of new topics. Dominance, in the sense of participants achieving what they want from other parties, or employing specific techniques in order to be victorious during disagreements is also linked with interactional asymmetry, although as stated earlier, dominance should not be seen as the only litmus test for asymmetry. If one rules out a strictly interpretative style of analysis, and if one also ignores simple quantitative data analysis (such as counting the number of words each participant utters) the approach of looking for features of the conversation which contribute towards interactional asymmetry is the most attractive. There were a number of such features which were more or less present in all of the conversations I analysed, which are described briefly below. The asymmetrical nature of the lecturer-student relationships was not apparent in every utterance made during their conversation; it was most likely to reveal itself during occasions of "trouble": misunderstandings, disagreements, non-attributable silences, unwanted interruptions. Any point of the conversation which resulted in a situation where participants had to resolve this trouble before the interview could proceed would usually be where issues of asymmetry were also confronted. The nature of the asymmetry was revealed in the differing techniques (and also responses to techniques employed by the other party) that the two participants used in order to resolve the conflict. Lecturers, for example, employed strategies which not only resolved the conflict, but heightened their chances of the conflict terminating in their favour. On the other hand, the techniques used by students during conflict tended to be more concerned with "saving face" before submission. Lecturers tended to be more anticipatory of student techniques, and to use counter-strategies, while students would often be quickly persuaded by the lecturer’s tactics.

To conclude, the asymmetry between students and lecturers was not confined to a single level. Although asymmetry should not always imply a hierarchical scale in which some participants are at an advantage to others, I feel that it would not be incorrect to state that in the majority of cases where asymmetry is at issue during the conversations analysed, the lecturers are placed in the superior position. From levels of asymmetry which are
qualitative (responsibility for progression of the conversation, knowledge, tactics during conflict, exertion of dominance) through the merely quantitative length of utterances) to the exogenous, (participant status and rights) it is the lecturer who emerges as the dominant subject. It was not the intention of this paper to investigate whether this dominance arose because of the interplay between exogenous and endogenous factors within the lecturer-student relationship, but to show how internal characteristics during the interaction (specifically the participant’s talk) revealed the nature of the asymmetry. I hope that through my implementation of the conversation analysis approach this goal has now been achieved.
REFERENCES


### Appendix 1.

Table of Lecturer-Student Pairings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Lecturer gender</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Student Status</th>
<th>Student gender (No.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

### Appendix 2.

Transcription Conventions.  
Short pause less than 0.5 seconds (1.0)

Pause in seconds: L: yes [I see] Material in brackets indicates speech: [right]

Occurs simultaneously: L: It’s just that = Equals sign means no discernible gap

S: =I know between turn changing (2 syllables) Approximate length of unintelligible material (coughs) Transcriber’s description (So this is) Transcriber’s guess at what is said