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Mapping the components of the telephone conference:

An analysis of tutorial talk at a distance learning institution.

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Abstract

This article maps the components of telephone tutorial conferences (TTCs) used for distance learning in higher education. Using conversation analysis we identified four common sequences of TTCs as 'calling in'; 'agenda-setting'; 'tutorial proper'; and 'closing down'. Patterns of student participation look similar to those in face-to-face tutorials and the degree of interaction during 'calling-in' and agenda setting does not foretell student participation in the 'tutorial proper'. Student participation was related to differences in 'communicative formats' adopted by tutors and students for different purposes. These findings have helped us reflect on our communicative practices as university teachers and indicate that TTCs are functionally comparable with face to face tutorials in higher education settings.

Key words:

Research on 'Supporting Remote Learners' (Rewt and Maher, 2001) has often been designed to help educators understand how different technologies of communication are associated with particular strengths and problems. Despite the global move towards electronic forms of communication, telephone tutorial conferencing is still an important discussion forum for groups of remote students (Tait and Mills, 2003). Good practice for telephone tuition is well documented at the Open University, which has an abundance of experience in distance teaching and learning (Rewt and Maher, 2001) but students and tutors report 'persistent issues' with the use of telephone conferences (McAteer, Crook, Tolmie, Macleod, Musselbrook, and Barrowcliff, 2000). Based on interviews, focus groups and archive recordings of tutorials, McAteer *et al* highlight several areas of potential difficulty that need careful management and require specific skills on the part of tutors and students that are related to the distinct characteristics of the telephone conference as a communication technology. The agreed purpose of the telephone conference is argued to be an important issue to be resolved in advance. Where TTCs are used as an alternative to face to face tutorials the following issues arise: the need for advance planning and managing the processes of the meeting; the need to be aware of the consequences of using a voice-only medium with possible lack of manifest feedback for students and the difficulty of establishing rapport between members of an unseen group. In view of these potential areas of difficulty, TTC's have been described as more problematic, prone to miscommunication and potentially more chaotic than face-to-face tuition and McAteer *et al* (2000) provide some helpful tips for best practice. For example, they recommend an optimum group size (six-eight) and remind us of the need for accurate timekeeping, advance preparation, the facilitation of peer discussion, involvement of participants, answering students' questions and giving them feedback. All of this

involves effective management of group processes. These are valuable guidelines that identify important issues, however, no study has yet mapped out the overall structure of TTCs nor examined in the detail afforded by Conversation Analysis precisely how these ideals are put into practice.

Our aims for this paper are twofold: First we will demonstrate that, despite the difficulties described by previous research, interactions in the conferences display far more regularities and fewer difficulties than expected. These regularities are mapped out and can be used reflectively to develop particular pedagogical outcomes. Second, we aim to show that despite subjective reports about difficulties in TTCs, participants display a shared understanding of how they work. We apply CA to demonstrate the collaborative nature of TTC's and tutors' and students' understanding of what it is to teach and learn in that setting.

Talk in institutions

Following the growing tradition of studying conversation in institutions (e.g. Drew & Heritage, 1992; Heritage, 1997; Heritage & Maynard, 2006), this paper is informed by the CA tradition and its previous applications to institutional talk, telephone conversations and university tutorials in higher education.

Early CA work by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974/78) made clear that ordinary conversation is the basic structure from which all institutional formats can be derived (ten Have, 2007). Institutional talk is more formal and restricted than ordinary conversation, having recognisable forms and patterns that constitute its own setting. For example, CA studies show how the opening sections of telephone calls follow a

regular pattern of sequencing (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1968). These initial observations have recently been applied to the study of opening sequences in commercial settings such as radio 'call-in' shows (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002), calls to a computer support line (Baker, Emmison and Firth, 2001: 42) and in calls to an NSPCC childline (Potter and Hepburn, 2003). All of these demonstrate the orientation of callers and call-takers to the nature of the business to be dealt with in the call.

There is a wealth of relevant discursive work in educational research, applying CA, discursive psychology and linguistic analyses to classroom and tutorial talk. For example, Benwell and Stokoe (2002) studied how educational business is organised in in face-to-face seminars in higher education, covering topics such as student participation, the organisation of knowledge, group dynamics, students' uptake of tutors' questions and the negotiation of agendas (c.f. Benwell, 1999). They discuss the asymmetrical nature of tutorial discourse, the apparent 'reluctance' of students to answer questions or participate in discussions, and the significance of 'agenda-setting' sequences. The 'asymmetrical' nature of client-professional interaction is also well documented in Silverman's (1997) description of HIV counselling sessions where the flow of interaction moves back and forth between two 'communicative formats' which he claims "put the professional firmly in control" (Silverman, 1997: 56). Whilst this seems to cast doubt on the 'client-centredness' of such counselling sessions, it remains to be seen how tutor-student interaction might also be constituted through such formats and what the likely implications might be for 'student-centred' teaching.

The originality of our paper lies in the application of a CA approach to the analysis of TTCs used for distance learning and teaching. We contribute to this field by mapping out regularities observed in TTC's, showing how tutors and students actively collaborate to produce an intelligible structure for their educational business using different kinds of interactions for different pedagogic purposes.

Method

The participants were postgraduate students and their tutors, who gave informed consent to the audio recording of their telephone tutorials. For many, this was their first experience of taking part in a TTC. They were reassured that the research was not linked to performance assessment and they were given the choice of opting out of the study[1].

TTCs are embedded in specific organisational practices by which routines are achieved (Schegloff, 1986). For example, in our data the regular and distinctive pattern of the calling-in phase is embedded in the way that procedures are normally set up by the organisation. Students sign up for a TTC and tutors book dates and times. Conference calls are arranged by university administrators who allocate a conference number for students to call-in. The telephone network usually 'calls-out' first to the tutor, who waits for students 'callers' to be introduced one by one.[2] These procedures follow a normative pattern and provide a context for the way that the calling-in sequence is managed in practice[3]. All TTCs in our data were an hour long

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[1] Non-recorded tutorials were provided for those students who did not wish to take part in the study.
[2] The exception to this format is that the communication network 'call out' to overseas students.
[3] In our corpus we only have one TTC where the tutor is called last and so does not fit the normative pattern for a calling-in sequence.

and were bound by the network Operator who initiated the call and 'called time' five minutes before the end (cf. McAteer et al, 2000).

Our data corpus comprises 14 hours of audio recorded TTCs. The full corpus was transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 1984 Appendix 1) and CA was applied to transcripts alongside repeated listening to audio recordings. First we identified regular component patterns that comprise the phases of the conference. We analysed sequential structure and organisation of speaker turns - how the opening sequence was managed, how the tutorial agenda was negotiated, how turns were designed in the 'tutorial proper' and how the conference was drawn to a close. We selected extracts typifying each of the tutorial phases and were alert to notice extracts where the TTC did not follow normative patterns and to identify lack of student participation such as documented by earlier research.

Analysis

Our analysis focuses on four distinct components of TTCs, which shared patterns across the corpus. These phases were (1) a 'calling in/introductions sequence (2) an 'agenda-setting' sequence (3) the 'tutorial proper' and (4) a 'closing down' sequence. For each phase, an example of a typical sequence demonstrates how orderliness is co-produced by the participants. Our analysis begins with the 'calling-in' sequence.

(1) Calling-in/introductions sequence

An extended sequence at the beginning of each TTC shows participants being introduced by the operator. This 'calling in' sequence includes greetings, introductions and a series of small-talk to task-talk transitions. As with Sacks' observations about the order found in apparently chaotic everyday interactions, it is

clear that there are regularities in the way that this sequence is structured and managed by participants as a preface to setting up the business of the tutorial (c.f. Baker, Emmison and Firth, 2001; Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002). In producing such regularities, participants display their shared understanding of how such interactions routinely work. The 'calling in' section initially follows the normative patterns identified by Schegloff (1986) as characteristic of telephone conversation openings in Western cultures. The telephone ring and answer is recognisable as a 'summons/answer' sequence and the conference call is normally opened by an 'identification/recognition' sequence where the operator asks the tutor to confirm her identity. The extract below is a clear example of this sequence.

Extract 1: Kate: (20/07/03)

1.		((ring))
2.	K	hello
3.		(.)
4.	Op	oh hi there Kate
5.	K	yes
6.	Op	community network ready for your conference
7.	K	oh ye:s (.) thank you (.)
8.	K	thank you very much
9.		(15.0)

At the end of Extract 1 (line 9) there is a long pause before the Operator introduces the first student to the conference (in Extract 2, below). Waiting time is a common feature of 'calling-in' sequences lasting until the operator introduces the first student to the conference. The call continues below.

Extract 2: Kate (20/07/03)

10.	Op	Kate
11.	K	Hello
12.	Op	Hello I have Sa-hello is that Kate?
13.	K	Yes
14.	Op	I have Sam joining you
15.	K	((*smiley voice*)) thank you

After a further summons/answer sequence (line 10-11) the call continues with an

introduction sequence in which Sam (student) is introduced into the conference call

(lines 12 and 14) and Kate (tutor) acknowledges the Operator and Sam's 'arrival'

(line 15). The next part of the call begins with a greetings sequence between Kate and

Sam.

Extract 3: Kate (20/07/03)

16.		(.)
17.	S	hello Kate =
18.	K	= ((*smiley voice*)) hello Sam (.) hi how
19.		are you?
		(…)
30.	S	Anyone else here yet?
31.	K	No it's just us two at the moment(.)we'll
32.		just have to sit and wait for them but er
33.		have-how have you got on with the reading?

After the greetings sequence, Kate's 'how are you?'(lines 18-19) opens a short small-

talk sequence (lines omitted), after which the sequence at lines 30-33 shows a

transition from *small-talk to task-talk*, prompted by the student's remark 'anyone else

here yet?'. Kate treats this both as a question requiring an answer (line 31) and as a cue to move on to 'task-talk'- in this case tutorial preparation (lines 32-33). Such individual discussions with students are a common feature of introductory sequences and are distinct from the 'tutorial proper' (c.f. Benwell and Stokoe, 2002). Kate makes this distinction by marking the suggested discussion about reading as 'waiting' time and her switch from small-talk to task-talk here constitutes the legitimate business of the conference. The next extract shows the student's response.

Extract 4: Kate (20/07/03)

34.	S	o:ka:y I'm ploughing through part three
35.		readings at the moment
36.	K	mm ye:a[h
37.	S	[haven't got to (.) <u>your</u> chapter
38.		yet
39.	K	mm hm?
40.	S	*((mumbles – interference on telephone))*
41.	K	= well I think a lot of people will be (.)
42.		y'know sort of won't have got that far yet
43.		so [that's fi:ne yeah yeah
45.	S	[right I'm about to start the reading
46.		next week=
47.	K	= °right°

Issues around lack of preparation are common in face-to-face university tutorial talk (Stokoe, 2000) and Sam's use of a metaphor, suggests that 'ploughing through' the reading (line 34) is hard labour and this accounts for not being properly prepared. Kate responds (lines 41-3) as most tutors do (Benwell and Stokoe, 2002) with a 'face-

saving' strategy that Sam will not be the only student who is behind with the reading. Sam's willingness to start reading (line 45) signals awareness of her obligations as a student. This is softly acknowledged by Kate (line 47) before the Operator introduces the next caller for another greetings sequence (below).

Extract 5: Kate (20/07/03)

48. Op	I have Bob joining you now
49. K	hello Bob
50. B	hello Kate
51. K	hi how are you
52.	(.)
53. B	not too ba:d
54. K	that's great we've got erm (.) Sam (.)
55.	with us erm
56. B	hello
	(…)
60. K	how are you getting on with the reading
61.	erm hhh (.) have you sort of managed to get
62.	through most of it?
63. B	not re::ally I've got somewhat behi:nd (.)
64.	I went on my holiday last week >very well
65.	intentioned< took my book

Here are more introductions and small talk (lines 49-53) where Kate introduces Bob (student caller) to Sam (lines 54-5) and then returns to Bob (line 60), switching between small-talk and task-talk and nominating the same topic as before (reading). Kate's queries about preparation (lines 60-62) are more tentative and hedged here (line 61) marking it as delicate or potentially 'face-threatening' and setting up an

expectation for Bob's negative response (line 63) 'I've got somewhat behi:nd'. His account (at line 64) and his rushed-through statement of good intent (at lines 64-5) counters any possible suggestion that he is uncooperative and signals his awareness that he has obligations as a student on the course, whilst accounting for possible lack of participation in the tutorial discussion.

This TTC continued with several similar sequences of introductions and small-talk, each followed by a task-talk transition to a query about students' preparatory reading. Kate summarises what they were 'talking about' for the benefit of each new student caller (e.g. Extract 6, line 93), such formulations being a common device to include newcomers in an established group (Coupland, 2000).

Extract 6: Kate (20/07/03)

```
93   K      we were just talking about how far
94.         everybody's got with the reading
95.         erm and er (.) I think mostly people are
96.         a-not quite into the block three stuff.
97.         ((smiley voice)) Am I right in thinking
98.         that(.) yeh?
99.  P      yeah heh heh heh about half way through
100.        block three
101. K      ye:ah
```

At lines 97-8, Kate redesigns her query about reading so as to obtain agreement. The '*smiley voice*' and refocused query are recognisable 'face saving strategies' in tutorial talk (Benwell and Stokoe , 2002; Goffman, 1967). 'Politeness' and humour help to move these early sequences along with a positive upbeat tone, whilst constituting the

students' lack of preparation as a potential area of 'trouble'. The use of humour to manage 'trouble' (Jefferson, 1984) is comparable with what happens in traditional face-to-face tutorials (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002) and this humorous exchange occurs near the end of a sequence in which all of the students have indicated that they are poorly prepared for the tutorial. Kate attempts to manage this breach by incrementally modifying the design of her question to provide an opportunity for students to give a 'preferred' response and to normalise their lack of preparation (lines 95-8). The repetitious process of introductions, greetings, and discussion of 'what we have read so far' continues until the tutor signals that all of the students have joined the conference (line 112, below).

Extract 7: Kate (20/07/03)

112. K   okay so I'm not expecting anybody else so

113.   can we make a start then now?

The question 'can we make a start then?' (line 113) signals to students that previous talk has not been the main task focus and that a transition to the proper business of the conference is upcoming. Kate's use of 'okay so' (line 112) marks a transition from one phase of the tutorial to another (Beach, 1993; Montague, Horton-Salway, Wiggins and Seymour-Smith, *forthcoming*). This transition is common to all of the conferences in our data corpus, including a deviant case where the tutor joined last. This is where the process of negotiating agendas and nominating tutorial topics starts to be formally constructed. Although small-talk to task-talk transitions in introductory sequences are frequently initiated by students, the 'making a start' transition is always initiated by tutors and it constitutes their leading role in the 'tutorial proper'. Where a tutor joined the TTC last, there was a lengthy task-talk discussion in which her leadership was not

clearly articulated until she initiated a 'making a start' transition.   Agenda setting

processes are considered in more detail in the next section.

(2) Agenda setting

The main business of the tutorial is initiated and negotiated by tutors during 'agenda

setting'. Extract 8 (below) illustrates how this phase is managed.

Extract 8: Sue (23/9/03)

1.	S	= yes so we've (.) we've got so
2.		far we've got B, H, E, J,
3.		A and T and I'm S (.)
4.		erm so what if I can just start
5.		off then I'll just run through er
6.		an agenda that I've made up (.)
7.		and then you can let me know if
8.		this sounds okay↑
9.		(.)
10.	S	so I thought we'd start of b::y
11.		(.)
12.		basically seeing how everyone's
13.		getting on with revision or
14.		pla↑nning revision hh if you
15.		haven't started it yet and any
16.		first concerns you might have
17.		about that (.) erm then I thought
18.		we'd go straight into the two
19.		parts of the exam
20.		(0.2)
21.	S	as you'll see on the specimen
22.		exam paper the exam's in two

23.		parts the first part is focused
24.		on the issues raised in chapter
25.		seven sorry chapter twe↑nty seven the debates
26.		chapter hh erm so
27.		we'll talk a bit about how you
28.		might tackle those que↓stions (.)
29.		and then we'll move on to talking
30.		how you might tackle part tw↑o
31.		(0.2)
32.	S	e::rm then we'll sort of finish
33.		off with sort of general revision
34.		thoughts any ideas to share with
35.		each other
36.		(0.2)
37.	S	that sound okay↑ =
38.	T	= hm [mm
39.	B	[sounds good =
40.	S	= great okay

Tutor (Sue) moves from a 'reminder' of who is present at the tutorial (line 1-3) to her agenda suggestions (lines 4-8). This sequence (lines 1-3) is specific to a telephone conference as (in the absence of visual cues) it helps to make the members more present to one another as a group. Despite Sue treating agenda-setting as a negotiated activity (lines 4-8), no students come in at the Transition Relevant Place (TRP) (line 9) where a pause marks the end of one turn of talk, and the beginning of another (Sacks, 1974; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 2007). Turn-taking is a key concern within CA and there are several ways in which speaker change can be organised: this is locally, interactionally and party managed. Either a next speaker can

be selected, or the present speaker can self-select, or the present speaker can continue talking (Sacks *et al* 1978). Failure to take a turn at a TRP is treated as a 'dispreferred response' and resists the normative question-answer pattern in ordinary conversation (Pomerantz, 1984). Benwell and Stokoe have shown that "students routinely stay silent at TRPs within the tutor's talk" (2002: 437; c.f. Fassinger, 1995). They observed how lack of student uptake can "disable the tutor's attempts to initiate discussion" so that tutors resort to 'politeness' and 'face-saving' strategies to move the discussion along. These methods signal tutorial activities as potentially 'face-threatening' (Goffman, 1967; Brown and Levinson, 1987; Malone, 1997).

To return to our example above, Sue responds to lack of student uptake by resuming her outline agenda (lines 10-19). Another TRP (line 20) passes by and the tutor continues to elaborate topics for discussion (line 27-28). After a further instance where students pass up the opportunity to contribute (line 31), Sue concludes her ideas for the agenda (lines 32-35). At the final TRP, Sue poses a direct question (line 37) and two students finally respond. At line 40, Sue treats this as agreement with her suggestions (line 40: 'great okay').

In some of our other examples, tutors were more tentative in their agenda-setting than Sue who constructs a clear summary of her proposals focused around a specimen exam paper which had been sent to students in advance. In Extract 9 (below) Kate's agenda-setting is peppered with hesitations and hedged queries.

Extract 9: Kate (20/07/03)

    1.   K   Now most of us have kind of looked at

2.	chapters two three and possibly four so
3.	what we'll do is (.) well what I suggest
4.	heh heh we do heh heh I'll ask you what
5.	you think erm (.) I thought if we just
6.	start with a rather general question
7.	(.) to discuss what you found of interest
8.	really about the pieces of research you've
9.	looked at in the workbook

Kate begins with a clear justification for what *can* be covered in the tutorial, based on a recap of what most students have read (line 1). Then follows a section (lines 3-5) where she orients to agenda setting as a negotiated activity through incremental changes. She begins directively (line 3), then repairs to a suggestion (lines 3-4) and moves on to a more democratic approach (lines 4-5), and arrives at her final suggestion for the first topic of the tutorial (lines 5-6). The hedging and laughter in this example are clear indicators of Kate's concern with directive agenda-setting as potentially difficult and the need to encourage student participation. The sequence follows an earlier calling-in sequence where students have admitted to being ill-prepared so the agreement of an agenda in Extract 9 displays a concern with getting students' agreement and their subsequent participation in discussion of nominated topics.

Despite differences in tutors' deliveries of agenda-setting, all sequences have a similar structure and perform the same kind of business. They mark the beginning of the 'tutorial proper' where tutors nominate topics and students' agreement to agendas is sought. Earlier research has stressed the importance of agreeing agendas, even sending them out in advance, for the success of the telephone tutorial (McAteer *et al*

2000). In practice, this guidance has as much to do with managing the processes of the tutorial as with getting the students to prepare. Furthermore, we found that, despite tutors' orientation to agreement, their attempts to achieve consensus in agenda-setting sequences did not necessarily result in increased student participation in the 'tutorial proper'. In the 'tutorial proper', discussed in the next section, two different 'communicative formats' (Silverman, 1997) are related to different degrees of student participation.

(3) The 'tutorial proper'

We borrow the term 'tutorial proper' from Benwell and Stokoe (2002) and interaction in this phase of the TTC seems to be bound up with the accomplishment of two tasks: 1) to further student's knowledge and understanding of the course material and 2) to encourage active student participation in the tutorial. In practice, tutors move between different 'communicative formats' which serve different purposes (c.f. Silverman, 1997). One format was noticeably more effective in the task of encouraging active student participation. To illustrate we analyse examples from tutorials led by tutors, Julie and Sue.

Our first example, taken from Julie's 'tutorial proper', demonstrates how extended turns at talk are used to impart knowledge to students.

Extract 10: Julie (25/1/04)

1.	J	why you would want to [( )
2.	P	[that's the problem
3.		with it why you would want to (.)
4.	J	well that's the interest isn't it? An it
5.		raises quite a lot of interesting

6.   questions about conversation analysis as

7.   well because if you-in one of the ways-

8.   they're quite small extracts and quite

9.   often CA analysis is done in quite small

10.   extracts mainly because of the amount of

11.   detail that they would want to analyse

12.   those particular interactions with and the

13.   whole thing about context I kno::w in the

14.   Workbook's ((name)) chapter he does tell

15.   you about why he y'know interested in that

16.   kind of research so you get that broader

17.   context (.)

This demonstrates one strategy used by the tutor to retain the floor for an extended turn. Julie's question (line 1) is echoed by Pam (lines 2-3). This adjacency pair constitutes an 'information check' to set up the 'Information delivery' format used by the tutor in lines 4-17 (c.f. Silverman, 1997). Rather than answering the tutor's query, Pam treats it as rhetorical and re-states it as 'the problem' (line 2). Julie then reformulates it more positively as 'the interest' (line 4) and continues, as if Pam had requested further information, with a three-part list of reasons (lines 7-13) why it might be of interest. This is designed to strengthen the position of CA to a diffident student (Atkinson, 1984a) and constitutes the task of imparting knowledge rather than encouraging student participation. Silverman refers to an asymmetric division of labour that is characteristic of counsellors talking to their clients. In 'Information delivery' format, it is the professional who does most of the talking and the client who is the recipient. However, the collaboration of both parties is necessary, and at a relevant TRP (Extract 11, line 18: below) Pam, as recipient of the information, comes

in with an acceptance token 'yeah' which acts as a continuer for Julie to carry on

talking (Schegloff, 1982).

Extract 11: Julie (25/1/04)

18.	P	yeah=
19.	J	=but with CA you're not supposed to go
20.		into the analysis with any predetermined a
21.		priori sort of intentions of what you are
22.		going to do so in some ways it's quite
		(…)
28.		that's that's their point of view. I mean
29.		I like the extra context myself and I
30.		prefer um (.) using discursive psychology
31.		where you can bring in wider sort of
32.		contextual issues but (.) that whole issue
33.		of context is quite a key

Julie continues an extended turn with further information about CA supplemented by

her own views. (lines 29-33). Neither Pam, nor the other students take opportunities

for a turn in Extracts 10 or 11 and thereby consent to the 'information delivery'

format used by the tutor. There are advantages for professionals in using an

'information delivery' format to deliver a pre-designed range of issues in a shorter

space of time (Silverman, 1997). There are alternative advantages in using an

'Interview format' that are demonstrated in the next sequence from Sue's 'tutorial

proper'.

Extract 12: Sue: (23/9/03)

1.	S	how are basically people feeling at this
2.		stage (.) coming up to revision
3.		(1.5)
4.	H	I could do with another two months huh heh
5.		(.)
6.	S	okay is that Helen or (.)
7.	H	heh heh heh yes it's Helen sorry heh
8.		heh heh heh heh
9.		(0.1)
10.	S	okay (.)
11.	J	yeah er it's Jackie here I would agree
12.		could probably do with another two months
13.		but um (.) I'll be glad when er it comes
14.		round I think just to get it done (.)
15.	S	yeah
16.	H	mm
17.		(.)
18.	H	I'm feeling okay about the first part but
19.		the second part terrifies me I've gotta
20.		heh heh say it just feels (.) seems a lot
21.		more complicated than the first part
22.		(.)
23.	S	okay
24.		(0.2)

This extract is taken from near the start of the 'tutorial proper' where Sue established a good level of student participation. An interesting feature of Sue's tutorial is the use of self-identity as part of the turn-taking mechanism. In the absence of visual cues, identification can be used for speakers to signal they are

about to take a turn and helps to construct the social order of the interaction. Sue had established the strategy of self-identification earlier in her tutorial by saying "Sue here". Here in Extract 12 (line 6) she requests a similar self-identification from one of the student speakers, "okay is that Helen?". This sets a precedent for student (Jackie) to follow (Extract 12, line 11). McAteer *at al* point out that using a proper name to get the floor might seem unnatural as it is not normal practice in everyday face to face conversation (cf. Sacks *et al*, 1978). However the establishment of this protocol is a useful aid to encourage students to self-select in a TTC and to make group members more 'present' to one another where the usual visual cues are not available.

Sue's turns in this sequence of the 'tutorial proper' are designed in an 'Interview format' where she is questioner and listener and the students are answerers. Her initial question "how are basically people feeling" (lines 1-2) is designed to get students to contribute and Sue provides only minimal feedback in both Extracts 12 and 13, allowing longer pauses (Extract 12, line 3; Extract 13, line 42) and giving encouragement with back-channel sounds (Extract 13, line 37) and continuers (Extract 12, lines 10, 15 and 23). In this way she facilitates student participation and the whole sequence (comprising Extracts 12 and 13) follows a normative pattern of questions and answers. Extract 13 (below) demonstrates how Sue gives space for all of the students in the group to answer before moving on to the next question or topic.

Extract 13: Sue (23/9/03)

23.   S   okay

24.   (0.2)

25.	B	Bob here I haven't really started
26.		revision yet and the course covers such a
27.		vast amount of of of erm (.) of material
28.		er (.) and um I think that my specialty-
29.		cos I've had to go into some things in
30.		more depth I do that anyway for work and
31.		just have to hope for the best but the
32.		part two as well just seems to (.) erm it
33.		must be focused more because you answer
34.		those questions you would just need to
35.		have studied for several years really
36.		(.)
37.	S	mm
38.		(.)
39.	B	I don't know what they're expecting and
40.		I'm hoping you're going to tell us about=
41.	S	=heh heh okay
42.		(1.0)
43.	S	anyone else?

After Helen's extreme statement about the second part of the exam which 'terrifies' her (Extract 12, line 19), Bob comes in (Extract 13, line 25) with a confession about lack of revision. Hesitantly (line 27), he poses a difficulty with the course materials. Though indirect, this could be taken up by Sue as a request for information and answered as such. However, rather than providing lengthy feedback to his individual queries (lines 39-40) she opens out the discussion to include the whole of the group (line 43).

In Extracts 10, 11, 12, and 13 there are differences in the way tutors Julie and Sue manage imparting knowledge and student participation. There is a trade off between giving substantial feedback in the 'information delivery' format and encouraging group participation in the 'interview' format, but both formats are co-produced between tutors and students. Sue's use of 'interview format' signals that Bob's query (line 40) is one item in a 'query collecting' exercise rather than treating it as something to be addressed immediately (lines 41-43). Query collection is accomplished through her use of continuers signalling that students should take turns whilst Sue collects their topics for later discussion. At first this appears to be inclusive but, as the 'tutorial proper' gets underway, some queries are forgotten. For example, Bob's query (line 40) about the focus of part two exam questions is not dealt with directly here and Bob falls silent for the rest of the tutorial. This does not necessarily imply that Bob's query was not addressed. On the contrary, part two exam questions were discussed later with other students. However, the tutor did not make any specific attempt to include Bob in that later discussion, nor did she check that his original query had been answered. This resulted in Bob being 'invisible' for the rest

of the tutorial. In contrast, Julie (in Extracts 10 and 11) in her use of 'information delivery' format provides full teaching comments to each individual. The effect of this is immediate and as Julie becomes embroiled in this mode of delivery, her students take up the passive role of recipients.

We observed similar phenomena in all of our transcripts. In the 'tutorial proper', tutors designed their turns variably to accomplish two different tasks. Julie's treatment of students as the recipients of knowledge resulted in much less participation from her students. In contrast, Sue's use of 'interview format' indicated a 'listening mode' and resulted in extended sequences where most students participated but some agenda items were overlooked. A similar phenomenon was observed in 'Citizens Council' meetings (Davies, Wetherell & Barnett, 2006) where council members were encouraged to debate and come to conclusions about health related topics. Facilitators collected topics for discussion in a similar way to Sue and findings suggested that this method often resulted in topics being overlooked and limited the members' participation. In our tutorial examples, unless the tutor manages to keep track of all student queries and participation, the loss of some topics for discussion may be a necessary 'trade off' for increased levels of student participation. Either way, it is clear that both 'information delivery format' and 'interview format' have their uses and consequences for student participation and possible exclusion. In the 'interview format' this appears less immediate and therefore at first glance might appear to be a more student-centred format than the 'information delivery format'. However, much depends on how 'student-centredness' or a successful tutorial is being defined or evaluated. Success might be measured by full student participation or by student satisfaction in having all of their queries answered. On the other hand successful

learning might be seen as an outcome of peer discussion, as with constructivist

models of learning (Steffe and Gale, 1995). In order to make such a judgement about

success it would certainly be necessary to hold some pre-conceived theory of what

constitutes the best way of learning however, in doing conversation analysis on our

data, we hold no such theories a priori (Schegloff, 1997). As reflective practitioners,

we may well subscribe to such theories and have certainly found the mapping of

'interview format' and 'information delivery format' a useful aid in helping us to

consider pedagogical aims, such as preparation, use of agendas and strategies for

inclusion of students. As to the evaluation of the tutorial, our CA analysis treats this

as a matter for participants who routinely orient to that in the closing sequences of the

TTCs. In the 'closing-down' sequence (below) we have analysed how the tutor and

students typically accomplish the success of the tutorial as a collaborative

achievement.

 (4) Closing-down sequence

The 'closing-down' sequence is the final phase of the conference call, heralded by the

Operator five minutes before time is up. There is always an acknowledgement of the

Operator followed by a temporary return to completing tutorial business, then thank

yous and goodbyes. See Extract 14, below.

Extract 14: Paula (7/4/04)

1.	Op	sorry to interrupt you it's the Operator (.)
2.		you have five minutes left now=
3.	P	=okay thank you (.) right we'll spend the last
4.		few minutes then. I'll just read these out for
5.		J cos these are um the final bit on the sheet

After the Operator's prompt at lines 1-2, Paula (tutor) sets out a plan for the last few minutes and indicates 'the final bit on the sheet' as completion of an agreed agenda. Appeals to an agenda are a common strategy used to move tutorials along (McAteer *et al,* 2000) and some delicate business is accomplished (in Extract 15) before the closing sequence properly begins.

Extract 15: Paula(7/4/04)

13.	P	= so I <u>did</u> intend to have a little bit more
14.		time to discuss it but we obviously haven't
15.		\<although I think\> there's been quite a lot of
16.		discussion of these as we've gone through the
17.		points anyway hasn't there?=
18.	J	= [mm
19.	K	[mm=
20.	P	= are there any points that any of you would
21.		like to raise in relation to these three? That
22.		you'd like to make or that you think are
23.		particularly interesting particularly
24.		difficult maybe
25.		((rustling for 0.2))
26.	J	well I'm reasonably happy with (.) the
27.		contrasts=
28.	P	= it's quite nice that somebody's reasonable
29.		happy with the course heh heh [heh
30.	K	[heh heh heh heh=
31.	P	or the contrasts in the course heh heh ehh
32.		heh=
33.	J	= ((smiley voice)) it's remembering it all heh

34.		[heh
35.	P	[yeah yeah and it's just finding a way to put
36.		it down on paper that you'll remember isn't
37.		it?=
38.	J	= yeah
39.		(0.1)
40.	P	was you going to say something L?=
41.	L	=yes I was.It's just the-the last one that I'd
42.		got the understandin of the critical
43.		discursive but the contrast between theirs and
44.		I understood it as with the critical
45.		discursive approach it was sort of looking at
46.		change through critical understanding
47.	P	contrast but you seem to have got over that
48.		problem so that's fine (.)

At lines 13-17, Paula claims that despite time constraints, they have covered most of their agenda items. This promotes a positive note for closing down the tutorial and when she throws open the floor for final questions, she restricts the business to nominating interesting or difficult topics 'in relation to these three' (lines 20-21). As before, the use of a three-part list constructs a more general inclusiveness of all outstanding items (Atkinson, 1984a). No-one nominates an 'interesting' or 'difficult' topic and student J's comment (lines 26-7) "well I'm reasonably happy" is greeted with laughter first from the tutor and then from student (K). The laughter marks being "reasonably happy" as a risky claim prior to the examination and this prompts J to add the proviso "It's remembering it all". The laughter in this exchange between Paula and student J indicates that a breach in the interaction has occurred (Benwell and Stokoe, 2002; Jefferson, 1984). Nominating difficult topics would have been the

preferred response, since that is what the tutor requested. Student J's proviso "Its remembering it all" responds to the questionable status of being 'reasonably happy' and provides for Paula's elaboration of a "difficult topic", how to improve recall in the exam (lines 35-6). The sequence ends with the tutor nominating another student (L) (line 40) who introduces a topic from the legitimate list of "these three". The tutor fails to follow this up in detail (at lines 47-8) before initiating the closing-down sequence of the conference call (Extract 16, line 49, below). In Extract 15, although time was spent on a student who claimed to be "reasonably happy" at the expense of one who chose a legitimate topic from the tutor's list of three, Paula managed to design her response to L as a positive evaluation of how the student had successfully coped with her own problem (lines 47-8).

Extract 16: Paula: (7/4/04)

49.	P	I think we mi::ght be cut off any minute [no:w
50.	K	[heh
51.	P	so heh I'll just say thanks to everyone for
52.		joining it's a shame Ted and Rose couldn't
53.		join in an it's heh ((smiley voice)) lucky that
54.		we didn't wait for Ted heh heh
55.	K	mm
56.	P	but it's been really nice speaking to you all
57.		and I hope it's been useful
58.		[an I hope you get on alright
59.	J	[yes it has thank you
60.	K	[it has P thank you very much=
61.	L	=yeah thank you=
62.	P	= if you've got any questions just email me
63.		or-or something an heh if I'm av(heh)ailable

64.		I'll get back to you heh heh [right?
65.	K	[thank you=
66.	L	=thank [you
67.	J	[thank you very much=
68.	K	=good luck everybody
69.	J	= good [luck
70.	K	[I hope it goes well=
71.	P	=yeah
72.	K	okay then byee=
73.	J	=bye
74.	P	=bye

The closing sequence is initiated by an appeal to the constraints imposed by the telephone Operator (line 49). The main business of the final closing sequence is to observe the normative courtesies of closing a telephone call (lines 56-74). Concluding business is managed through establishing affirmation that the tutorial has been useful (56-60), and setting up arrangements for follow up queries (lines 62-4). Telephone closings (between two people) are made of moves to both pre-closing and closing and generally take up four turns at talk – two for each of these (Button and Lee, 1987). In the above extract these moves to pre-closing begin with Paula's reference to getting in touch at lines 62-64, and responses from students at lines 65-70. The closing is mutually negotiated by them all through this pre-closing and then finally by K at line 72 with responses from J and Paula. This sequence is typical of the final part of a closing down sequence in our data, although students do sometimes exchange contact details before the end of the TTC some reference might be made to a follow up task (e.g. an exam or assignment). There is much of interest here, but two points are worth further comment. The first is a segment (line 51-2) that refers back to the 'calling-in'

sequence, thanking students for joining and referring to those who did not show up. This orients participants to their membership of a tutor group as a collective, whilst Paula's humorous comment about waiting for Ted, (lines 53-4) justifies her earlier decision to continue without him. Secondly, the tone of this sequence is congratulatory and summarises what has been achieved by the group. The members have covered the main points on the agenda, no difficulties were raised and there is agreement that the tutorial was useful. An additional bonus is that the decision not to wait for Ted was the right one. In the narrative of the successful conference call, this tutorial had a happy ending!

DISCUSSION

To summarise, our analysis highlights four key components of TTCs which enable the collaborative business of the tutorial to be managed. We have labelled these four phases as follows: 'calling-in', 'agenda-setting', 'tutorial proper' and 'closing-down' sequences.

- The 'calling-in' sequence is an important site of socio-interactional business. Participants are introduced, interaction between tutor and students is established through small-talk and information relevant to the tutorial business is collected during task-talk prior to 'agenda –setting'.

- Agenda-setting is always tutor-led and follows a regular pattern: Tutors suggest tutorial topics and look for agreement, before continuing to the first tutorial topic that signals the start of the 'tutorial proper'.

- In the 'tutorial proper, despite a lack of non-verbal cues, the patterns of student uptake and participation look surprisingly similar to the ones that characterise face-to-face group tutorials. The degree of interaction in the

'calling-in' sequence does not foretell the degree of student participation in the 'tutorial proper'. For instance, one tutor established an interactive 'calling-in' sequence and explicitly defined the tutorial agenda as negotiable, but the 'information delivery format' used during the 'tutorial proper' resulted in less active participation by students. A tutor who used the 'information delivery format' in the agenda-setting sequence, later switched to the 'interview format' providing minimal individual feedback in the 'tutorial proper' and allowing a greater degree of participation by students.

- The closing-down sequence was similar between TTCs. A five minute warning by the Operator heralded closing down tutorial business. Thanks and goodbyes signal the end of the call. Despite lack of preparation or participation in the 'tutorial proper', students typically collaborate with tutors to evaluate the tutorial as a success story.

Apart from the defining features of the TTC - calling in sequence, closing down sequence and some use of self-identification, tutorial talk in TTCs shares much in common with face-to-face university tutorials (c.f. Benwell and Stokoe, 2002). Yet, McAteer *et al* (2000) reported reduced student satisfaction in TTCs, suggesting that this is because it is easier in face-to-face tutorials for the tutor to nominate speakers using eye contact, or to notice when someone is trying to self-select. It is certainly the case that students can remain 'invisible' if they do not speak and the tutor overlooks them. Despite these issues, participants did produce recognisable phases of the TTC as a regular pattern of sequences through which tutorial business was accomplished. These regularities were not agreed in advance as rules to be followed, but they were co-produced by the participants themselves on and for each occasion.

McAteer *et al* (2000) argued that using a pre-circulated agenda effectively structures TTCs and helps to facilitate participation. We would agree that an agenda is an important feature of TTCs and, as McAteer *et al* suggest, it is something that the tutor can use to move tutorial topics along. However, our analyses of the processes of turn-taking reveal a further element to consider- the methods tutors use to manage the twin tasks of furthering knowledge and engaging student participation. Their use of different 'communicative formats' have implications for student engagement in these processes. We did notice a tendency for tutors to make more use of one format than the other and it would be tempting to claim that this amounts to individual 'styles' of tutoring. However, tutors did not use formats consistently or exclusively but made use of both kinds at different points in their tutorials. The analysis illustrates the importance of turn design in the processes of imparting knowledge or engaging student participation as distinctly different kinds of tutorial tasks. We are here building on Silverman's earlier findings on the use of 'communicative formats' in a counselling setting but we do not presume to treat the use of distinct 'communicative formats' as evidence of greater or lesser student-centredness in our teaching. Indeed, such issues can only be addressed if one has taken up a prior theoretical position on what constitutes a 'student-centred' approach. We will leave that for other reflective practitioners to decide.

The main departures from the norms of face-to-face tutorial talk are observed in the 'calling-in' and 'closing down' sequences at the start and end of every conference and also in the use of names to self-select in the 'tutorial proper'. The 'calling-in' and 'closing-down' sequences are different from what happens in a classroom, but they do

closely resemble what happens at the start and end of telephone calls (Schegloff, 1968; 1979; 1980: Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). The 'calling-in' sequence resembles a *series* of ordinary telephone call openings, complete with greetings and initial enquiries (Schegloff, 1986). This 'Operator' sequence is similar to 'call-ins' in other institutional settings, for example radio call-ins where caller access is managed by technicians 'behind the scenes' to discuss a pre-selected topic (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002), or computer help-lines where 'expert' call-takers and callers co-produce the orderly structure of the opening sequence (Baker *et al*, 2001). Our own analyses show that the organisation of TTC's is similar to that of institutions like computer help lines where the interaction is both asymmetrical and task-oriented (Baker *et al,* 2001). However, the apparent asymmetry between participants and the management of task-based talk are collaboratively achieved. Students do not passively follow a pre-ordained agenda or communicative format selected by the tutor. They can resist the tutor's efforts to encourage greater student participation (cf. Stokoe, 2000). In Extract 10 (lines 1-4) there was an opportunity for the student to respond as answerer to the tutor's question in 'interview format'. Instead she reformulated the query as a 'problem' for the tutor to answer in 'information delivery' format. Such examples show how students and tutors orient to these two formats as recognisable and flexible features of their institutional setting.

An important outcome of our research has been a reflexive one. In line with the pedagogical aims of reflective practitioners (Schőn, 1987) we have found the results of our study illuminating. We have been able to reflect on our own teaching practices and hope to be more aware of the collaborative interactive processes involved in our

TTCs as a result. We leave it to other practitioners to decide how they might use our analysis to inform their own practices.

Our analysis in this paper was specific to group tutorial work in distance learning at a higher education institution in the UK. Further research might also look at the detail of TTCs in different higher education disciplines or in different settings, such as commercial institutions or self-help groups to see if the regular features we identified are common to other contexts. A comparison between conference calls for tutorial purposes and conference calls for business purposes could help to identify if there are 'core' regular features common to the use of telephone conferencing as a communication technology.

Appendix 1: Transcription Conventions

Symbols are based on the system developed mainly by Gail Jefferson (1984).

[	A left hand square bracket indicates where an overlap begins.
]	A right hand square bracket indicates where an overlap ends.
=	An 'equals' sign indicates 'latching' of successive talk.
(.)	A dot in brackets indicates a hearable pause, too short to measure.
(0.3)	Numbers in brackets measure pauses in seconds
↑↓	An arrow pointing upwards indicates a rising intonation. An arrow pointing downwards indicates a falling intonation.
> <	Indicates speeded up talk.
underlining	Indicates emphasis
Ye:ah	A colon indicates elongation of the vowel sound that it follows.
Bu-u-	Hyphens mark false-starts.

° °   Indicates quieter speech

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