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REQUESTING IN LIBRARY REFERENCE SERVICE INTERACTIONS

by

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and approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Requesting in Library Reference Service Interactions

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This dissertation is a conversation-analytic study of requests and the opening sequences that set up requesting in service interactions at a reference desk. The data reveal that openings consist minimally of an approach-availability display sequence followed by a request. Patrons and librarians jointly shape the course of action to provide a slot in which a request is expectable. Greetings may be used to: (1) maintain a state of engagement in an incipient interaction when initiated too far from the desk to transact business through talk or (2) advance to requesting by projecting the conditional relevance of a request in the next turn via a greeting+solicit construction or by reducing the opening through turn taking practices.

Patrons typically produce a request by presenting an assistable formulated as an unfinished activity. In the data requests make either instruction-giving or giving access to library resources relevant. Librarians' responses display their understanding of a turn as doing requesting by proposing a solution to the patron's problem, beginning to work on a solution, or initiating an interrogative sequence that solicits information relevant to a solution. When a request is not assistance-ready, the interactants collaborate on the production of an actionable request by: (1) augmenting the request turn; (2) initiating an interrogative insertion sequence; (3) constructing an extended, narrative request turn.

This study identifies the feature of needing assistance with completing a library-related activity as highly relevant to request-making. Librarians' orientation to this feature is consequential to the course of action, for when a patron does not construct a request around an unfinished activity, the librarian may: (1) respond as though the request had been formulated around an unfinished activity or (2) solicit a reformulation of the request in terms of an unfinished activity. The findings have implications for librarians' re-conceptualization of requesting as a social action and the improvement of professional practices based on the use of naturalistic data for research and training. The findings also support and extend prior research on the beginnings of face-to-face encounters, and on institutional talk-in-interaction, in particular work on the interrelationship of verbal and nonverbal practices in service encounters.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This study describes how requests and the opening sequences that set up requests are enacted in service interactions at a reference desk in a college library. The distinguishing feature of this study of reference service encounters is its approach to language for the action(s) it accomplishes rather than the information it transmits. Prior work on reference service encounters has been undertaken largely within a framework that treats communication as a process that entails the transfer of information between interlocutors. The field of research on reference librarianship has developed around this model of communication which has also guided library practice. Consistent with this model of communication, analytical attention has concentrated on factors that influence the successful transfer of information between a patron and a librarian. The performance of systems and services has been assessed with respect to the speed of information retrieval, fidelity of the message (e.g., request) vis-à-vis the intention of the sender, quantity or precision of retrieval, and reports of user satisfaction with the process. While the application of the information transfer model has yielded great advancements in modern librarianship, and has been especially well-suited to managing the rapid growth of information technology in libraries, every analytical perspective favors the investigation of certain types of phenomena and addresses certain types of questions more effectively than others. For insight into *how* communicative practices in libraries are enacted we need to work outside the framework of information transfer, because it is not concerned with describing the mechanics of social interaction. Consequently, this study applies conversation analysis to explore how patrons and librarians collaborate on

the production of patrons' requests, as well as the opening sequence that leads to the request.

Conversation analysis is a method of analyzing talk not for its syntactic form or the message that it transmits, but for the action or actions it accomplishes within a larger sequence of action (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 29). The goal of conversation analysis is to explicate the common-sense procedures that interlocutors use to formulate and understand actions. Therefore, drawing on a database of videotape-recorded naturally occurring reference desk interviews, this study describes the interactional tasks that patrons and librarians accomplish verbally and nonverbally in the opening of an interaction and the most commonly used practice for making a request that is observed in the data. Although librarians are accustomed to evaluating the transfer of information that occurs in the reference service encounter, this study demonstrates the usefulness of a complementary perspective that assumes that interlocutors attend to each other's talk for the action it is accomplishing, not just the information it carries (Schegloff, 2007). My analysis shows how conversational co-participants orient to the question "why that now?" (Schegloff & Sacks 1973; Schegloff 1990, 1998) as they seek to understand an utterance what it is doing within the context constituted by a sequence of action.

The study of face-to-face reference service encounters additionally provides an opportunity to investigate the bodily enactment of social interaction, for in each reference service encounter a patron and a librarian face the practical problem of managing the start of the interaction at a service point. As the results of this study show, this seemingly trivial task involves a sequence of actions that require patrons and librarians to employ gaze, body orientation, movement, and talk to accomplish an approach to the desk from a

variety of directional positions, communicate their interest and availability to engage in an interaction, establish a frame of space in which to conduct business, and other interactional work that is described in chapter five.

Library users regard reference service as a fundamental component of library resources<sup>1</sup>. Libraries' effectiveness at providing reference service is commonly used as a key performance measure (e.g., LibQUAL+). Therefore a detailed analysis of the actual conduct of reference librarians and patrons at work in the reference encounter provides insight into a critically important form of social action in the library setting-- what Ranganathan (1971) called the "hub and foundation of library work".

My findings have both substantive and methodological implications for research in the field of reference librarianship. The use of conversation analysis demonstrates the role of sequential position in the accomplishment of action in reference service encounters and thereby provides a new perspective from which to approach many forms of social interaction in libraries. The results encourage researchers and practitioners to examine talk for the action it accomplishes and consider the sequential position of an action when seeking an account of the social conduct of patrons and librarians. The findings also contribute to a growing corpus of research on talk-in-interaction. In particular, the results inform our understanding of how requesting is done, how openings to co-present interactions are constructed, and how verbal and nonverbal communicative practices are deployed in interactions involving physical co-presence.

### Features of This Study

There are six characteristics of this study that set it apart from previous work on

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<sup>1</sup> In a national survey sponsored by the American Library Association (2006) more than half of the respondents reported consulting with a librarian as one of the services they used in the prior year. It is the second most heavily used service after charging out books.

reference service encounters. The first four are assumptions upon which the study was developed. The final two are methodological positions that were taken with regard to the collection and analysis of the data.

1. *Communication entails social interaction.* As noted above, the library profession's understanding of the reference service encounter has been guided primarily by a model of communication that focuses on the transfer of information from one interlocutor to another. The reliance on this model has had implications for the types of phenomena that researchers study, the methodologies that they apply in their work, and the types of evidence that are accepted to reach conclusions. Moreover, librarians apply the information transfer model to the development of library practices and base their institutional relationships with patrons on the view of communication that is instantiated in the model. This study broadens the profession's analytical perspective by applying a model of communication that views language in terms of the action(s) it accomplishes. In so doing, it shows the value of conversation analysis in the investigation of social action in libraries.

2. *The reference service encounter begins prior to the start of talk.* The analysis of the data in this study shows that the interaction begins before the arrival of the patron at the reference desk. One of the objects of analysis in this study is how patrons and librarians collaboratively achieve an opening to the interaction. Although this study concentrates on the action of requesting, I am concerned not just with how requesting is done, but also how librarians and patrons get to the point in an interaction where a request can be made. Prior work on the nonverbal interactional work in openings to reference service encounters has addressed how to get patrons to approach the desk

(Swope and Katzer, 1972; Gothberg, 1977; Larason & Robinson, 1984), why patrons select a particular librarian (Radford, 1998), and why patrons do not use reference service (Lederman, 1981; Mellon, 1986; Jiao, 1996; Liu and Redfern, 1997). By examining the opening sequence in terms of the bodily enactment of social action, this study also provides insight into the relationship of verbal and nonverbal practices in the openings of interactions beyond the library setting.

3. *Actions are defined by the displayed orientation of the co-interactants.* The library profession has traditionally characterized patrons' requests as questions or queries, even though librarians know through their direct experience at the reference desk (physical or virtual) that patrons make requests in a variety of ways, only some of the time involving the format of a question. This study does not rely on syntactic format to recognize the actions of librarians and patrons. An action is treated as a request when the interlocutors display an orientation to it as performing that action and it is consequential to the trajectory of action in the service encounter (cf. Schegloff, 1992). Thus, the understanding of an action is not pre-defined by a general grammatical format, but rather it is a local accomplishment of the co-interactants.

4. *Requesting is a collaborative accomplishment.* This study takes the position that requesting is best understood, not as an isolated, unilateral act, but as the product of interaction. Also, a turn at talk is produced and understood as a request due to its position within a sequence of action. The co-participants, as well as the analyst, interpret the action it is designed to accomplish (and thus what it "means"). Similarly, the request creates a context in which the next turn at talk in the interaction may be understood. Thus, this study introduces into the field of librarianship a method of looking beyond the



confines of a single sentence or a speaker's turn for an account of the actions of participants.

5. *The conclusions are based on empirical analysis of naturalistic data.*

Research in the field of librarianship has yielded substantial results through the analysis of surveys, interviews, and reports of prior interactions by librarians and patrons. However, these methodologies are not designed to produce thorough descriptions of communicative practices. One reason for this is that individuals cannot recall an event, such as a reference service encounter, with the level of detail required for empirical analysis. In contrast, the data in this study are recordings of actual, naturally-occurring reference encounters. By recording the interactions the rich detail is preserved to a degree that is not possible through the reliance on the memory of the co-participants. In addition, the analyst has access to the same set of interactional occurrences that the participants had at the time of the service encounter. Moreover, the data are available for other researchers to re-analyze and reach their own conclusions.

6. *Requests are examined for how librarians and patrons collaborate to make them actionable.* One of the persistent themes across the history of reference librarianship is the belief among librarians that patrons' requests poorly represent their actual information needs. The literature offers strategies for handling the negotiation of a request that is consistent with the needs of the user and the requirements of the library as an information system. This study extends prior work on this phenomenon by analyzing request sequences to understand: (1) how librarians treat requests as actionable, that is, how they respond to them as providing sufficient information to make an assisting action possible; (2) how librarians and patrons collaborate to make an initially un-actionable

request one that can yield an assisting response.

### Organization of This Study

In the next chapter I review the literature on requesting in library reference service encounters to establish how this study builds on prior contributions and offers new research opportunities for librarians. The review is organized around a descriptive dichotomy that is commonly applied within the library literature, namely, system-centered and user-centered approaches to the information search process (Savolainen, 1993). The discussion highlights the reliance of the library profession on an information transmission model of communication for understanding social conduct in the library, as well as a foundation for developing user services. However, the review also cites notable works from cognitive, social constructionist, and speech act theory perspectives. The review discusses two themes with regard to the profession's treatment of requesting: (1) the association of requesting with the format of a question; (2) the concern with a perceived incompleteness of patrons' requests and the strategies to achieve successful service encounters working from these "deficient" requests.

Chapter three reviews the relevant literature of conversation analysis to provide the framework in which this study was conceived and executed. The chapter opens with a discussion of how conversation analysis views language with respect to social action. The review covers how context is constructed through the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction using basic buildings blocks such as adjacency pairs, as well as expansion sequences to construct larger episodes of action. I take into account previous examinations of how requesting is organized, along with how request turns and responses to requests are designed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of prior reports of the

organization of openings to interactions in institutional settings and everyday conversation.

In chapter four I explain how the data were collected for this study and describe the data collection site. I also discuss why naturally-occurring episodes of reference service encounters were used. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the data were analyzed.

Chapter five presents my findings with regard to the openings of reference service encounters. Since all the cases analyzed in this study involve the physical co-presence of the interlocutors, this discussion provides insight into the accomplishment of embodied social action. In this chapter I describe how patrons and librarians manage the patron's approach to the desk, display their availability for an interaction, and create a spatial arrangement at the desk that is suited to enacting a reference service encounter. The analysis lays out the organization of the opening as involving the patron's approach to the desk and the librarian's display of availability as constituting a distinct sequence of action. The findings also reveal how librarians and patrons manage the opening to provide a slot in which a request for assistance may be made.

Chapter six describes the most prevalent practice for the making of requests that was observed in the data; patrons most commonly formulate their request turns by reporting an unfinished library-related activity. Librarians consistently treat these reports as doing requesting by responding with an assisting action and I describe each of the forms that assisting actions take. This chapter includes an analysis of the role of sequential organization in the production and understanding of turns as requests. The data analysis shows that certain types of request formulations make certain types of

responses relevant.

Chapter seven presents the aggregate findings of this study as a cohesive account of the opening actions of the reference service encounter through the request response-sequence. I then discuss the implications of these findings for two areas: the study of social interaction and the practice of reference librarianship. For the study of social interaction this study contributes to our understanding of how requesting is accomplished and how opening sequences are constructed in institutional service interactions. For the practice of reference librarianship this study contributes to a re-conceptualization of requesting and displaying availability in terms of action. With regard to its methodological implications, this study demonstrates how conversation analysis may be applied to the study of social conduct in libraries. In terms of implications for future research, the findings suggest potentially fruitful work addressing librarians' management of patrons' expectations, whether patrons' formulate their first requests as being initial, how patrons display their preparation for a reference service encounter, and a new approach to examining closure in reference service encounters.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REQUESTS IN REFERENCE INTERACTIONS

#### Introduction

This study examines library reference service encounters from a patron's approach of the reference desk through the enactment of a request-response sequence. A distinguishing feature of the analysis is its treatment of requesting as a type of social action. In order to appreciate the potential contribution of this perspective to our understanding of reference service encounters and other forms of social interaction, one must consider the long tradition in librarianship of viewing reference service requests as unilateral acts of information transmission. The aim of this chapter is to review the research literature that has shaped the library profession's understanding of requesting, along with the literature that has guided and sustained library practice that is grounded in this research.

Taylor (1968) considered library patrons' requests to be integral to "one of the most complex acts of human communication" in which "one person tries to describe for another person not something he knows, but rather something he does not know" (p. 180). Unfortunately, the library literature tends to treat requesting as neither integral nor complex. Despite the centrality of requesting to the reference service process, scant research attention has been directed to the analysis of this communicative practice. Moreover, both the research and practitioner literature reduce this complex action to a simple gloss of asking a question and ignore *how* patrons and librarians jointly produce requests within a larger sequence of action that comprises the reference service

encounter.

### The Dominant Model of Communication

One reason for the lack of analytical attention in the library literature to requesting as a collaborative interactional practice is the longstanding reliance on a single model of communication, namely a system-centered model focusing on information transmission (Savolainen, 1993) in which communication is treated as the unilateral transfer of information. In the basic system-centered model developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) an information source uses a transmitter to convert a message into signals that are sent over a channel to a receiver which converts the signals into a message for its destination. Depending on the direction of the information transmission, the brain of the librarian or the library patron may be considered the source or destination of the message. In face-to-face interaction, the transmitter is the human vocal apparatus that allows a speaker to encode a message into spoken language (i.e., the signals), which are sent over the channel (i.e., the air medium). The listener's auditory system is the receiver that decodes the signals into a message for the hearer.

In this model of communication, reference librarians are viewed as encoders, decoders and processors of messages (Boucher, 1976) who serve as "switching devices" between patrons and the library's resources (Vavrek, 1969; Gothberg, 1973). In his classic textbook on reference service, which has been used to educate thousands of professional librarians, Katz (1982, pp. 14-15) grounded his view of reference work firmly in this model when he writes:

The communication process may be divided into given elements or constants:

1. The communicator or transmitter, i.e., the speaker, writer, artist, etc.
2. The message, or what the communicator delivers. For most library purposes the message is generally known as information.

3. The method of transmission or the medium. The communicator may deliver the message in the form of book, journal article, dialogue, radio speech, film, etc.
  - a. Here the information community, including publishers, producers, indexers, etc. enters in.
  - b. Through the medium, the message is processed and recorded on any device from a printed page to a computer disk.
  - c. The library then classifies and stores the message in the form given by the processors.
  - d. In most reference service, the transmission of the message usually implies an intermediate agent, i.e., the librarian, who may assist in the transmission of the message by clarifying what type of information or communicator is needed, by searching the various methods of transmission, etc.
4. The receiver, i.e., the listener, reader, observer, or anyone who receives the message originated by the communicator or transmitter and sent via one of the numerous channels.

The library profession's reliance on this information transmission model of communication to account for librarian-user interaction has profoundly influenced the approach that librarians have taken to analyzing research phenomena and designing their services. Kuhlthau (1991) asserted that information systems have been driven by a bibliographic paradigm concentrating on the collection of documents, the classification of those documents, and the development of effective search strategies. Information is regarded as having a truth value. The information search process, including the reference service encounter, is treated as a single interaction with the system in which retrieval focuses on the generation of requests that best correspond to a system's representation of the collected texts. A realist ontology applies in this paradigm, with information having correspondence to fixed meaning in the objective world outside the information system and the mind of the user. User needs are measured according to the features of the system, such as material types (e.g., Gorman, 1995). Evaluation criteria for system effectiveness focus on standard statistical measures, such as precision, recall, and fill-rate (e.g., Kantor, 1981; Su, 1994).

The focus of this communication model on the accurate transmission and receipt of a message has guided research and practice toward analyzing and addressing factors that facilitate or interfere with this process as a unilateral action. As discussed in a section below, the literature often reports on the challenge of managing a reference interaction due to the patron's presentation of a defective query, that is, a message (i.e., a request) that does not accurately represent what the patron is seeking (e.g., Mount, 1966; Thomsen, 1999). It is the responsibility of the reference librarian to refine or restate the message so that it may be applied against the library's resources to generate an appropriate response. Thus, the prototypical reference interaction incorporates a reference interview, although empirical evidence suggests that interviews occur in fewer than half of all reference service encounters (Lynch, 1978).

Authors invoke the information transmission model of communication to train reference librarians to remedy “input failures” when the listener is unable to obtain a complete, or at least coherent, interpretation for an utterance (Ringle & Bruce, 1982; Dewdney & Michell, 1998). In addition, research aims to predict and measure the outcome or function of the communication between sender and receiver using constructs such as communication apprehension (Lederman, 1981; Mellon, 1986; Jiao, 1996), self-disclosure (Thompson, Smith & Woods, 1980), and verbal and nonverbal communication competence (Muñoz, 1977; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1992). Previous research on reference service encounters has ignored how the action of making a request is accomplished. In contrast, this study examines how patrons’ turns at talk are formulated to be recognizable as doing requesting, as well as how librarians show that they regard them as requests. Instead of dismissing patrons’ requests as defective, I analyze them to see how a patron’s



initial request formulation that is not “assistance ready” is made actionable for the librarian through the interactional work of the librarian and patron.

### Requesting as Inquiring

By approaching requesting as a form of social action, this study yields a more detailed analysis of how patrons’ requests are enacted than prior work that simply equates requests with questions. Katz (1982) declared that “[a]t the heart of reference work is the question” (II, p. 38). Consistent with this view, throughout the library literature for more than one hundred years the term “question”, or its synonym “query”, is used to denote the wide range of utterances that patrons direct to librarians to obtain reference assistance (e.g., Crunden, 1886; Hutchins, 1944; Taylor, 1968; Davidson, 1979; Katz, 1982; Ross, 2003). The work of reference librarianship is commonly characterized as the answering of patrons’ questions and the development of collections to aid in that task (Foskett, 1967; Davidson, 1979). Although the American Library Association (ALA) (1984) officially adopted the ANSI (1983) definition of a reference transaction as “[a]n information contact that involves the use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources, or knowledge of such sources, by a member of the reference or information staff”, in practice the association commonly refers to patrons’ requests as questions or queries. The current Standards for University Libraries of ALA’s Association of College and Research Libraries (1989) lists the “answering of questions” as one of the fundamental services to be provided. ALA’s (2000) guidelines for information services prescribed that “[t]he library should strive to provide users with complete, accurate answers to information queries regardless of the complexity of those queries.” The Association of Research Libraries follows a similar

practice in its annual statistical report where the association includes the number of “reference queries” handled by its member institutions. Libraries have carried this practice over to the realm of digital reference (Carter & Janes, 2000; Diamond & Pease, 2001; Qayyum, 2002; Epps, 2003; Schwartz, 2004) where it is especially evident in the names assigned to the online equivalents of traditional reference desk service, such as the use of “Ask a Question” by the Internet Public Library and the University of California, Irvine, as well as OCLC’s virtual reference service “QuestionPoint”. In summary, the conceptualization of patron requests as questions has long, widespread, and authoritative use within the profession.

The consistent identification of patron requests with questions extends beyond the use of the term as convenient shorthand for the concept; authors overwhelmingly use questions to represent specific requests. Katz (1982) proposed a three-part classification of reference questions consisting of directional, ready reference, and specific search types. For each category, all the examples of “typical questions” that he supplies share the grammatical form of a question, specifically a Wh-question or a yes/no question format. Similarly, with few exceptions<sup>2</sup> when the literature offers examples of actual (i.e., recalled) patron requests or abstracted ones for pedagogical purposes they are in the particular grammatical form of a question (e.g., Ranganathan, 1961, pp. 240-251; Kumar, 1974, pp. 188-277; Thomas, Hinckley & Eisenbach, 1981, pp. 117-122; Grogan, 1987). Practicing librarians are certainly aware from their direct experience that patrons use a variety of formulations to accomplish requesting. In addition, the only reference training

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Jahoda and Braumzel (1980, p. 118) offered fourteen examples of initial (i.e., pre-negotiation) reference queries and only one is not listed in the form of a question: “I’d like some information on water pollution”. Slavens (1994) provided separate lists of idealized “reference questions” that follow a question format and the transcribed opening turns of actual “reference interviews” that reflect the variety of request formulations also found in this study.

aid to use transcriptions (stenographically recorded) of actual reference transactions presents requests in non-question format in over forty-percent of the cases (Slavens, 1978; 1994). Nonetheless, there have been no previous studies that examine how patrons formulate their requests or how librarians show that they orient to patrons' utterances as doing requesting.

As a basis for both research and practice is it important that librarians abandon the identification of requesting with inquiring and investigate how requesting is accomplished through the analysis of actual talk, as this study does. This study demonstrates that conceptualizing requesting as questioning is deficient to represent the rich social practices that patrons and librarians employ to accomplish this action. Utterances in the syntactic format of a question may accomplish other interactional work than questioning and the action of inquiring or requesting may be implemented through many different formulations (Schegloff, 1984). Using the term "reference question" obscures the interactional work that yields a sequence of action that implements requesting in reference service encounters. Moreover, it ignores the importance of sequential position in the accomplishment of requesting with any type of turn formulation. This study examines how patrons and librarians manage openings to create a slot in the interaction for a patron to make a request.

Without the empirical analysis of how requests are made in actual reference interactions we lack an understanding of one of the fundamental communicative actions in libraries. This study is designed to begin to fill that need. The development of textbooks, professional standards, and training materials around the conceptualization of requests as idealized questions deprives practitioners of adequate preparation for the

interactional situations they will experience in the field. The use of naturalistic data for this study contributes to an understanding of how requesting is actually done in face-to-face reference service encounters.

### Patrons' Requests as Ill-Formed

A common assumption in the literature is that patrons' initial reference requests do not accurately represent their true information needs (Hutchins, 1944; Mount, 1966; Davidson, 1979, Katz, 1982), although one large empirical study of reference interviews reveals a shift from patrons' opening requests to a different request in only thirteen percent of the cases (Lynch, 1978). Bates (1996) declared it an "anecdotal truism" that patrons initiate the reference interaction with requests that are broader than their actual need. Nordlie's (1999) analysis of reference service interactions in a public library supported the historical claim of the over-generality of patrons' initial requests, which are made more specific over the course of the interactions in her study. Nordlie described initial requests as "normally brief, more often consisting of one sentence in which the problem is stated as a single term or expression; they are in at least 60% of the cases less specific than the user's real information need, and they often need disambiguation" (p. 15). Nordlie's viewpoint reflects the common assumption in the literature that a patron's action, such as requesting, is determined by the format of an utterance. In addition, the characterization of patrons' requests as typically brief and therefore as inherently problematic ignores that the reference encounter as a social activity provides resources for librarians and patrons to collaboratively construct an actionable request from one that is not assistance-ready. In addition, This study takes the position that format may be used to accomplish a wide variety of actions and that action is As the next chapter explains,

the conversation-analytic methodology applied in this study is especially well-suited to explicate how librarians and patrons accomplish the formulation of actionable requests through their talk-in-interaction.

This study also promotes the use of empirical rather than intuitive data as the basis for a discussion of participants' conduct in the reference service encounter. The literature frequently attributes the deficiencies of patron requests to ignorance, indecision, or guile on the part of the requester. As Hutchins (1944, p. 24) stated the case in her textbook:

So much has been said and written humorously, but at the same time with ill-concealed impatience and scorn, by reference librarians (especially youthful assistants) about the difficulty of getting readers to divulge their actual wants that there is danger of an assumption that the latter stupidly or willfully and perversely withhold information. Probably this is very seldom the case. More often the reader simply does not know how to state his needs clearly, or else he is afraid of making a nuisance of himself. In a misguided attempt at self-service he makes up his mind what sort of material will contain the information he is seeking and asks for a book which a person who knew more about books would understand was inadequate.

Authors commonly seek explanations for requesting practices in the minds of library patrons rather than within the actual talk-in-interaction of the reference service encounter. In one of the more heavily cited articles in library literature, Mount (1966) attributed patrons' failures to "ask really pertinent questions from the start of their inquiry" to nine factors:

1. An inquirer lacks knowledge of the depth and quality of the collection.
2. An inquirer lacks knowledge of the reference tools available.
3. An inquirer lacks knowledge of the vocabulary used by a particular set of tools.
4. An inquirer does not willingly reveal his reason for needing the information.
5. An inquirer hasn't decided what he really wants.
6. An inquirer is not at ease in asking his question.
7. An inquirer feels that he cannot reveal the true question because it is of a sensitive nature.

8. An inquirer dislikes reference staff members (or vice versa) and consequently avoids giving a true picture of his needs.
9. An inquirer lacks confidence in the ability of the reference staff.

Owen (1998) assigned patrons to categories such as “obsessively-secretive” and “malapropist”. Thomson (1999) used a taxonomy that identifies requests as innately problematic with categories such as “tricksters”. These examples illustrate that for many years the profession has relied on intuitive analysis in its treatment of requesting. This study contributes to the use of data from real-life interactions as the basis for describing interactants’ conduct in reference service encounters.

There has been work that seeks to explain the reported incompleteness of patrons’ requests through the communicative practice of requesting rather than the deficiencies of patrons. Taylor’s (1968) theoretical model of the reference process accounted for the need for negotiation of patron requests by pointing to a patron’s insufficient knowledge to effectively manage a problem-- what subsequent researchers would term an anomalous state of knowledge (Belkin, 1984) that results in a reference service interaction.

According to Taylor’s model, each request develops along a continuum beginning with a patron’s unexpressed visceral need for information that may only take the form of a sense of unease. Next, the patron may form an ambiguous mental description of the problem, which Taylor terms a conscious need. The patron may seek assistance from a colleague to articulate the request as a formalized need for information. Finally, the patron is able to pose the request in expectation of how it must be handled by the information system (e.g., library catalog, reference librarian, or database); consequently, Taylor denoted this level of formulation the compromised need. Within this model the goal of the reference interview is for the librarian to work the patron’s request back to the level of a formalized

need and then apply professional expertise to translate the request properly into terms that the information system can handle. Taylor envisioned the reference interview as a process of negotiation in which a librarian attempts to understand a patron's request. This study builds on Taylor's theoretical work by analyzing how patrons construct their requests, as well as how librarians respond to these requests, thereby initiating a sequence of action that Taylor and others throughout the literature gloss as the "reference interview".

Gross (1995, 1998, 1999) pointed out that Taylor's (1968) model applies to self-generated requests, but it does not adequately represent the formation of an imposed request. She defined self-generated requests as internally motivated in response to the context of an individual's life circumstance and imposed requests as transacted on behalf of others (e.g., school assignments and company projects). She argued that when librarians apply Taylor's model in practice, they operate from the assumption that a request is self-generated and ask questions designed to work the patron back to an earlier stage of request formation that is not relevant with respect to imposed requests. While Gross's distinction between self-generated and imposed requests is intuitively plausible as an analyst's construct, she did not provide evidence from actual reference service encounters to show that this distinction is relevant and meaningful for the librarian and patron as displayed in their talk-in-interaction. Although investigating Gross's claim is beyond the scope of this study, the conversation-analytic approach to requesting that is employed could be applied by future researchers to determine whether the trajectory of the action differs for self-generated and imposed requests.

Also building on Taylor's (1968) model of the reference negotiation process,

Eichman (1978) aimed to provide a rational explanation for the presumed generality of reference requests. He drew on speech act theory to argue for a distinction between the actions of making a request and asking a question that may account for this phenomenon. According to Searle (1969), one of the pioneers in speech act theory, the propositional content of a request is the future act of the recipient and carries the assumptions that the recipient is capable of accomplishing the requested act and will not perform it unless asked. In contrast, a question may bear any propositional content and the preparatory conditions are that the speaker does not know the information and the recipient will not provide it unless asked. In speech act terms a request is an attempt to get the recipient to perform the act in the proposition, while a question is an attempt to obtain information from the recipient. From this perspective Eichman argued that one factor leading to the lack of clarity in an initial reference request is the patron's uncertainty as to whether he or she is requesting assistance or asking for information. He noted that one of the responsibilities of the reference librarian is to clarify the proposition in a patron's speech act, which is complicated when the utterance carries elements of the illocutionary force of both a request and a question. There may be a salient difference between the actions of requesting information and requesting assistance in reference service encounters as Eichman proposed, but the evidence lies in whether: (1) the librarian and patron display an orientation to such a distinction in their talk; and (2) the difference is consequential to the sequence of action they construct through their talk (cf. Schegloff, 1992).

Consequently, one of the features of request sequences that this study examines is whether there are types of assisting responses that are made relevant by particular request formulations.



Eichman (1978, p. 219) also pointed out that a patron's opening speech act may function in at least the following three ways:

1. expressively, relaying the attitudes and feelings of the inquirer, consciously or subconsciously;
2. phatically, establishing a channel through to the mind of the librarian;
3. informationally, posing a question about some subject matter.

According to Eichman (1980), librarians base their criticism of patrons' opening requests by focusing on the informational function without taking into account the other communicative functions the utterance must serve.<sup>3</sup> With regard to the expressive function, the initial request captures the potential social embarrassment of admitting ignorance in public. The phatic<sup>4</sup> function of the opening request refers to the patron's need to establish a professional relationship rapidly with a typically unknown interlocutor. In speech act terms, patrons' opening requests violate a cooperative principle of communication, namely Grice's (1975, pp. 45-46) maxim of quantity, to make one's contribution only as informative as required for the purpose of the exchange. However, Eichman maintained that the generality of initial requests may be due to a patron's need to accomplish multiple communicative functions in the opening of a reference service encounter. When patrons initiate a reference interaction they do not know how much a librarian knows about a topic. Eichman argued that the patron's utterance may fail in its phatic or channel-opening purposes if it introduces a request that is too specific or too deep with respect to the librarian's knowledge. Consequently, the

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<sup>3</sup> Radford (1993, 1996, 1999) reported that librarians are more concerned than patrons are with the informational or content dimension of the communication in the reference encounter, while patrons assign higher importance to the relational dimension of the encounter.

<sup>4</sup> Malinowski (1923, p. 153) introduced the term *phatic communion* to denote "a type of speech in which the ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words." Jakobsen (1960) applied the term to describe the function of maintaining an open channel of communication between interlocutors and, therefore language used to establish or maintain social contact rather than share propositional content.

generality of initial requests may offer an effective strategy for patrons to seek assistance from a typically unknown interactant and should be expected by reference librarians (Bates, 1996). Eichman's argument is based on his own intuitive insights into how patrons and librarians manage requesting in reference service encounters. This study uses empirical data to show how patrons accomplish multiple interactional tasks, such as securing mutual attention, achieving a ratified state of interaction, and establishing an alignment of institutional identities, that Eichman claims are a source of potential misunderstanding.

Following Eichman's (1978, 1980) analyses, Ross and Dewdney (1998) recommended that librarians respond to a patron's initial question not as an accurate representation of an information need, but as four unspoken questions: "(1) Am I in the right place?; (2) Are you available to help me?; (3) Have we made contact? (Are you listening and willing to help me?); (4) Have you understood my topic (in general)? I'm going to be describing a problem about X." Ross and Dewdney's approach aligns with the perspective taken in this study, because it suggests an analysis of requesting in terms of the action(s) that a patron enacts. However, the authors do not provide evidence from reference service encounters to show that librarians and patrons demonstrably orient to the accomplishment of these four particular interactional tasks. This study describes how patrons and librarians accomplish actions, such as displays of availability, through their talk-in-interaction in the opening of a reference service encounter.

Eichman (1978, 1980) treated the reference service encounter as beginning with a patron's request and his perspective in this regard is common across the literature. Authors have largely ignored the interactional work that precedes a patron's utterance of

a request, except for works that report the need for librarians to employ verbal and nonverbal displays of approachability (e.g., Muñoz, 1977; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1992) to encourage library patrons to use reference services. This study treats all action in the opening of the reference service encounter as deserving analytical attention, including the joint management of the patron's approach to the service point at the reference desk. While Eichman (1980, p. 258) acknowledged that "some form of a simpler greeting may take place just prior to the opening question," he does not examine the relationship between the greeting and the initial reference request, or address the request and the preceding actions as part of a larger sequence of action. This study describes the interactional work that patrons and librarians accomplish in the opening sequence of a reference desk encounter, including the utterances prior to the patron's request that establish their mutual availability and interest in engaging in an interaction, as well as manage their entry into the interaction.

#### Alternative Approaches

Although this study is unique in its application of conversation analysis to the examination of requesting in library reference service encounters, there is prior work in the library literature that more closely aligns with the approach I have taken than the overwhelming amount of work that has been done using an information transfer model of communication. Over the last three decades the metatheoretical assumptions underlying the system-oriented approach to the information search process have been challenged increasingly by library and information science researchers working from an alternative, user-centered paradigm (Savolainen, 1993). As the name implies, user-centered approaches share a view of the information search process that is oriented toward the

needs and experiences of the user, rather than the information system. While system-centered approaches focus on the information retrieval process in terms of a single interaction between a user and the information system, user-centered approaches view the search for information as a multi-step process that is not always forward-moving; stages may overlap and iterations may be necessary. While system-centered approaches regard information as an autonomous object with a fixed value that is transferred from system to user, user-centered approaches may work from the assumption that information is constructed through social interaction such as a reference service encounter. System-centered approaches restrict research attention to the physical interactions between a user and the information system, while researchers taking a user-centered perspective may investigate cognitive and affective dimensions of the search process as well.

One group of user-centered approaches to the information search process is characterized by a common focus on the thought processes of the information user. Researchers seek to explain individual experience within the search process (Kuhlthau, 1988, p. 233), discover how differing world-views influence choice of information, or understand how information use changes these views (Wilson, 1984). Taylor's (1968) four-stage model of query negotiation discussed above, which attempted to represent the cognitive process through which a system user develops a request for a librarian, is an example of this type of user-centered approach. Also operating from a cognitivist perspective is the anomalous states of knowledge (ASK) hypothesis, which is based on the view that humans turn to information systems when their own knowledge is not sufficient to effectively manage a problem (Belkin, 1984). As a result, researchers working in this field direct their attention beyond the delivery of information to the

consequences of the use of that information. That is, an information system cannot be deemed effective unless the user has accomplished the goal of being better able to understand and manage the problem that resulted in the ASK. This approach generates a much different set of potential research questions than the traditional system-centered model. Instead of concentrating on the use of an information system from levels of analysis defined by the system itself (e.g., precision), researchers are directed to study how a system is used and to what end. This study diverges from prior work on reference service encounters in the cognitivist tradition due to the theoretical and methodological implications of approaching requesting as social action. One of the fundamental assumptions underlying this study is that we cannot presume to have access to the mental processes of patrons and librarians during a reference service encounter. Instead, this study assumes that librarians and patrons achieve mutual intelligibility regarding the actions they are accomplishing through their talk-in-interaction. The use of recorded data from actual reference service encounters provides the researcher with access to the same interactional resources for meaning-making that were available to the co-interactants. As a result, intuitive and interpretive analysis is rejected in favor of the detailed analysis of episodes of actual reference service interactions.

The cognitive approach to understanding the information search process was integrated with social constructionist assumptions in a body of research that is grouped under sense-making theory (e.g., Dervin, 1998). At the core of the theory, and in contrast to system-oriented approaches, is the notion that information does not exist apart from the social interaction in which it is constructed (Savolainen, 1993). In sense-making theory an information need arises when the cognitive steps taken by an individual in the normal

course of life come to a halt due to a discontinuity condition. Usual patterns of reasoning do not allow the individual to proceed, therefore information is needed to bridge the gap and enable the individual to construct sense in the current life situation (Dervin & Nilan, 1986). While system-centered models assign static truth values to information, sense-making theory recognizes that the information that bridges a gap in one's sense of the world may not achieve the same result for another person or even the same person at a later time. Kuhlthau (1988; 1991) incorporated an affective dimension into sense-making theory. She notes that uncertainty and anxiety are natural and important parts of the process and therefore must be taken into account by researchers. One of the assumptions for this study is that the affective state of a patron or librarian is of concern only when the data show that the co-interactants treated it as relevant during a particular reference service encounter. There must be evidence in the talk of their orientation to an interactant's display of emotion and its consequentiality to the trajectory of action.

This study follows an emerging tradition of research based on recent research on the library reference process which recognizes that individual behavior may be analyzed as part of collaborative social sense-making activity, rather than as simply a unilateral action of information transmission. This insight into the constitutive nature of communication, which treats human interaction as a site of meaning construction (e.g., Mokros, 1995; 1996), enables us to see that social structures as fundamental as identities and relationships (personal and institutional) are interactively constituted through social interactions as seemingly routine as service desk transactions in libraries. Working from this analytic perspective, Mandelbaum (1996) demonstrated how a librarian and a library user formulate their suggestions in ways that constitute their respective institutionally

relevant identities. Chelton's (1997) study of library service to adolescents showed that in each reference transaction library users present themselves as qualified to receive service and this self-identity is confirmed or rejected interactively with the librarian.

This study follows the contributions to research on the reference process that reject the literature's dominant linear model of communication in favor of a view of reference service transactions as social accomplishments. Social life and the social structures through which we organize our social lives are interactively (re)produced through the ongoing enactment of mundane communicative practices. Thus, the focus of this study is describing the actions that constitute the opening sequence of reference service encounters involving physical co-presence. Requesting is not treated simply as the transmission of a query from the patron to the librarian. Rather, this study lays out how requesting is collaboratively achieved by librarians and library patrons within a larger sequence of action comprising the reference service encounter. That sequence of action begins before a patron's request is uttered. This study shows how patrons and librarians co-produce an opening that brings them together at a service point and establishes an organizational slot for the enactment of a request. This study offers insight into how these practices are accomplished through talk-in-interaction. In the following chapter I lay out the specific theoretical framework in which data collection and analysis are situated.

## CHAPTER THREE

### APPLYING CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This study uses conversation analysis (CA) to investigate how requests are enacted in library reference service encounters. A central concern of CA is uncovering the socially organized features of talk-in-interaction that are intuitively known and tacitly oriented to by co-interactants (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984). Through the systematic analysis of recorded naturally-occurring talk-in-interaction and consistent with its roots in ethnomethodology<sup>5</sup>, CA provides a means of gaining access to the commonsense knowledge and organized reasoning procedures that interactants invoke to make sense and be understood (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997). The focus of research attention is the organization of interaction that serves as the central resource for maintaining intersubjective understanding on an utterance-by-utterance basis. The analyst aims to explicate the interactional practices through which speakers produce their own social conduct and understand the conduct of others. In this work we are trying to uncover the machinery that organizes social interaction (Sacks, 1984, p. 27). In each turn at talk a speaker displays an understanding of the prior turn and the ongoing course of action, which may be ratified or repaired in subsequent turns by the interactants. By recording an interaction the same interpretive resources are made available to the overhearing researcher (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

As the remainder of this section shows, prior CA research, especially work with

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<sup>5</sup> Garfinkel (1967) defined ethnomethodology as “[t]he investigation of the rational properties of indexical expressions and other practical actions as contingent ongoing accomplishments of organized artful practices of everyday life” (p. 11). For a discussion of the relationship of ethnomethodology to CA see Heritage (1984).



respect to institutional talk-in-interaction (e.g., Drew & Heritage, 1992), provides a strong foundation on which to investigate the action of requesting at the reference desk. CA studies on the organization of practices such as requests for assistance (Zimmerman, 1992; Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2004), troubles-telling (Jefferson & Lee, 1981), advice-giving (Heritage & Sefi, 1992), and the instantiation of the institutional identities associated with these activities have direct relevance to the reference transaction as a service encounter.

In addition to drawing from past accomplishments in CA, the analyses in this study contribute to a growing corpus of conversation-analytic research on communicative practices in mundane and institutional settings. Although there have been other studies of requesting (see below), requesting is a local interactional accomplishment that addresses local contingencies. While there are features of requesting that reference desk requests share with other types of requesting, this study identifies the features of requests that are observed specifically in librarian-patron interactions. This study has particular relevance to work on how verbal and nonverbal practices inter-relate in the organization of interaction (e.g., Robinson, 1998), because the reference service encounters analyzed involve physical co-presence and my analysis specifically addresses the patron's approach to the desk. No prior research has been done on how patrons and librarians negotiate a participation framework (C. Goodwin, 1981) for their interaction at the desk.

The review of the CA literature on which this study is grounded begins with a discussion of the discipline's fundamental focus on action. This provides the analytical perspective from which the study was conducted. The literature review continues with a discussion of the organization of requests, for a key finding in this study is that the

understandability of a patron's turn as a request is due in large part to its enactment in a specific slot within a larger sequence of action. There is a discussion of CA research on the design of request turns and responses to requests in both everyday conversation and institutional contexts. Finally, I review the literature on opening sequences of interactions, for the data in this study show that patrons and librarians organize the opening of a reference service encounter to provide a sequential position in which a request is expectable.

### A Focus on Action

While prior research on reference desk transactions overwhelmingly relies on an information transmission model of communication, this study approaches interaction from the view that interlocutors orient to talk for the action(s) it is understood to accomplish, rather than the information it transmits. As Schegloff (2007, pp. 2-3) observed, talk is constructed and inspected by co-participants for the action or actions it may be doing, because the action may have implications for what action might be done in the next turn as a response to it. Moreover, this study treats requesting as an interactional accomplishment that interlocutors achieve beyond the boundaries of a single sentence.<sup>6</sup> An utterance is understood and acted upon as a request due to its position within a sequence of action. As Garfinkel (1967) pointed out, all language is indexical in that it is understandable only as an activity within a larger context of activity and its meaning derives from how it is being used by members at a specific time (cf. Heritage, 1984; Bilmes, 1986; Parker, 1989). Heritage and Atkinson (1984) noted that "[u]tterances are in the first instance contextually understood by reference to their placement and

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<sup>6</sup> For an example of speech act analysis of library reference transactions at the sentence level see Eichman (1980).

participation within sequences of action” (p. 5). Conversational interactants construct these sequences of action collaboratively on a turn-by-turn basis. In their analysis of the organization of turn-taking in the achievement of intersubjective meaning, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) demonstrated that “[g]enerally a turn's talk will be heard as directed to a prior turn's talk unless special techniques are used to locate some other talk to which it is directed” (p. 728). Interlocutors understand individual utterances as specific types of actions due to their position and participation in an ongoing sequence of talk-in-interaction (Heritage, 1984). In his classic study of telephone calls to a suicide prevention center, Sacks (1992) showed how a caller uses the seemingly descriptive statement "I can't hear you" to accomplish the withholding of his name from the call recipient. This is possible because the sequential organization of the telephone call provides diminishing structural opportunity for caller self-identification as the interaction progresses (Schegloff, 1986). Thus, the strategic placement of the statement at the prototypical slot for caller identification in the trajectory of the call makes it unlikely that self-identification will be volunteered (cf. Hutchby & Wooffit, 2000).

In addition to pointing out indexicality as a fundamental feature of talk-in-interaction outside a speaker's use of deictic expressions, Garfinkel (1967) also called attention to the reflexivity of social action. Although social action is shaped and understood by the circumstances in which it is enacted, it simultaneously elaborates or transforms the trajectory of interaction along which it is located (Heritage, 1984). In this manner, a speaker's contribution to an interaction is context-shaped (Drew & Heritage, 1992a). Following Garfinkel, Heritage (1984) characterized utterances as being doubly contextual, in that they are both "context-shaped" and "context-renewing." An utterance

is context-shaped because it may only be understood by reference to preceding talk. If an utterance is shaped by the context provided by an immediately prior utterance, by extension each utterance may also be seen as forming the immediate context for some next action, thus it may also be regarded as context-renewing.

Participants in interaction analyze one another's talk during the course of its production for what action(s) each utterance is being used to accomplish, for any action may have implications for what is expected of the recipient (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Perhaps he or she has been selected as next speaker or has received a request that may require an acceptance or refusal (Schegloff, 2007). Turn-by-turn, sequences of action are progressively, collaboratively shaped while interactants attend to what courses of action are being enacted. With each turn-at-talk a participant displays his or her understanding of the prior turn (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) and proposes a local definition of the present situation (or context) to which subsequent talk will be oriented (Heritage, 1984). Similarly, in the next turn in the sequence the hearer will display agreement with that understanding or seek to "repair" a misunderstanding (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Schegloff, 1992). The successive pairing of actions that underlies sequence organization provides an interpretative resource to participants and serves as "an architecture of intersubjectivity" (Heritage, 1984, p. 254), supplying the means by which participants understand what is being said and what is being done.

The conceptual framework that CA provides for examining reference desk encounters leads the analyst to inspect each turn-at-talk for the action that it is accomplishing. For the purposes of this study, a patron's turn is treated as a request if the

patron and librarian treated it as such as evidenced in their talk. This approach rejects the association of an action with a particular syntactic format (e.g., request equals question). From this analytical perspective requesting is not information transfer; it is embodied action. The next section examines what CA tells us about how co-interactants organize sequences of action and how those practices apply to the formulation of request-response sequences.

### The Organization of Requests

Prior research has shown that social interaction has stable, identifiable structural features such as turn construction and allocation (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), preference organization (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), sequence organization (Schegloff, 2007), and overall structural organization (Schegloff, 1986; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Interactants draw on these shared procedures and practices to make meaning. It is their mutual orientation to these rules of interaction that constitutes an activity in which they are participating (e.g., a request for reference service) and distinguishes it from other activities (Heritage, 1984; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Hutchby & Woofit, 2000).

Sacks (1992) and Schegloff and Sacks (1973) proposed the concept of an adjacency pair as a fundamental organizing unit for sequences of talk-in-interaction, noting the strong contextual association between utterances that comprise common, recognizable sequences of actions such as greeting-greeting, question-answer, and complaint-denial/excuse/apology. An adjacency pair is a sequence of utterances that have the following characteristics: (1) they are adjacent; (2) they are produced by

different speakers; (3) they are ordered as a first pair part and second pair part; (4) they are typed so that a particular first pair part requires a particular second pair part or range of seconds (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 2007). A speaker's production of a first pair part normatively obligates the hearer's production of a relevant second pair part. Its absence is noticeable and accountable. When an anticipated second pair part is not issued, a participant will draw inferences regarding the intentions of the co-participant. For example, if a greeting is not returned, the initiator may conclude that the recipient did not hear or is no longer on speaking terms (Heritage, 1984).

The notion of “adjacency pair” is an especially useful concept for approaching the analysis of reference desk requests. This section introduces how it has been applied in other work to describe sequences of action that involve a turn that implements a request and the subsequent response-relevant action from a request recipient. The discussion of request-response adjacency pairs emphasizes that they are parts of larger sequences of action. Interactants, such as librarians and patrons, create a sequential context that sets up a request sequence or expands one; they thereby influence the trajectory of action in an encounter.

The action of requesting may be analyzed around the production of a base adjacency pair consisting of a first pair part (the request), which makes the recipient normatively accountable for responding with a relevant second pair part in the form of an acceptance or rejection of the request (Merritt, 1976; Levinson, 1983; Robinson, 2001; Zimmerman, 1992; Schegloff, 2007). Frequently, requesting as a course of action is accomplished through additional sequences of actions that are preliminary, intermediate or subsequent to the base adjacency pair (Schegloff, 2007).

Speakers may use a preliminary sequence (pre-request) to avoid a non-granting response to a request by checking the conditions that will influence the success of a possible request (Levinson, 1983, pp. 356-357; Schegloff, 1984). In the following example from a retail service encounter the customer (A) inquires on the availability of batteries (line 1) before requesting four (line 3) from the store keeper (B).

(1) Notions (A-29, 12-14) Merritt (1976, p. 324)

- 1     A:     Hi. Do you have uh size C flashlight batteries?
- 2     B:     Yes, sir.
- 3     A:     I'll have four please.
- 4     B:     ((turns to get))

Pre-requests may also permit the recipient of a foreshadowed request to make an offer rather than wait for a request, as requesting is a delicate social action that may involve issues of face (Goffman, 1967; Lerner, 1996), social solidarity (Heritage, 1984), or customer satisfaction (Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2004). In the following example, a speaker's positive assessment of an interlocutor's food (lines 1-2) makes relevant an offer of some from the recipient (lines 4-5). As a result, it is not necessary for the speaker to make a request for it.

(2) [JGT:1] (Lerner, 1996, p. 314)

- 1     D:     Looks like ya got some
- 2             good pizza here Mom.
- 3             (1.5)
- 4     M:     Why don't you have
- 5             some Darlene.

Sacks (1992, II, p. 330-331) pointed out a sequential relationship between requests and offers. Schegloff (2007) cited the following distributional evidence for an organizational preference<sup>7</sup> for offers over requests: (1) in mundane talk requests tend to

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the technical meaning of preference see Sacks, 1992; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984; Lerner, 1996. For cross-linguistic evidence for the preference of offers over requests see Lindström,

occur late in an interaction; (2) speakers formulate requests with features that are usually associated with dispreferred second pair parts such as accounts, delays, and partial repeats; (3) speakers may withhold a request until it may be accomplished reciprocally with the recipient; (4) requests may be avoided through an interactional move that results in an offer. Lerner (1996) observed that the anticipatory completion of a speaker's turn by another speaker may be used to pre-empt an upcoming dispreferred action in favor of a preferred action. In this manner, the recipient of a nascent request may convert the request into an offer when an opportunity for completion of the speaker's turn is available.

Since a request is the first pair part of a request-response adjacency pair<sup>8</sup>, once a speaker makes a request, a granting or denial from the recipient is conditionally relevant (Schegloff, 1968). However, the recipient may postpone the delivery of such a response with an insertion sequence (Schegloff, 1972; Merritt, 1976; Levinson, 1983) that is designed to elicit information necessary to the fulfillment or rejection of the request. In the following example from the data corpus for this study, the patron inquires about access to a computer with a printer (a<sup>1</sup>). This request may be understood as the first pair part of an adjacency pair that makes a response in the form of an answer to the request expectable. However, the librarian's subsequent turn is a new request (b<sup>1</sup>). This turn is recognizably instrumental to providing a response to the patron's request, because it is reasonable for the hearer to infer that access to a computer with printing capability is dependent on one's status as a library user. A response to the patron's request remains

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<sup>8</sup> In service interactions a request may follow an offer of service and is therefore the second pair part of an adjacency pair. However, as Robinson (2001, p. 30) observed, a request that follows an offer of service is not only responsive to the offer; it also constitutes an initiatory action that presents a problem to be remedied by the service provider thereby obligating its own response.



expectable, although it is on hold until the patron produces a second pair part ( $b^2$ ) to the adjacency pair initiated by the librarian. In addition to closing the insertion sequence, the patron's response also yields the information required for the librarian to proceed with a response to the patron's original request ( $a^2$ ).

### (3) PCs

- 1 →  $a^1$  Patron: Are there any PCs here that I can use to print something out;  
 2 →  $b^1$  Librarian: Are you affiliated with {this college}?  
 3 →  $b^2$  Patron: Ye:ah I'm a (0.6) full time student right now.  
 4 (1.2)/((Patron shows his student ID card))  
 5 Patron: [It's current.  
 6 →  $a^2$  Librarian: [Ye:ah then .hh you can either go to the computer center  
 7 upstairs on the sixth floor;

Requesters may employ a post-expansion sequence to pursue a request following an apparent declination that would implicate closure of the service interaction. In the following example also taken from the data for this study, the patron asks for the location of a particular title (lines 3-4). The librarian responds by rejecting the request based on a lack of availability (line 5). The patron extends the request sequence through a report of its use by another patron (line 6).

### (4) Cliff Notes

- 1 P: ((Walks up to reference desk holding a slip of paper that she is reading as  
 2 L turns head to left))  
 3 Mm uh/((L turns to P without looking up)) where can I find/((gaze to L))  
 4 the Cliff Note.  
 5 L: ((Looks up at P)) We don't carry Cliff Notes.  
 6 P: Oh but one of my friend found Cliff Note here.

This section has focused on the structure of request-response sequences that are built around a core adjacency pair that may be augmented through preliminary, insertion, and expansion sequences. However, there is analytical leverage to recognizing requests as parts of pairs of action within larger sequences of action, not simply as isolated adjacency pairs (Robinson, 2001). Thus, in this study attention is also directed to what

precedes and follows request-response sequences to determine their role within the trajectory of action of the overall reference service encounter.

As discussed above, from a sequence organizational perspective, requests are sequence initiating actions-- the first part of a paired set that makes relevant either a granting (acceptance) or non-granting (declination or refusal) response as the second part. However, the recipient of a request chooses a response from nonequivalent courses of action and there is an organizational preference for grantings over refusals (Levinson, 1983; Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007). Wootton (1981b) demonstrated that in everyday conversation recipients of requests produce refusals as softened, delayed, or accompanied by an account. Refusing a request without a using mitigated form makes a claim of asymmetrical status and rejects the claim of the requester to be entitled to assistance from the recipient (M. Goodwin, 1980). As part of the analysis of requesting in this study, attention is directed to how librarians formulate their response turns to be recognizable by patrons as responsive to a request, as well as how patrons display their orientation to a librarian's turn as a request-relevant response.

### Requests in Institutional Interactions

If context is a contingent accomplishment of social interactants, locally produced rather than exogenously applied (Heritage, 1984; 1992), one may ask how requesting at the reference desk may differ from the same action as it is accomplished in mundane conversation. The approach taken in this study holds that the institutional character of interaction is not simply a function of the physical setting in which it occurs. Rather it arises from the interactants' orientation to the special characteristics of the speech exchange systems associated with an institution (Drew & Heritage, 1992a). Institutional

talk-in-interaction usually involves systematic differences in interactional practices that distinguish it from casual conversation and other forms of institutional interaction (Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; Drew & Heritage, 1992a). These differences include reductions in the range of opportunities and options for action, as well as specializations and respecifications of interactional features. In this sense, institutions are "talked into being" (Heritage 1984, p. 290). The specific way in which these features are deployed and oriented to by the interactants creates a "fingerprint" for each institutional interaction (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991, pp 95-96). This study explicates how requests are formulated and understood by the co-participants at the reference desk as instances of requesting. My approach to analyzing the data has been guided by previous research on the organization of service encounters.

In many institutional settings the purpose of an interaction between a customer and an institutional representative is for the former to make a request and have it be fulfilled by the latter (Merritt, 1976; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987; Zimmerman, 1988; Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2004). In these contexts, customers are expected to produce their requests as the first order of business. This feature of the organization of the interaction reflects the orientation of the interactants to a core goal or activity that is associated with the institution and is a hallmark of institutional talk-in-interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992a). Service providers inspect the position immediately after an opening sequence for a turn that will be doing requesting and the absence of a request in this position may be normatively accountable (Kidwell, 2001). Customers employ "recipient design" (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) in the formulation of their requests in that they orient to the need to present their problem so

that a particular type of official recipient will understand and act on it (Zimmerman, 1992, pp. 448-449).

Prior research on request turns has revealed the orientation of speakers to concerns associated with institutional talk such as identity and status. Curl and Drew (in press) observed that the syntactic form that patients use to construct a request turn displays their understanding of the contingencies associated with the recipient's ability to grant the request and the speaker's entitlement to make the request. Research on mundane conversation shows that requesters make use of different syntactic forms to shape the potential acceptability of a request (Wootton, 1981a). In their analysis of requesting in a primary care setting Gill, Halkowski and Roberts (2001) noted that requests are done obliquely due to the delicacy of requesting as an imposition even within a service interaction in which requests for assistance are expectable. A common feature of requests in institutional service interactions is the design of the request around the presentation of a problem. In his analysis of calls to a poison control center Frankel (1989, p. 203) found that callers most frequently formulated the report of the problem as a declarative statement that consisted of the caller's perspective on the problem, followed by an action description and the name of a substance involved. Reports of problems implicate the recipient in the possible response of assistance (Gill, Halkowski & Roberts, 2001; Robinson, 2001). The recipient of a reporting may expect that the action is preliminary to another action, such as a request, and respond with an assisting action; however, it is left to the recipient to formulate the upshot of a report and act upon it (Drew, 1984).

Zimmerman (1992) identified three types of request turn designs in emergency

service calls. (1) *Requests*, in which a caller displays the need for a responsive action to be taken or asks that a specific action be taken. (2) *Reports*, which entail the naming of a problem as a standard category of policeable matter. (3) *Narratives*, which are extended, chronologically organized accounts leading to a possibly troublesome event.

Zimmerman found that requests that are formulated as narratives supply the call taker with the information necessary to provide assistance and allow callers to present themselves as ordinary, disinterested witnesses to a potentially troublesome event that they encountered during the normal course of routine activity.

Requests are enacted and understood within larger sequences of action.

Therefore, this study takes into account the actions that set up requests in reference service encounters, as well as the actions that a librarian produces in response. Previous work in CA that has described the organization of service encounters provides a foundation on which to examine the organizational position of requests in reference desk interactions. Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) and Zimmerman (1988, 1992) proposed a sequence of organization of calls to emergency services centers as shown in Figure 1<sup>9</sup>. Variations on this basic model are evidenced in a wide range of institutional settings (e.g., Merritt, 1976; Lamoureux, 1988; Kidwell, 2001). All share a design around a base adjacency pair (request-assisting or non-assisting response), with the possibility of an interrogative insertion sequence initiated by the service provider. In addition, the interactants construct an opening sequence in which they establish their mutual availability to engage in interaction and they also accomplish a closing sequence.

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<sup>9</sup> The models for the organization of service encounters discussed in this dissertation are derived from earlier work on the organization of everyday conversation, particularly research on telephone calls. See Sacks, 1972, 1992; Schegloff, 1968, 1979; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973.

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Pre-beginning  
 Opening/identification/acknowledgment  
 Request  
     Interrogative series  
 Response  
 Closing

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Figure 1. Configuration of sequences for managing calls for emergency services (Zimmerman, 1992).

One of the distinguishing features of Zimmerman's (1992) organization is his inclusion of a "pre-beginning" sequence (Schegloff, 1979). He noted that call takers at emergency services centers enter into the interaction with the expectation that it will involve a request for assistance. A caller's "pre-beginning" move of dialing into a telephone number (i.e., 911) that is highly publicized as a source of emergency assistance begins the process of establishing the interaction as constructed around a request-delivery of assistance sequence. The act of calling this specific number initiates the alignment of the participants' institutional roles of requester and service provider. As part of this study I consider the role of pre-beginning sequences in the enactment of requesting in reference desk transactions, because libraries use many ways to designate their reference desks officially as a service point and patrons presumably enter into an interaction with a reference librarian with an understanding of an offer of service due to this preliminary work.

Earlier I noted that the CA literature provides evidence for an organizational preference for grantings over refusals in response to requests in everyday conversation. A similar preference may apply with regard to institutional service encounters. Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski (2004) demonstrated that service providers formulate non-

granting responses in a manner that displays their orientation to the delicacy of rejecting a request for assistance.

A fundamental insight from CA research that has been reiterated throughout this chapter is the role of sequential position in the formulation and understanding of actions. Utterances are recognizable to recipients as doing requesting due in great part to their position in an ongoing sequence of action (Gill, Halkowski & Roberts, 2001; Kidwell, 2001; Robinson, 2001; Schegloff, 2007). A feature of the organization of institutional service encounters is the occurrence of requesting after an opening sequence (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987; Zimmerman, 1992; Kidwell, 2001). Consequently, this study directs substantial attention to the enactment of openings in reference service encounters. The previous research on which I based my analysis is discussed in the next section.

### Openings

One of the fundamental organizational units of an interaction is the opening sequence in which interlocutors establish for one another their interest and availability to engage in an interaction and manage their entry into one. Since the reference service encounters in this study involve physical co-presence, this section opens with the discussion of a framework for describing the organization of the opening of face-to-face interaction, including the deployment of gaze, body orientation, and movement. Next, openings in telephone-based interactions are considered with regard to institutional and everyday conversation. The review includes discussion of a reduced opening previously identified for emergency service calls. This organizational feature is relevant to one of the findings of this study and will be revisited in chapter five.

## Openings in Interactions Involving Co-Presence

Previous research on the opening sequences of face-to-face interactions has yielded insight into the co-participants' moment-by-moment achievement of social organization. This prior work provides an analytical stance from which to explicate the constituent actions accomplished in the openings of reference encounters. Kendon's (1967) descriptive analysis of the opening moves in face-to-face social encounters revealed an organizational structure consisting of four inter-related phases of joint action:

- Sighting and announcement - The initiation of an interaction typically requires co-present prospective interactants to share momentary mutual gaze at the outset, as the exchange of glances is one of the ways in which individuals give each other clearance for further interaction (Goffman, 1963). Following this brief spate of shared looking, the interactants may withdraw eye contact until they are in close enough proximity to engage in talk. Interactants may shift body position or torque (Schegloff, 1998) to physically orient toward one another as a display of engagement that provides warrant for proceeding with the interaction.
- Distance salutation - If the co-participants are separated by a large distance, once they have displayed orientation to one another, they may use an explicit display of engagement such as a wave, call, or head dip to establish that the two have seen one another and are now in a ratified state of interaction.
- Approach phase - As the interactants move closer to one another, aversion of gaze continues until a distance of only a few feet separates them. They



are likely to provide a facial display of engagement, such as a closed-mouth smile.

- Close salutation - At this point the interactants jointly establish a distinct spatial and organization frame in which to conduct their business. Within the half second immediately preceding the start of the close salutation, they will re-establish mutual gaze. Close salutations are accomplished in a manner that sets or reaffirms the relationship of the participants.

The organization of the opening actions that Kendon (1967) proposed offers an account for how individuals who are co-present jointly manage problems inherent to the initiation of an interaction. First, they must establish mutual awareness and display for one another interest and availability to engage in the interaction. If the physical distance separating them does not accommodate a vocal exchange, they must manage the achievement of co-location while sustaining the incipient interaction and conforming to social conventions. For example, mutual eye gaze initiates engagement from a distance, but co-interactants do not generally look at each other continuously as they approach. The withdrawal of gaze following an initial exchange may be associated with the role of "look" in the regulation of intimacy or degree of personal involvement in the social interaction (Kendon, 1967).

Some of the interactional work that is accomplished in the opening of a face-to-face encounter is also observable in encounters that do not involve co-presence. In both cases the parties must manage their entry into the interaction with the visual and auditory resources available to them. They must also establish the reason for the interaction or the business that will be conducted. The following two sections review prior work in

telephone-based interactions from both everyday and institutional settings to help identify elements in the organization of openings that are common to and contrastive with face-to-face engagements.

### Openings in Telephone Conversations

Considerable analytical attention has been devoted to the sequential organization of mundane telephone conversations (e.g., Schegloff, 1968; 1986; 2002). This work has identified a recurrent set of constituent action sequences for telephone call openings, which are: summons/answer; identification/recognition; greetings; "howareyou"; and first topic. While this sequence organization has been shown to apply across numerous recorded interactions, individual cases may vary in organization, as each interaction is a local accomplishment produced by the interlocutors who shape the organization according to their immediate interests and circumstances. Each of the constituent sequences will be discussed with reference to the sample case provided below (extract 5).

- (5) [Item 247a, Schegloff, 1986, p. 115]
- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 0  |    | ((ring))                                    |
| 1  | R: | Hallo,                                      |
| 2  | C: | Hello Jim?                                  |
| 3  | R: | Yeah,                                       |
| 4  | C: | 's Bonnie                                   |
| 5  | R: | Hi,   |
| 6  | C: | Hi, how are yuh                             |
| 7  | R: | Fine, how're you,                           |
| 8  | C: | Oh, okay I guess                            |
| 9  | R: | Oh okay.                                    |
| 10 | C: | Uhm (0.2) what are you doing New Year's Eve |

Telephone conversations begin with a summons/answer sequence comprising the ring of the telephone (line 0) and an answering response from the recipient (R). As with interactions involving co-present interlocutors, a summons (e.g., "excuse me" or term of address) establishes the interactants' availability and is hearably prefatory to the reason

for issuing the summons. The summons makes conditionally relevant from the recipient an "answer" in the form of a clearance cue that advances talk to the anticipated talk prepared by the summons or a blocking response. Thus, there is an obligation on the part of the summoner to talk again, as well as one on the part of the summoned to listen (Schegloff, 2002). In this manner, the summons-answer sequence establishes the availability of the participants for the interaction.

The summons-answer sequence can be followed by a dedicated identification-recognition sequence (lines 2-4). In the case of telephone conversations, the co-participants do not have the visual resources for mutual recognition provided by physical co-presence. The summons is a standardized mechanical ring, rather than a human voice that could aid in identifying the caller who is seeking to mobilize the attention of the recipient. As a result, there is a typical asymmetry in knowledge between the caller and answerer regarding who the other is likely to be. The response to the phone ring (usually "hello" in United States) provides a voice sample allowing for the opportunity of identification via recognition by the caller. As extract (5) demonstrates, the voice sample may not be sufficient to accomplish this goal. The caller opens the sequence with a candidate identification delivered in questioning intonation (line 2) for confirmation by the recipient. The recipient confirms the caller's recognition of him, but does not display recognition of the caller (line 3). Consequently, the caller follows with self-identification (line 4).

The interaction continues with a greeting sequence (lines 5-6) that displays confirmation of recognition between the parties and marks entry into a ratified state of talk. Greetings establish and sustain what Goffman (1963) termed the "occasioned

mutual involvement" of interlocutors. The "howareyou" sequence (lines 6-9) provides an opportunity for either party to propose his or her current circumstances as a first topic of discussion. Typically what follows (line 10) is the first topic slot or "anchor position" (Schegloff, 1986), which is the reason for the call and normally is assigned to the caller in the prototypical sequencing of turns.

### Openings in Service Encounters

A key issue to be considered in the analysis of reference desk interactions is how our knowledge of the organization of openings to conversational talk-in-interaction may be applied to understanding the types of goal-focused interaction that are co-produced in institutional contexts. Research on talk across institutional contexts (see for example, Drew and Heritage, 1992) supports the stance that the institutional character of interaction is not purely a product of the physical setting in which it occurs. In an age of digital librarianship we know that reference service transactions are often conducted outside of the physical library, through chat software, e-mail messages, and traditional telephone-based service. The physical design of the reference desk as a service point contributes to the alignment of institutional roles of service provider and service requester and helps to establish the expectation of a request for assistance as the basis for an interaction. Nonetheless, the institutional nature of an interaction also arises from the interactants' orientation to the special characteristics of the speech exchange systems associated with an institution. Institutional talk-in-interaction usually involves systematic differences in interactional practices that distinguish it from casual conversation and other forms of institutional interaction (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991, p. 95-96).

Zimmerman and Whalen (1987) observed that calls to emergency services

agencies display a distinctive organization for service encounters that reflects an adaptation of mundane telephone conversations. The opening sequences of emergency calls are routinely reduced, resulting in the placement of the reason-for-the-call, or assistance, slot to the callers (i.e., service seekers) in their first turn at talk, which is the second turn of the interaction. The reduced opening is seen in the following fragment.

(6) (Zimmerman and Whelan, 1987, p. 174) [MCE/21-9/12 simplified]

- 1       D:     Mid-City Emergency  
2       C:     Um yeah (.) somebody jus' vandalized my car.

In response to the summons of the telephone ring the dispatcher (D) provides an institutional self-identification (line 1), which represents a specialization of the conversational telephone opening discussed above to support institutional talk. The accomplishment of personal recognition is not relevant in anonymously transacted institutional service calls. What is essential is that the roles of service provider and service requester are aligned for the business of the interaction to proceed. Here the response "Mid-City Emergency" displays to the caller (C) that he or she has reached a specific institution (with particular associated services) and the recipient of the call is available to engage in interaction. The caller next requests assistance by reporting a problem (line 2). The reduction of the opening sequence displays the interlocutors' orientation to the contingencies of negotiating anonymous assistance seeking and delivery. Thus, the issues to which greeting exchanges are addressed are not ordinarily applicable to service encounters. The caller's display of the purpose for the call (line 2), rather than the greeting exchange, ratifies the state of talk (Zimmerman and Whalen, 1987), which results in the reduced opening. One of the findings of this study is that librarians and patrons may enact an opening that is more reduced than reported by

Zimmerman and Whalen (1987), because the need to establish institutional identification is not necessary when the interaction is conducted face-to-face at a designated service point.

Openings are dense sequences of talk-in-interaction in which interlocutors accomplish multiple tasks such as ratifying their state of interaction, confirming their identities, and establishing what will be talked about (Schegloff, 1986). When interactants are physically co-present the opening sequence also involves establishing a frame of space in which their actions will be directed and interpreted for a relevant response (C. Goodwin, 1981). This spatial and orientational frame delineates participants from non-participants (Kendon, 1967). Gaze placement is a key resource that interactants employ to create and maintain a framework of mutual orientation (C. Goodwin).

Institutional representatives working at a service desk display themselves to be a “ready recipient” of a service requester’s next action by adjusting their body orientation, gaze, and facial expression with the arrival of the requester at the service point (Kidwell, 2001, p. 27). In institutional interactions participants are not continuously engaged in collaborative action. Service providers may disattend a service recipient to engage in bureaucratic tasks. One of the characteristics of the reference service encounters examined in this study is the librarian’s occasional shift of attention between a patron and a computer or a statistical log sheet. As a result, this study examined how librarians’ practices involving gaze, body orientation, and talk are oriented to by patrons and invite the performance of an action in response (cf. Robinson, 1998). As Schegloff (1986) advised, the apparent routine nature of openings should be appreciated as an interactional achievement that interlocutors reach from a wide range of possibilities. One of the

contributions of this study is a moment-by-moment description of how patrons and librarians employ talk and body action to enact the opening of reference service encounters as routine while accomplishing core tasks, including establishing a position in the talk for the making of a request.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODS AND DATA

#### Introduction

Adopting a conversation-analytic approach to investigating requesting in reference service encounters had clear implications for how the data for this study were to be collected and analyzed. In contrast with the literature on reference service encounters, but consistent with CA methodology, the data comprise video-recordings of naturally-occurring reference desk transactions. As discussed in chapter two, the practitioner literature of reference librarianship presents idealized examples of reference desk requests for pedagogical purposes. While these materials are suitable for developing competence in the use of reference resources, they do not provide the level of detail necessary to fully describe the practice of making a request. Moreover, invented data are subject to the inventor's personal typification of the action, which cannot capture the frequency, variety, and specificity of naturally situated communicative conduct (Heritage, 1984, p. 237; Sacks, 1984). Group members' intuitions have been shown to be unreliable for explicating the practices surrounding the achievement of social action (Clayman & Gill, 2004, p. 2). Contrived data, despite "confirmation" by members' intuition, inherently reflect personal preconceptions and analytical biases regarding how interaction operates. Sacks (1992) argues that "if a researcher uses hypotheticalized or hypotheticalized-typicalized versions of the world, then, however rich his imagination is, he is constrained by reference to what an audience, an audience of professionals, can accept as reasonable" (II, p. 419). If we do not rely on naturally-occurring talk-in-interaction to derive descriptions of social action, we may be simply instantiating our



own view of the phenomena we are studying (cf. Sacks, 1984).

Prior analyses of reference desk transactions have relied on the retrospective accounts of patrons and librarians regarding recent cases or critical incidents (e.g., Lynch, 1978). However, such recollections are also deficient with regard to the details of the interactions. Our recollections can only be selective and lacking the complexity, diversity and detail that characterizes talk-in-interaction (Heritage, 1984, pp. 236-237). In contrast, this study uses data recorded from naturally occurring occasions of interaction at a reference desk. The use of recorded transactions permits an analysis of the richness of an interaction that cannot be achieved through the participants' memories or a researcher's intuition (Sacks, 1984). In addition, the inclusion of the transcripts in this dissertation makes the data available for re-analysis, as well as alternative interpretation, by its readers.

#### Data Collection

The data in this study consist of ninety minutes of digital video-recordings of thirty-one reference desk transactions at a college library located in a large city in the Northeastern United States. Interactions involving a total of four reference librarians and thirty-one library patrons are captured in the data.<sup>10</sup> This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board of Rutgers University and the equivalent body at the university where the data were collected. Participants provided their written consent to be recorded. In addition, a sign announcing that, "All reference transactions are being recorded today" was posted on the desk alongside a visible microphone. The data corpus is based on reference desk transactions that were observed in full during four recording

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<sup>10</sup> In the public versions of the data the faces of the interactants are obscured to maintain their anonymity.

sessions in 2001. The reference desk which served as the data collection site (Figure 2) is the only one in the library.



Figure 2. Reference Desk at the Data Collection Site

The reference desk is located on the main floor of the library directly across from the entrance as indicated on the floor plan (See figure 3). Consequently, it is immediately in view as one enters the library. The desk is designed for staffing by two librarians (L1 and L2) at the front counter. In order to avoid overlapping interactions among librarians and patrons at the desk for the purposes of this study, data collection was scheduled during off-peak hours when only one librarian was assigned to the desk.

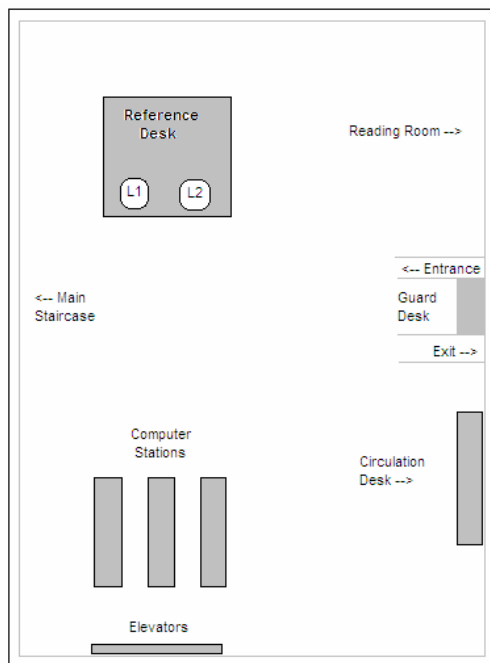


Figure 3. Floor Plan of the Data Collection Site

### Data Analysis

The data were transcribed according to standard conventions used in conversation analysis (Jefferson, 1984; appendix A). As Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) observed, conversation analysis rejects the *a priori* stipulation of research questions and the proposing of models for the organization of specific features of talk-in-interaction to be tested by the data. Instead, the researcher approaches recorded interactions by drawing from previous work in CA and observing what is going on in the data and how it is getting done. One method is to isolate sequences of action for detailed analysis. Following Pomerantz and Fehr, my analysis of requests started with the selection of a single instance of requesting. The identification of a request was not done according to any presumed syntactic format for this action. Instead I relied on the librarian and patron display mutual

recognition of a turn as accomplishing that action. This step required the identification of the boundaries of the action sequence. I placed the start of a request sequence with the turn at talk in which a request was initiated and recognizably acted upon by the librarian. I placed the end of the action where the patron and librarian were no longer responding specifically to the request.

The next step in the data analysis involved characterizing the action(s) that each participant performed in the sequence. The aim is to describe what a librarian and a patron are doing with each turn. It is important to note that a single turn may accomplish more than one action. For example, a patron may design a turn to request assistance with using a photocopier while also enacting a complaint about the age of the equipment. In addition, attention must be paid to cases in which an interactional move is done not as the focal action of a turn, but rather as a means of implementing the main action (see for example, Beach & Mandelbaum, 2005).

As the next step of the single case analysis I examined how the interactants formulated their actions in the sequence. I asked “why that now?” (Schegloff & Sacks 1973; Schegloff 1990, 1998) with regard to each interactional move. As Pomerantz and Fehr (1997) advised, I considered issues such as: What understandings do the interactants display? What inferences has the speaker made in using a particular turn formulation? Does the speaker make any claims (e.g., knowledge, preparation, or suitability of the action) with the design of the turn. What implications does the formulation have on the recipient’s next action?

My analysis also took into accounts features of the organization of the sequence of action, such as how the turns were allocated (Sacks, Schegloff &

Jefferson, 1974). The timing of a speaker's start of a turn is important, because it may display a hearer's early recognition of an action (Jefferson, 1994; Lerner, 1996) while a delay may signal a non-affiliating or dispreferred response (Heritage, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984). Similarly, I attended to how a speaker's turn was finished by looking for features in the talk that would indicate whether the interactants treated it as complete or designedly incomplete. Finally, I examined whether the design of the turns implicated relationships or roles between the interactants. Did the formulation display rights on the part of the speaker or obligations on the recipient?

The analysis of the first case yielded a set of features for each action that I addressed (e.g., requesting). I proceeded with a case-by-case examination of all instances of the action in the data corpus to determine which features also appeared in those instances. The case-by-case analysis yielded a non-case-specific set of recurrent practices that are presented in the following chapters. Deviant cases were analyzed to obtain additional insight into alternative practices for implementing an action. Thus, counter-examples are included and discussed in the data analysis chapters for the insight they provide into the features that are identified.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REFERENCE DESK OPENING SEQUENCES

#### Introduction

Conversational openings have been shown to be "compact and interactionally dense" sequences of talk in which the interlocutors accomplish multiple interactional jobs (Schegloff, 1986, p. 112). In openings to reference desk transactions patrons and librarians collaboratively manage several interactional tasks, one of which is also characteristic of the mundane social order, namely, determining whether and how co-presence will lead to a "face engagement" (Goffman, 1963). A librarian and an individual walking toward the reference desk face the practical problems of establishing for one another their mutual availability and interest in engaging in an interaction, as well as managing their entry into such an interaction. In addition, the interlocutors must achieve suitable mutual proximity and location for proceeding with a reference transaction. As Ciolek and Kendon (1980) noted, interactants establish and maintain a spatial arrangement appropriate for each occasion of talk. The way in which they organize their co-presence delineates participants from non-participants. Although the physical layout of a library reference desk shapes the "spatial and orientational frame" (Kendon, 1967) in which librarians and patrons transact the business of the reference encounter, they must still co-produce this arrangement locally on a case-by-case basis in the face of all the contingencies that may arise affecting the coordination of their movement across physical space.

This chapter examines the interactional work that patrons and librarians accomplish in opening a reference desk encounter. The data show how librarians and

patrons interactionally achieve a consistent position and distance as the service point for each reference desk transaction. The physical location where patrons terminate their approach to the reference desk is not simply an institutionally fixed point. Rather, the point of termination for the patron's approach is a jointly managed, local accomplishment-- a relative position directly in front of the librarian and at a common distance separating the interactants. The participants' achievement of this "reference distance" (cf. Goffman, 1963, p. 161) physically facilitates the interaction by establishing boundaries that limit participation to themselves, ensuring that no visual obstructions are present and providing sufficient proximity for talk.

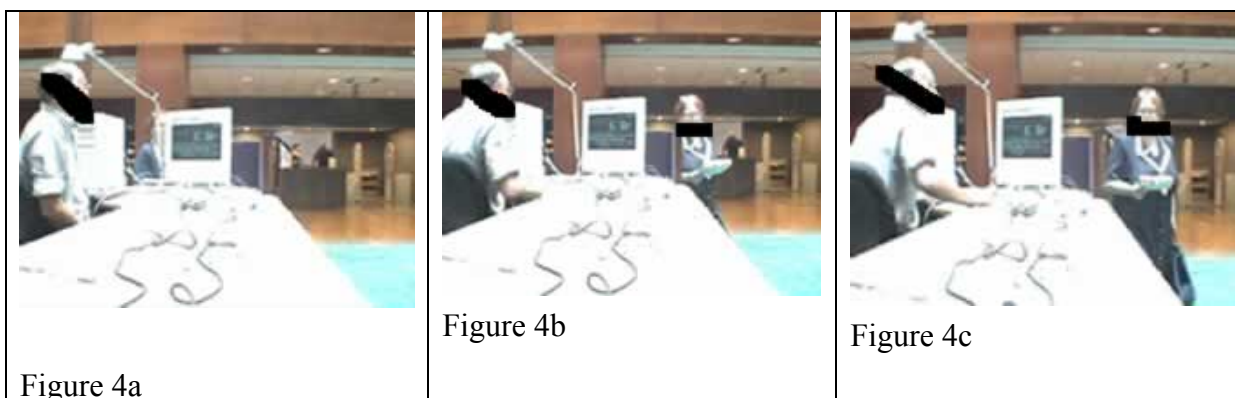
Based on an analysis of the data I describe an organization of the opening sequence that consists minimally of an approach-availability display adjacency pair that creates an organizational slot for a patron to make a request. I also propose an organization for the use of greetings as an interactional resource that librarians and patrons employ to sustain engagement during a patron's approach to the desk and shape the course of action to provide a patron with a request slot.

As the analysis of openings at the reference desk demonstrates, librarians and patrons negotiate the opening of each co-present reference encounter as Kendon (1967) observed, through a sequence of actions that display mutual orientation to interaction and sustain engagement in an incipient interaction while they reduce the physical distance that separates them. In the next section I present an argument for regarding the patron's approach to the desk as an attention securing move comparable to the initial ring in a telephone interaction in terms of the interactional work it does. In the case of face-to-face reference interactions, the approach yields a response from the librarian in the form

of a display of availability, which may be accomplished through the simple placement of gaze to a patron. It is through these actions that librarians and patrons co-produce an approach that leads to a remarkable consistency in the relative position and distance across cases.

### Approach-Availability Display Sequences

In all cases in this data corpus, the reference interaction begins with a patron's physical approach to the reference desk. Although walking toward the desk may seem to be a purely unilateral activity, the data show that it is actually a socially and interactionally shaped practice in that the patron and librarian collaboratively engage in the methodical production of a patron's approach to the desk as they achieve the proper location for the approach to terminate, a suitable distance between the co-interactants, and the avoidance of mutual gaze during the approach. Moreover, a librarian's apparent availability to assist an approaching patron is not simply a circumstance of the incipient interaction. Librarians actively accomplish displays of availability in direct response to a patron's approach. In the following example, the librarian and patron achieve mutual engagement and proximity/position through a series of moment-by-moment actions illustrated in the five images below.





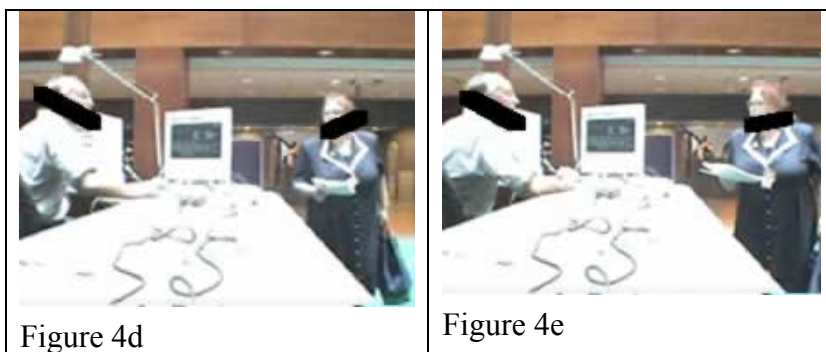


Figure 4. Call Number Directory

L and P pursue parallel, although different, lines of action that together result in the opening of the transaction of reference business directly in front of the L at the reference desk. P approaches L from the side of the desk. L comes into view as P passes by the space separating the computer CPU and monitor (figure 4a) and it appears that they are engaged in momentary, mutual visual monitoring that could precede an incipient interaction. As the subsequent images in figure 4 illustrate, L and P do not re-establish mutual gaze and they engage in a series of body actions that determine that if an interaction is initiated, it may not commence until P is at the front of the reference desk. P reaches the corner while glancing down at the papers she is carrying while L directs his gaze toward the monitor (figure 4b). As P turns the corner, she looks up from her papers toward L thereby projecting that an interaction with him is sought, but L has redirected his gaze slightly to the right (figure 4c). By turning away from the monitor and facing completely forward (figure 4d), L displays that he is not occupied with work on the computer and is therefore possibly available to assist P. In addition, as a result of repositioning his body, L still does not reciprocate P's gaze as she comes from around the side (figure 4d). Joint engagement is finally established via mutual gaze when P arrives directly in front of L, but only at this point and distance from L (figure 4e).

L's interactional work addresses two practical problems. First, he repositions his

body and gaze toward the front of the desk, which helps to distinguish P as a "patron" who is initiating an interaction rather than a "passerby", because she will have to come around to the front to engage him face-to-face. By looking straight ahead, L's gaze is perpendicular to that of P as she walks toward him at the desk. L is not actively seeking out an interaction with P, but is merely making himself available for one. Thus, P will have to take the affirmative step of turning toward him when she reaches the front of the desk directly in front of him, an action that a passerby would be unlikely to take. If he had monitored her approach and established eye gaze while she was walking around the side of the desk, it might have shown his presumption of an interaction that might not have been part of P's agenda. Second, his body conduct points P where she needs to be in order to engage in an interaction with him by leading P around to the front of the desk. His repositioning (figure 4d) requires that if a reference interaction is initiated, it is to be enacted directly in front of him at the reference counter unless P performs an action, such as a vocal summons, to initiate the interaction earlier. Thus, the librarian designates a place at the desk for the prospective patron to arrive and the interaction to be conducted while he is displaying availability to provide service. P collaborates in the accomplishment of the managed opening by orienting to L's body position leading her to the front of the desk and not making a move, such as issuing a verbal summons, that would initiate the interaction before her arrival at that location. While L displays his availability to engage in an interaction with her as she reaches the front of the desk, she initiates mutual engagement through a head-on approach that includes direction of gaze toward L.

The next two sections describe how patrons' approaches to the desk and librarians'

displays of availability are accomplished as local solutions to specific sets of circumstances.

### Joint Management of the Approach to the Desk

Earlier I claimed that a patron's approach to the desk is not a unilateral activity, but a socially and interactionally shaped practice. One of the ways in which this is evident in the data is through the coordination of body movement between the librarian and the patron that results in the arrival of the patron in front of the reference desk at a consistent service position across from the librarian despite a variety of distances and directions from which patrons approach the desk.

Although the design of the reference desk in this library best accommodates a transaction in which the librarian and patron confer at the front counter with the former facing directly outward and the latter standing opposite by a few feet, institutional policy and furniture placement do not account for the consistency in proximity and position observable in the data; it is achieved on a case-by-case basis through the coordination of movement between the interactants. Patrons and librarians jointly manage the patron's approach so that the business of the interaction begins at the reference desk directly in front of the librarian equivalent to what was illustrated in Figure 4e. In that case, by turning toward the front of the desk and facing forward, L has positioned himself so that P can only establish mutual eye gaze with him if she walks completely around to the front of the desk or performs an action to obtain his attention prior to arriving at the front of the desk. L's body behavior is deployed as an interactional resource to guide P around to the front of the desk directly in front of him if P is to initiate an interaction. P collaborates in the accomplishment of this goal by completing her arrival at the front of the desk, rather

than an earlier point along her approach, such as the side.

The analysis of the data in this study shows that patrons and librarians manage the patron's approach to the desk across four types of approach: (1) patron approaches head-on; (2) patron approaches from the side; (3) patron approaches from the position as next-in-line for service; (4) patron and librarian approach the service point in concert. The participants' bodily enactment of the opening to a reference interaction matches the local contingencies associated with each approach position. The remainder of this section discusses how librarians and patrons accomplish the opening in each of these circumstances.

Patron Approaches Head-On: The most common approach to the desk involves a patron walking toward a librarian who is standing or seated at the front of the desk and facing forward. When a patron approaches a librarian head-on, the natural course of walking toward an intended interlocutor should result in the relative position noted above. In the following example, L is seated at the desk with her gaze directed slightly downward (figure 5a and line 1).



Figure 5a



Figure 5b

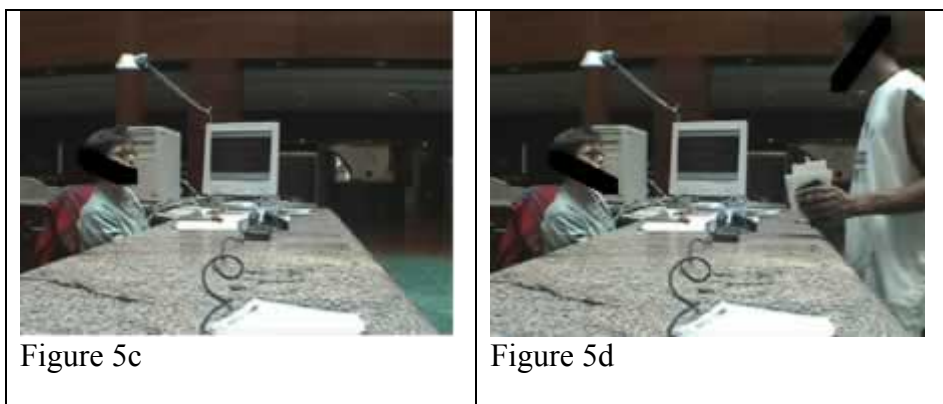


Figure 5. AOL

(2) AOL

- 1 L: ((Seated at desk.)) (figure 5a)
- 2 L: ((Widens eyes & makes closed-mouth smile as P approaches)) (figure 5b)
- 3 P: Hello. ((off camera as approaching desk))
- 4 (.)/(P gazes at P while he approaches))
- 5 L: Hi:. (figure 5c)
- 6 (.)/(L redirects gaze to papers in P's extended hand then back to P))
- 7 P: ((on camera at desk)) I need to use aiy oh el (figure 5d)

L achieves mutual engagement with P as he approaches from off camera by presenting a closed mouth smile and raising her gaze, presumably to meet that of P, who responds immediately with a greeting en route to the desk (figure 5b and lines 2-3). L reciprocates the greeting (figure 5c and line 5). By remaining stationary at the counter during this opening, L identifies for P where he must stand in order for an interaction with her to take place. Consistent with the other cases in the corpus, that location is directly in front of L at the distance of the width of the counter (figure 5d and line 7).

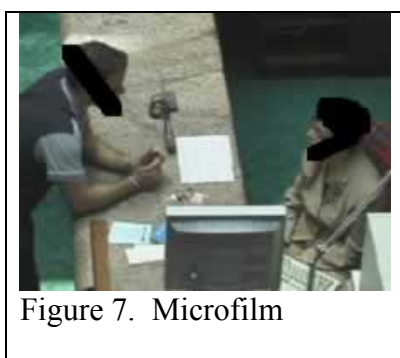
Patron Approaches from the Side: In the next example the librarian monitors the prospective patron in the far left as he walks along the side of the desk toward the front (figure 6a). At this point they have not yet interacted. L turns to face forward across the front of the desk (figure 6b), which makes interaction possible only if P comes around to the front of the desk or moves to secure his attention earlier. As P reaches a point

directly in front of him at the desk, L turns his head slightly to the left (figure 6c). In this manner he establishes mutual gaze just when the patron reaches the location where librarians and patrons consistently begin their interactions.



Figure 6. Norton Anthology

In most cases the librarian is seated at the same location close to the front of the reference desk, which facilitates the achievement of a consistent reference desk service point. However, the data provide evidence that patrons and librarians adapt to different contingencies as they collaboratively establish the spatial and positional requirements for a reference desk interaction. In the following case (figure 7), the librarian is seated farther back from the desk than the previous examples in this chapter. Once the patron



terminates his arrival at the counter directly in front of the librarian, he leans forward onto the counter to accommodate the librarian's position (cf. Lerner & Raymond, 1996). By doing this he reduces the distance that separates them and thereby achieves a

proximity that is equivalent to the cases in which the librarian is seated at the counter.

Closing the gap provides the distance to accommodate talk at a volume acceptable for transacting service business in a library at the designated work counter.

Patron Approaches from Next-in-Line Position: As the following case (extract 3, figure 8) illustrates, patrons display an orientation to both a locally-produced service position at the reference desk and a position for a “next patron in line”. In this example, the patron is visually available to the librarian who is already assisting a patron, but he waits outside the work space they have created for their interaction. The transition that the librarian accomplishes from one patron to another also deserves note. In prior cases the librarian and patron achieve mutual gaze just as the patron reaches the desk. Since a patron who is waiting in line is already near the desk, the librarian transitions from a closed interaction to a new one by shifting gaze away from the service position and back again once the patron reaches it.

### (3) PCs

- 1 P [(Waits at front side of desk while L assists X.)]
- 2 L: [((nodding to X)) Then they'll tell you that, (0.4) (figure 5a)]
- 3 X: Alright ((turns and walks away from desk))=
- 4 L: =it's not available for loan or something. (figure 5b)=
- 5 X: Alright.
- 6 L: ((Nods at X))=
- 7 P: =((Steps toward desk))
- 8 X: Thank you.
- 9 L: ((Shifts gaze to P)) (figure 5c)
- 10 L: Okay ((to X)) ((Turns to side)) (figure 5d)
- 11 P: ((Moves to front center of counter))
- 12 L: (°I don't know°) ((To another librarian behind the desk)) (figure 5e)
- 13 L: ((Turns forward and faces P))
- 14 P: (figure 5f) Are there any PCs here that I can use to print something out?

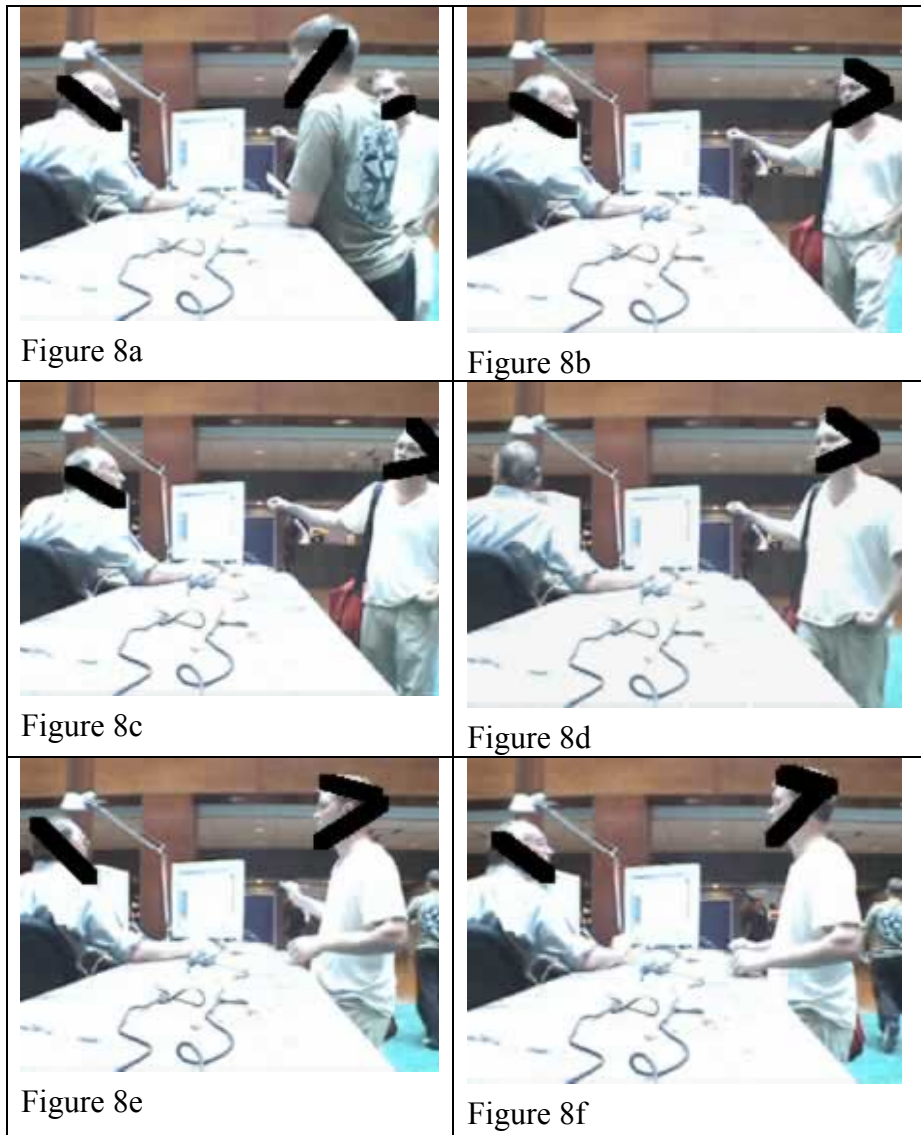


Figure 8. PCs

P stands to the side of the desk as L assists X (figure 8a, lines 1-2). X walks away from the desk as that interaction nears closure (figure 8b, line 4). Despite the opening of the space in front of the librarian resulting from X's departure, P remains slightly to the side of the desk. In this way he treats the interaction as still in progress and himself as a non-participant who is next-in-line by standing outside the boundaries of the physical space in which P and X have been conducting their interaction and sustaining a body position that indicates non-involvement with their ongoing interaction and starting a



subsequent service encounter. Once X issues the sequence closing "Thank you" (line 8), P steps toward the desk (figure 8c, line 5). The librarian responds to the patron's approach by gazing at him (also figure 8c). However, P is not directing his gaze at L yet. L quickly turns around in response to an unrecorded remark from another librarian behind the desk (line 10, figure 8d) and thereby becomes momentarily unavailable for interaction with P. While L faces away, P moves into position directly in front of him and gazes at him (line 11, figure 8e). When L turns around he establishes mutual gaze with P who initiates the first turn at talk (lines 13-14, figure 8f). Thus, once again the establishment of mutual gaze at the desk is a sufficient display of the librarian's availability for the patron to initiate talk.

The next case (figure 9, extract 4) provides another example of how a librarian may produce just-in-time placement of gaze to a patron during a transition from a next patron in line position to the service position at the desk. The sequence of images captures the period of less than three seconds in which the librarian reaches closure with the patron he is helping, establishes availability for the patron next in queue, withdraws gaze from the approaching patron, then redirects gaze to the patron as she is about to reach the desk.

#### (4) Business Letters

((L has just assisted X with locating a book that is shelved on an upper floor of the library. X begins to walk away from the desk, but turns back to ask for the location of the elevator. Meanwhile P waits next in line for service outside the view of the camera.))

- 1 X: =Um is it an el[evator? or?
- 2 L: [.hh yeah the elevators are right behind you [there.
- 3 X: [Oh it's this
- 4 way. (figure 9a)
- 5 L: Mm hm. (figure 9b)
- 6 L: ((Turns to computer while P approaches desk)) (figure 9c)
- 7 L: ((Directs gaze to P and opens mouth)) (figure 9d)

- 8 L: Hi. (figure 9e)  
 9 P: Hi. (figure 9f)

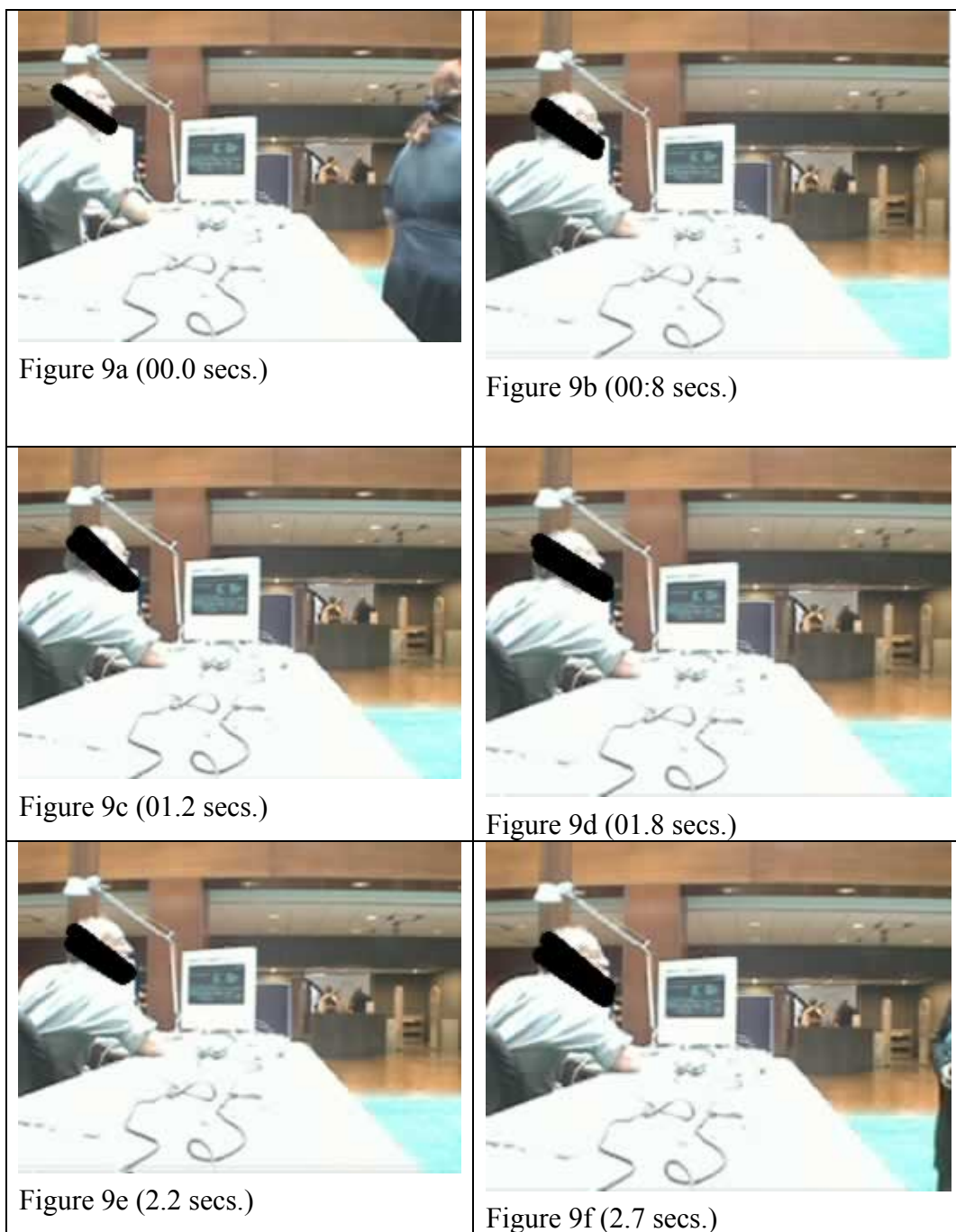


Figure 9. Business Letters

As L reaches closure in his interaction with X he faces forward in the same direction as X walks and P stands waiting in line (figure 9a, lines 3-4). X has already

begun walking toward the elevator by the time L utters his sequence closing confirmation (line 5). He holds this placement of gaze toward P momentarily after X leaves the service point and P begins to move toward the desk (figure 9b). In this way he displays his (distal) availability for P to move to the service point at the counter. However, as P walks toward the counter, L shifts his gaze to the computer on his left (figure 9c). The computer display shows the opening screen to the library's online catalog with elementary directions on how to perform a search. It is unlikely that he is reading the screen since he would be very familiar with its contents. His shift of gaze to the monitor allows him to withdraw gaze from P until she arrives at the counter. His re-direction of gaze at this point serves as a display of proximal availability. This action, along with his opening of his mouth to speak, signals to P that he is ready to engage in talk (figure 9d). The exchange of greetings ratifies the state of interaction (lines 8-9, figures 9e-f). Thus, L employs gaze placement to accomplish two types of displays of availability and effect a transition from one service encounter to another.

Mutual Approach: In all the cases examined thus far, the librarian is at the service point when the patron approaches the reference desk. In the following example, the librarian is standing approximately six feet back from the reference counter when the patron approaches the desk. Both interactants act to close the distance between them in order to create a space appropriate for the reference transaction and thereby accomplish a mutual approach.

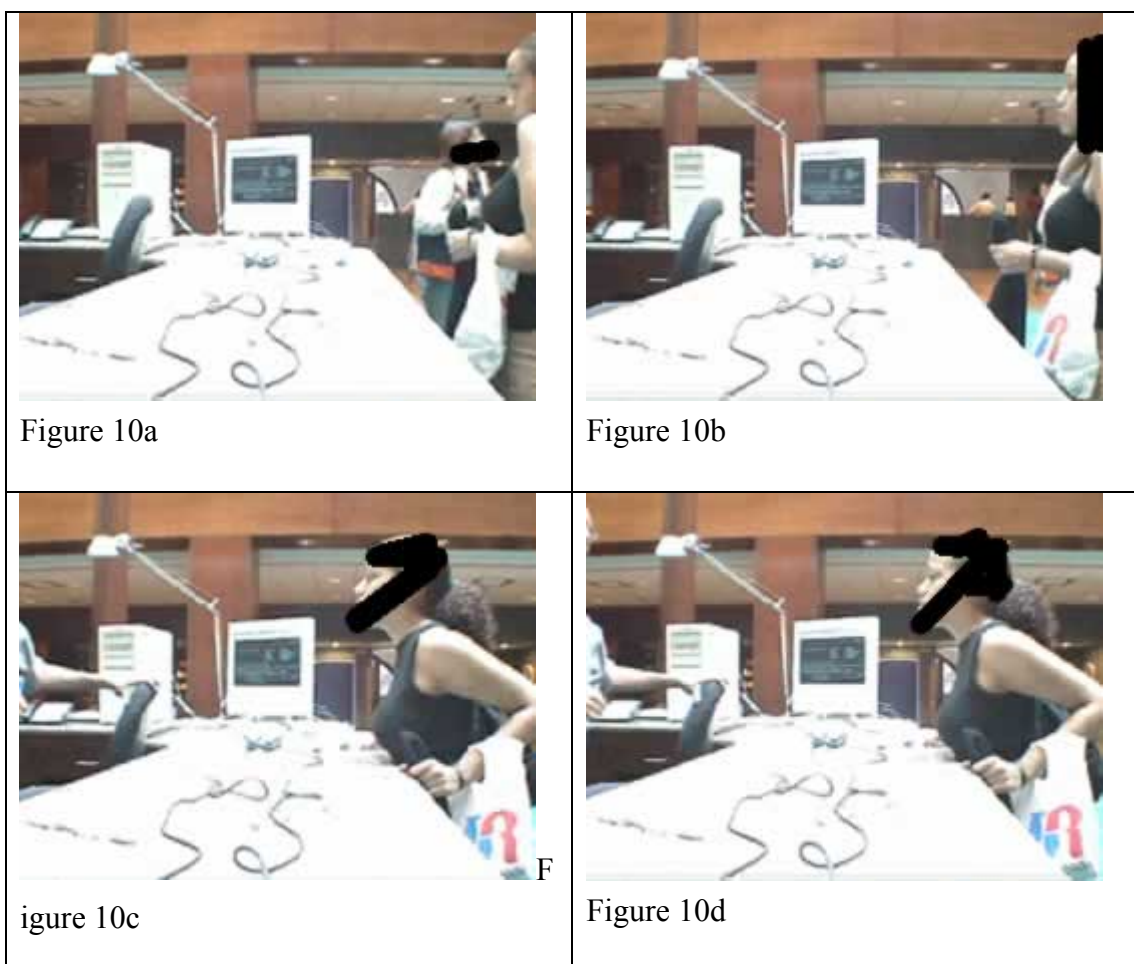


Figure 10. Computer Lab

(5) Computer Lab

- 1 P: ((Walks up to counter from side, turns and looks toward L who is several
- 2 feet back off camera.)) (figure 10a)
- 3 L: Yeah. (figure 10b)
- 4 (0.4)/((L walks toward counter while P opens mouth and leans into
- 5 counter)) (figure 10c)
- 6 P: U:m where's the com<sup>↑</sup>puter lab<sub>↓</sub> (figure 10d)

P arrives at the counter while L is still behind the desk outside the range of the camera (lines 1-2, figure 10a). L displays his availability to P vocally (line 3) since he is not at the service point (figure 10b). As L moves closer to the counter, P leans forward into the counter, which reduces the space between the two interactants (lines 4-5, figure 10c). L arrives at the service point and P's forward lean has established sufficient

proximity at this point to support talk, therefore, P begins her request (line 6, figure 10d).

Throughout the preceding sections of this chapter I have referred to actions that librarians employ as displays of availability to patrons. In each case a librarian performs a display of availability in anticipation of a patron's possible approach to the desk or in response to a patron's approach. In the next section I examine how librarians accomplish the embodied action of doing being available to patrons and the different types of displays of availability apparent in the data.

### How Librarians Display Availability

In the reference interactions analyzed for this study, before either participant initiates talk, the librarian employs gaze placement and body action to show ready availability to a possible patron. Two types of availability display are present in the data corpus: (1) distal availability – whereby a librarian displays to a potential patron that he or she is available to approach; (2) proximal availability – whereby a librarian displays to a patron who has arrived at the desk that he or she is available to begin a speech exchange. In this section I describe how librarians display both forms of availability, as well as how patrons orient to the librarian's action(s) as doing being available by immediately initiating talk. The following case is one example.



Figure 11a



Figure 11b

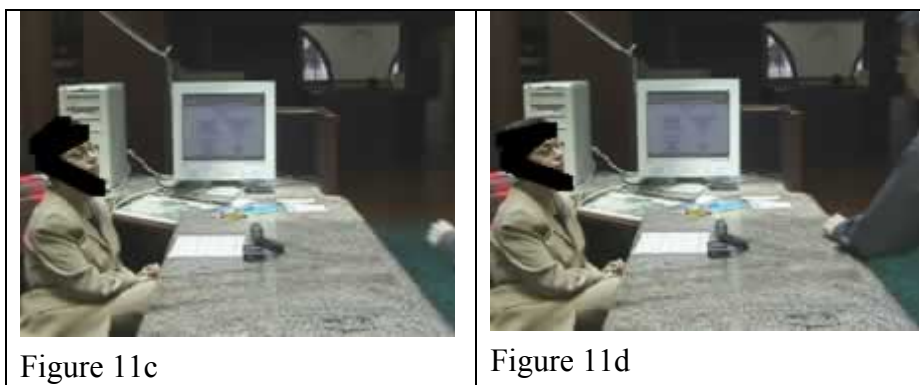


Figure 11. Compustat

(6) Compustat

- 1 L: ((Seated at desk facing in direction of camera)) (figure 11a)
- 2 L: ((Turns left in direction of P who is walking toward desk)) (figure 11b)
- 3 L: ((L turns head to follow P as he approaches desk, but directs
- 4 gaze slightly downward)) (figure 11c)
- 5 L: ((L completes head turn and raises gaze directly at P)) (figure 11d)
- 6 P: ((arrives at desk)) Compustat available for use<sub>i</sub>

L is seated at the desk facing the right side (figure 11a), then she turns in the direction of P, who is approaching from across the room (figure 11b). At this point P is at least 30 feet from the desk, which is too far for L to be certain that P's approach is preliminary to the initiation of a reference transaction. P is only a potential patron for he may simply pass by the desk en route to another destination. Consequently, it may be premature for L to establish mutual gaze when a reference interaction may not be part of P's agenda. By turning toward P with a slightly lowered gaze L can monitor his approach while her shift in body position physically orients her toward P as a *distal* display of availability that provides warrant for progressing with an incipient interaction (cf. Kendon, 1967). In addition, she does "being available" to P by maintaining a seated position at the desk that displays her lack of involvement in any activity that would preclude engagement in an interaction with him. Once P is close enough to the desk for him to partially enter into the camera view (figure 11c), L raises her gaze to P, showing

that he has her attention and thereby making a *proximal* display of availability to engage in interaction with P. As C. Goodwin (1980) observed, speakers routinely await the gaze of a recipient before proceeding to speak, because the recipient's placement of gaze displays "hearsership". Thus, interactants use the achievement of mutual gaze to ratify co-participation. In this case, once mutual gaze (figure 11d) demonstrates that mutual engagement has been achieved, P initiates talk ("Compustat available for use<sub>6</sub>").

Two of the earlier examples that were discussed in terms of the management of the patron's approach also demonstrate the use of gaze to display availability, so they will be re-examined here. The first case is extract (7) accompanied by figure (12).

(7) Call Number Directory

- 1 ((P approaches front of desk from side sharing gaze with L briefly (figure 12a).
- 2 L swivels chair toward patron as she approaches, but mutual gaze is blocked by
- 3 PC monitor (figure 12b). As P comes into view she gazes downward at paper
- 4 in her hand. As P looks up L looks ahead (figures 12c-d). P moves toward L with
- 5 extended hand holding paper. It is not until P is almost at the front position that
- 6 their gaze meets. (figure 12e)))
- 7→ P: Do you by any chance have a diagram of what (.) call numbers are on
- 8 what floors in stacks.=
- 9 L: =If you have good eyes (.) yes. ((Gives patron handout))



Figure 12a



Figure 12b



Figure 12c





Figure 12. Call Number Directory

As P approaches the desk from the side, L and P share a momentary visual exchange (figure 12a), which advances the interaction by "ritually establishing an avowed openness to verbal statements and a rightfully heightened mutual relevance of acts" (Goffman, 1963, p. 89). Having opened an incipient state of interaction through brief visual monitoring from a long distance apart, L and P do not engage in talk or mutual gaze (figures 12b-d) until P arrives at the front desk. At that point L turns to P and they sustain gaze for the first time. P treats L's establishment of mutual gaze as a display of availability to engage in interaction by immediately initiating talk (figure 12e and line 7).

Similarly, in extract (8) and figure (13) (which repeats figure 6), the patron responds to the librarian's establishment of eye gaze and body positioning as a sufficient display of availability to interact by immediately initiating talk (figure 13c).

(8) Norton Anthology

- 1 P: ((Observes P walking around the side of the counter.)) (figure 10a)
- 2 L: ((Turns forward while P behind PC CPU)
- 3 P: ((Gazes at L while L faces forward)) (figure 10b)
- 4 P: ((Turns corner with gaze at L while L faces forward)) (figure 10c)
- 5 P: ((Reaches front of desk with gaze at L)) (figure 10d)
- 6 L: ((Turns slightly toward P)) (figure 10e)=
- 7 P: =How are you sir. .hh [Uh ] ((reaches front of desk)) I'm having trouble=
- 8 L: [Hi: ]/((single nod))
- 9 P: = locating this book ((pointing to paper)) call number. ((taps on paper))=



- 10 L: =F[or which book.  
 11 P: [I don't think,

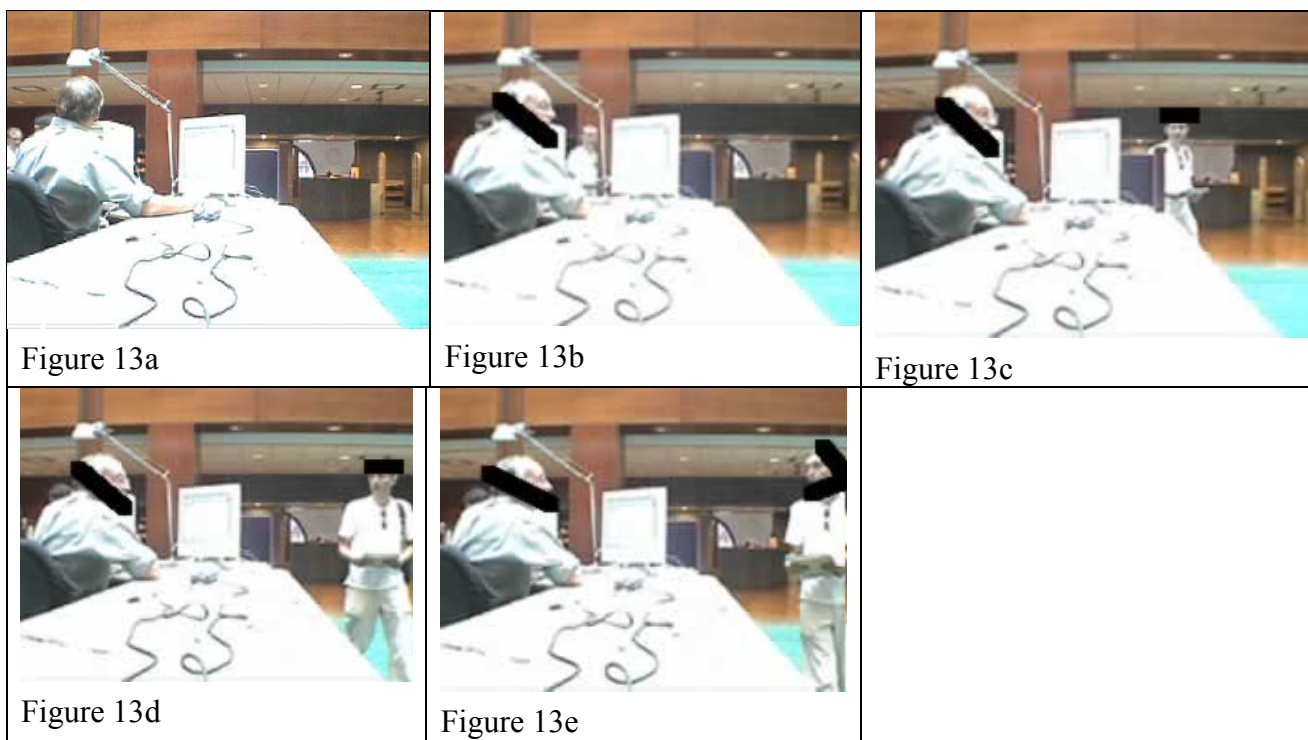


Figure 13. Norton Anthology (extended)

L observes P while he is at the side rear of the reference desk (figure 13a), but P does not reciprocate gaze. L turns to face forward as P passes behind the computer CPU on the desk. When P emerges from behind the obstruction, he is directing his gaze toward L, who is now looking straight ahead or in position for where a possible reference service interaction would be conducted (figure 13b). P continues to direct his gaze toward L as he turns the corner to the front of the desk, while L is still placing his gaze forward. L begins to turn his head toward P as he nears the position in front of him at the desk (figure 13d). Just as P turns his head sufficiently to achieve mutual gaze with P (figure 13e), P initiates talk ("How are you sir.").

The next extract (9) provides evidence that the establishment of mutual gaze is sufficient to serve as a display of availability from the librarian, even in a case in which

the librarian is not available to engage in an interaction with an approaching prospective patron. Here L speaks first to delay a display of availability to a patron who is next in line for service.

(9) Vendor Print

1 P walks around the desk from the side. P's eye gaze is directed at L,  
 2 who is assisting another user (X), as P passes L from side. P redirects gaze at U  
 3 as she reaches the front of the desk.  
 4 L: Point fo:ur,  
 5 X: Twenty? four.  
 6 L: <Four (.) point four (.) dot four./((as swivels head from X to PC gaze  
 7 meets P, standing a foot back from the front of the desk)) (figure 14)  
 8→ X: Mm hm/((P moves closer to desk)).=  
 9⇒ L: =Be right with you [okay? ((to P:))  
 10 P: [I printed out,  
 11 L: I'll be right with you ((motions finger toward P))/<just let me,>  
 12 (0.3)/((L and P share gaze))  
 13 (0.7)/((L turns to monitor while P looks down))  
 14 L: U::m (0.4) e:m  
 15 (0.6)  
 16 X: Mm hm.  
 17 L: Five two three,  
 18 X: Five two three,  
 19 L: Eight four three.  
 20 (0.3)  
 21 X: >Eight four three.<  
 22 L: Okay?  
 23 X: Mm hm.  
 24 L: And the books are arranged by letter and number and that book [uh is at=  
 25 X: [((moves  
 26 down counter closer to call number map held by L and bumps into P))  
 27 L: =[aitch eff so aitch effs would be/((P turns and steps back from counter))=  
 28 X: [Sorry/((turning to P))  
 29 L: =on the (.) fourth fl↑oor.  
 30 X: Okay.  
 31 L: You can take the elevator in the back to four if you [like  
 32 X: [Tha:nk you=  
 33 L: Okay good luck. ((redirects gaze to P))  
 34 (0.8)/((P approaches counter while gazing downward))  
 35 P: [I prin]ted out=I printed=I want to print it ou:- you know my=  
 36 L: [Hi: ]  
 37 P: =job my registration,



Figure 14. Vendor Print

L is in the process of assisting a patron (X), who is standing directly in front of him at the desk. As P approaches the desk from around the left side, she directs her gaze at L. L is dictating a call number from the computer screen, which is located on the same side as P's approach. He alternates looking at the computer and turning toward X while X writes down the call number that L is reading in segments. At one point (line 6) when L turns to the computer, his gaze meets that of P (figure 14), who moves up to the desk. L treats P's close approach to the desk as a means of securing his attention that makes relevant a display of availability, or in this case *unavailability*. L responds to P's approach by placing the incipient interaction with P "on hold" (cf. Hopper, 1992, pp. 202-207). The absence of talk, bodily co-orientation and mutual gaze between L and X at the moment that P approached the desk could have suggested to P the opening of an opportunity to engage in an interaction with L. She reaches the desk just after L has read a call number segment to X. X is looking downward while she writes and L is turned from X to face the monitor. Nonetheless, P's approach to the desk intrudes on the interaction in progress and the three parties at the reference desk must manage this intrusion. There is sequential business on the floor, as L and X have not yet completed their "dictation-read back" sequence involving the call number. L alerts X that more is to

follow by ending that segment with continuing intonation (line 4) and X initiates a repair sequence around her understanding of it (line 5). Thus, L is faced with simultaneous constraints to respond to two separate pieces of sequential business, namely responding to the approach to the counter by P and completing the dictation of the call number to X. L elects to place P "on hold" by indicating his unavailability to assist her at that moment (line 9). He incorporates into the postponement a move for explicit acquiescence ("okay?"). P does not display alignment to the revised interactional agenda. P continues to speak to L, who restates his unavailability, making clear that he is repeating his prior action by using a similar formulation (line 11). However, this time the response is not constructed as seeking approval from P. Instead, L reports that he will attend to P soon and then issues a polite command to P ("just let me"), which although unfinished, presumably relates to his continuing to assist X. L utters "just" with his index finger raised from the counter and pointed toward P. This gesture adds emphasis to the utterance by visually underscoring that it is directed specifically to P. L and P disengage from co-orientation as he turns toward the monitor and she looks downward. L proceeds with reading to X the next segment of the call number (line 14). Once the call number dictation sequence is completed, X moves closer to L to read from a call number chart that he is annotating to help her locate the book in the stacks (lines 25 and 26). As X moves down the counter she bumps into P and turns to offer an apology. P responds by backing away from the desk. When the transaction between L and X ends, L and P reinitiate their interaction. L displays his availability to P by shifting his gaze toward her (line 33). P approaches the desk again (line 34) and L responds with a greeting that is produced in overlap with L's reissue of her prior opening turn (lines 35 and 36). Thus, in

this single case there are two instances in which mutual gaze is sufficient for the initiation of talk once the patron is in close proximity to the librarian at the desk.

Throughout the data the most common means by which librarians accomplish a display of availability is through the placement of gaze and body positioning. In the additional examples that follow, once the librarian, who is at the front of the desk facing forward, fixes gaze on the patron (single arrowed lines), the patron responds by initiating talk (double arrowed lines).

#### (10) Computer Book

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from side and as she passes into view from behind  
2→ the PC at the desk, establishes mutual gaze with L))  
3⇒ He:llo, ((Walking around corner of desk))

#### (11) East Village

- 1 L: ((Sitting at desk while facing forward. Turns to right and gazes toward  
2→ P who is approaching the desk off camera))  
3⇒ P: Hel[lo ] how are you=  
4 L: [Hi]  
5 L: =I'm good how are you.

#### (12) Internet Access

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from direction ahead but slightly left of L))  
2→ L: ((Quickly looks up toward P, narrows eyes and makes a closed  
3 mouth smile))  
4⇒ P: Hi, how are you:.

#### (13) Number Systems

- 1 P: ((Waiting at side of desk while previous patron X is assisted))  
2 X: ((Walks away from desk))  
3 L: ((Turns facing left))  
4 P: ((Moves to position in front of L who is still facing away))  
5 L: ((Turns facing forward toward P))  
6 P: Hi ((L is facing away from P?))  
7→ (1.0)/L turns to P  
8⇒ P: .hh I'm looking for some books on different number systems,

#### (14) On Reserve

- 1→ L: ((Reading from PC screen, then turns to front as P nears desk))=  
2⇒ P: =Hi=  
3 L: =Hi./((P moves closer))

While most initiations of talk in the data corpus are accomplished through the establishment of mutual gaze, the following case illustrates that a librarian may enact a display of availability solely through talk.

(15) Business Quotation

- 1 ((P is waiting in line at desk off camera while L assists X))
- 2 L: Oka:y?
- 3 X: Thank you very [much.
- 4 L: [You're welcome
- 5 (1.5)/((X steps away from desk while L looks down at counter
- 6 and writes))
- 7 L: ((Gazing down at counter while writing)) Hi <can I help? you.>
- 8 P: ((approaching)) Ye:a:h u:m/((at desk/L looks up))<I hope. ((smiles))
- 9 (.)/(mutual eye gaze))
- 10 L: Yeah./((nod))
- 11 P: I:m looking for: <I'm writing a paper about (.) in<sup>↑</sup>vesting.
- 12 L: ((nod))

P approaches the area of the reference desk while L is assisting another patron (X). P waits behind X outside the view of the camera. A review of the entire recorded transaction involving X shows that L directs sustained gaze only on X, the computer monitor and the desk, but not P. Once L's interaction with X is completed, L shifts gaze from X to the counter without looking at P, yet he proceeds to direct talk to P without looking up. P does not orient to the greeting term that opens L's turn as doing the work of a greeting, as he does not reciprocate. P treats L's utterance as a display of availability and readiness to provide assistance by moving toward the counter in front of L. Moreover, by opening talk with "Hi <can I help? you.>," the librarian shows that he treats the approach not simply as initiating an interaction, but initiating one based specifically on seeking assistance.

#### Availability Display as a Response to an Approach

Approach-availability display sequences are similar to summons-answer sequences in that they serve to secure attention and align reciprocity as a means of initiating an interaction (cf. Schegloff, 2002, p. 289). While availability-display and summons-answer sequences accomplish similar actions in the opening of an interaction, they involve distinct practices. In the first set of extracts below (16-20) the librarians respond to a patron's approach with a simple affirmation token that establishes their availability and readiness to engage in an interaction (arrowed lines).

(16) Birth Year

- 1 P: ((Walks toward the desk from side where library entrance is located))  
 2→ L: ((establishes mutual gaze with P))/Ye:s  
 3 (0.2)/((P shifts gaze downward as walking closer to desk))  
 4 P: I would like to know how will you search for newspapers/((returns gaze  
 5 to L)) or ad- ((snort)) articles from nineteen seventy eight;

(17) Computer Lab

- 1 P: ((Walks up to counter from side and makes eye contact with L as passing  
 2 in view from behind PC on the desk))  
 3→ L: Yeah.  
 4 (0.4)/((L walks to counter while P leans into counter))

(18) Literacy

- 1 L: ((Looks out toward P as P approaches the desk from directly ahead))  
 2 P: H[i:  
 3→ L: [Yes.  
 4 P: .hhh/((L leans forward)) Um I was: ((stops at desk))

(19) Microfilm

- 1 L: ((Gazes toward P with half smile as P approaches the desk))  
 2 P: I ne[eed to use the mi↑crofilm. ((arrives at desk))  
 3→ L: [Yes  
 4 (0.4)/((P walks closer to L leaning forward to place bag down  
 5 while maintaining gaze at L))

(20) State Web Pages

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk))  
 2 L: ((Looks up from writing toward P, then stops writing and smiles))  
 3→ L: Yes::.  
 4 (1.0)/P approaching desk  
 5 P: °Hhi°

6 (1.0) ((P arrives at desk and leans onto it toward L))

In extracts (16) through (20) once L and P establish mutual gaze, L issues a turn consisting solely of token "Yes" or "Yeah" (arrowed lines), which are institutionally marked as responding to summons (Schegloff, 1986). As Schegloff (1979, 2002) observed with regard to opening turns in telephone conversations, these turns are the first utterances in their respective interactions, but they are not the first contributions to those interactions. "Yes" and "Yeah" are responsive to the patron's approach to the desk, which serves to secure the attention of the librarian. In three cases for which the patron is in camera view while approaching the desk there are specific circumstances that support the interpretation of the use of "Yes/Yeah" as a display of availability. In extract (17) L is standing near the rear of the desk with another library staff member as P approaches. P could have inferred that L was occupied with other business and therefore unavailable. In (18) L is at the desk speaking with another staff member as P approaches. In (20) L is facing downward at the counter writing when P approaches the desk. In each of these cases, L is involved in an activity that could be regarded by P as barring engagement in an interaction, but L's utterance of "Yes" to P signals readiness and availability.

There is further evidence in the data for considering the patron's approach to the desk as the first-pair part of an approach-availability sequence. C. Goodwin (1980, p. 281) notes that the characterization of coordinated actions as a summons-answer sequence may be justified by reference to the concept of conditional relevance. Basically, conditional relevance refers to the relationship between sequential items such that the occurrence of a first item, such as a summons, makes the occurrence of the second item expectable (Schegloff, 1968, p. 1084). In addition, the participants may



orient to the absence of the expected second (e.g., the answer) as a noticeable event. As long as the sequence is not completed, the first pair part may be repeated. If a patron's approach makes a display of availability from a librarian conditionally relevant, we would expect that a librarian's failure to provide this response to a patron after an approach to the desk has been completed will lead to the production of another attention-seeking action. In addition, the patron will cease such action(s) when a display of availability is produced by the librarian.

In the data when a patron's approach to the reference desk fails to secure a display of availability in the form of gaze direction or talk, the patron issues a new attention-seeking action. In some cases a patron may approach the reference desk without being observed by the librarian. Consequently, the approach does not succeed at yielding a display of availability and the patron employs another means of securing the librarian's attention. In the next example (extract 21) the librarian is turned toward the rear of the reference area when the patron walks up to the desk (figure 15a). L remains facing the opposite direction after P has reached the position directly in front of him. Faced with the problem of securing L's attention, P raises his arm to adjust his cap. This motion and the concomitant rustling noise produced by the fabric of his coat, draw the attention of L who responds by quickly turning forward to face P (figure 15b) and offering the first turn at talk. The patron thereby makes himself auditorially noticeable to the librarian after making himself visually noticeable failed to result in a noticing. P's movement of his arm up to his cap is coordinated with the raising of his gaze from the floor to L. Thus, when L responds by turning to face front, they establish mutual gaze for the first time, which contributes to their achievement of co-orientation.

## (21) Syllabus

- 1 P: ((Approaches the reference desk from directly in front of L, whose head is  
 2 turned facing behind, so that P appears to arrive unnoticed by L))  
 3 (0.8)/((P waits while L looks in opposite direction)) (figure 15a)  
 4 P: ((Raises arm to head to adjust cap making a rustling sound with coat))  
 5 L: ((turns forward quickly)) Hi: <can I he:lp? you.> (figure 15b)  
 6 P: This may be completely out of your jurisdiction (.) .hh but do you  
 7 happen to kno:w ho:w to find out (0.2) how (0.2) uh what books:  
 8 (0.2) we need for our upcoming classes;



Figure 15a

Figure 15b

Figure 15. Syllabus

Extract (22) and figure (16), present a case in which the patron employs another procedure for securing a librarian's gaze when her physical approach to the desk has not done so.

## (22) Cliff Notes

- 1 P: ((walks up to counter while reading from a slip of paper)) (figure 16a)  
 2 P: Mm u:h where can I find the Cliff Note.  
 3 L: (( X\_ gaze to P)) (figure 16b)  
 4 L: We don't carry Cliff Notes.

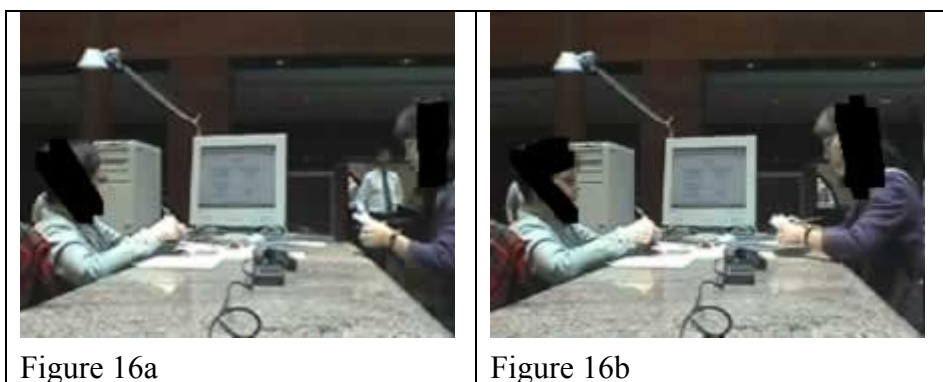


Figure 16a

Figure 16b

Figure 16. Cliff Notes

When P arrives at the desk, L is looking away (figure 16a). P begins to speak, but

delays the production of the turn (line 2) until L redirects gaze at her. L shifts her gaze to P during the utterance of the slightly lengthened "uh" (lines 2 and 3; figure 16b). C. Goodwin (1980) demonstrated that such a noticeable perturbation in the stream of speech at the beginning of a turn signals to a recipient that the attention of a hearer displayed via gaze is required. He also noted that this coordination of action between speaker and hearer constitute a type of summons-answer sequence. Thus, in extract 22, as in extract 21, the noticeable absence of an answer to attention-securing action of the patron's approach to the desk leads to a repeat of the action, produced differently. In each case, the patron delays the production of the first turn at talk until the co-participation of a hearer, displayed via gaze direction, is achieved.

#### Achieving an Institutionally Constrained Focus of Talk

In openings to reference desk transactions, the interlocutors jointly pursue a line of action that first establishes co-orientation and ratifies their state of mutual participation, while achieving the relative proximity and position at the desk that is necessary for them to conduct business. Furthermore, through the management of action formation in the opening sequence, the interlocutors display a concern for advancing quickly to an assistance position, that is, a turn in which patrons consistently issue a request for assistance. As Zimmerman and Whalen (1987, p. 175) noted with respect to emergency service calls, the reduction of the opening sequence "plays an important role in achieving an institutionally constrained focus to the talk, for it routinely locates the *first topic slot* to the callers in their first turn, which is the second turn of the call" (emphasis in original). In reference desk transactions the interlocutors' concern for advancing the line of action to providing the patron with a sequential position in which

requesting is done is exhibited most clearly in their design and use of greeting sequences. While greeting terms are common in openings to reference interactions, they are not always present. What do patrons use greetings to accomplish in the openings of reference transactions? The data show that patrons initiate greetings systematically to establish and sustain interactional engagement during their approach to the reference desk. When patrons initiate talk in reference interactions it is either with a request or with a greeting term. Patrons only open with a greeting term while making their approach to the reference desk, as illustrated in the following example.

(23) AOL

- 1                    ((P is walking toward desk. L widens eyes, makes closed-mouth smile))
- 2        P:        Hello. ((off camera as approaching desk))
- 3                    (.)/(L gazes at P while he approaches)
- 4        L:        Hi:.
- 5                    (.)/(L redirects gaze to papers in P's extended hand then back to P))
- 6        P:        ((at desk)) I need to use aiy oh el

The interaction opens with P approaching the reference desk from off camera more than twelve feet from the desk and from the direction in front of the librarian. L displays that she is attending to his approach as possibly initiating an interaction by looking toward him with widened eyes and a broad, yet closed-mouth smile (line 1). P ratifies the start of the interaction with "Hello" (line 2). L responds by engaging P as a co-interactant through gaze placement (line 3) and a reciprocal greeting (line 4). By offering the greeting, P is able to initiate talk at a distance from the librarian that would not yet allow for conducting a substantive reference transaction. The greeting exchange serves to confirm for the interlocutors that they are co-participating in an interaction, even though the business of the interaction must be postponed until they achieve suitable position and proximity.



- 1 L: ((Sitting at desk while facing forward. Turns to right and gazes toward  
 2 P who is approaching the desk off camera))  
 3→ P: Hel[lo ] how are you=  
 4 L: [Hi]  
 5 L: =I'm good how are you.  
 6=> P: ((reaches desk then looks downward)) Good/((looks through bag

## (26) AOL

- 1 L: ((Seated at desk.))  
 2 ((L widens eyes and makes closed-mouth smile while P approaches))  
 3→ P: Hello. ((off camera as approaching desk))  
 4 (.)/(P gazes at P while he approaches))  
 5 L: Hi.  
 6 (.)/(L redirects gaze to papers in P's extended hand then back to P))  
 7=> P: ((on camera at desk)) I need to use aiy oh el

## (27) Computer Book

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from side and as she passes into view from behind  
 2 the PC at the desk, establishes mutual gaze with L))  
 3→ He:llo, ((Walking around corner of desk))  
 4 (.)  
 5 L: [Hi.]  
 6 P: [Let] me ask you something  
 7 (0.2)  
 8 L: Yes.  
 9=> P: ((Reaches counter and leans on it)) You know which floo:r, ((looks  
 10 and points upward)) (.) I look fo ru"h (.) computers book.

## (28) On Reserve

- 1 L: ((Reading from PC screen, then turns to front as P nears desk))=  
 2→ P: =Hi=  
 3=> L: =Hi./((P arrives at desk))  
 4 P: ((Turns body toward L)) If it says an item is one reserve (0.4) how-what  
 5 does (.) that mean exactly.

When patrons take the first turn at talk they issue a request if they have terminated their approach to the desk (e.g., extract 22). However, as extracts (23-28) show, patrons will employ a greeting as a first turn at talk to maintain an interaction while they achieve the proximity and position that are necessary to proceed with a request and the subsequent joint tasks that a reference transaction involves.

The use of greetings by librarians also displays a concern for advancing to a turn

that a patron may use to serve up a request. When librarians initiate talk with a greeting, they generally design the turn so as to incorporate the solicitation of a request. As a result, the librarians' turns make sequentially relevant from the patron a request in the subsequent turn rather than a greeting response.

(29) Syllabus

- 1→ L: ((turns forward quickly)) Hi: <can I he:lp? you.>  
 2⇒ P: This may be completely out of your jurisidction (.) .hh but do you  
 3 happen to kno:w ho:w to find out (0.2) how (0.2) uh what books:  
 4 (0.2) we need for our upcoming classes;

(30) Executive Summary

- 1→ L: Hi. (.) wuh'c'n I do [for yu:h.  
 2 Y: [(inaudible) ((staff member waving P to L))  
 3 (0.6) ((P moves to position directly in front of l))  
 4⇒ P: Ye:a:h I'm try:nuh find some- a- a book about business  
 5 communications;

In both cases the librarian initiates talk with a single turn composed of a greeting + solicit that designedly accomplishes multiple tasks (single arrowed lines). There are two organizational consequences to this formulation. First, the interlocking of the greeting with the solicit shortens the length of the opening sequence by a turn (cf. Schegloff, 1986). Second, the solicit makes relevant a requesting action from the patron in the next turn (double arrowed lines). Thus, the reduction of the opening via the interlock forwards the action specifically to a request. In this manner, the librarian displays a clear orientation to providing service as well as an orientation to the patron's interest in initiating the interaction in order to receive assistance. These two motivated concerns for proceeding to the assistance position shape the trajectory of the action. The reduction of the opening via the librarian's greeting + solicit formulation places the organizational slot for making a request in the patron's first turn at talk. Through this turn design, the librarian sets the agenda for the interaction as the business of a service

transaction.

In the few cases in which librarians open the interaction with a stand-alone greeting term, they still systematically reduce the opening sequence in such a way as to provide the patron with a position in which to make a request. In extract (31) L initiates talk with a minimal greeting (line 4) that is followed in the next turn by a minimal reciprocal greeting from P (line 5). P does not design the turn to hold the floor or build a continuation. L does not self-select as next speaker. Consequently, there is a momentary gap as P completes her approach to the desk (line 6). L's withholding of talk provides P with a slot in which to make a request, which she uses once she reaches the position in front of L at the desk (line 7).

(31) ACT Exam

- 1 ((P is speaking with staff member X who is walking away as P approaches.))
- 2 L: month, ((turns slightly and fixes gaze on P approaching off camera))
- 3 (2.0)/((X looks at L then P, then turns and walks away from desk))
- 4 L: Hi:: ((while leaning forward toward P))
- 5 P: Hi.
- 6 (.)/(P arrives at desk, but continues toward counter)
- 7 P: ((gazing downward)) U:m (at counter) I wanted to know ((gaze at L))
- 8 that (0.2)/((sideward gaze at camera)) if you have like any ((gaze at L))
- 9 ACT,
- 10 (0.4)

One way in which a patron can reach the organizational slot in which to make a request is by being the recipient of a second greeting, which can be achieved by initiating the first greeting. When a librarian supplies a stand-alone greeting as the first turn at talk, the natural alternation of turns in the opening will not result in the patron having the slot after a greeting sequence (cf. Schegloff, 1986). Extract (31) shows that the interlocutors may display attention to the development of a line of action that allows the patron to receive the assistance slot and jointly accomplish this organizational outcome by enabling



the passing of L's turn after a greeting sequence that L initiated.

The next case (extract 32) appears to offer a counter example to the organization for greetings proposed above, for it is the only case in which the librarian issues a greeting term that is designed to be receipted as a greeting (line 3). However, unlike the other cases in this corpus, here the interlocutors are acquainted. The cheerfulness in L's production is one indication of their prior relationship, but their sharing of vacation plans (lines 31-39) gives the clearest indication. After P supplies a return greeting to L (line 4), she makes what could be heard as a complaint by noting that she has not had to wait, which is presumably unlike prior occasions since it merits reporting (line 6). P delivers this as an aside by rushing its production and issuing it on her way to the desk. L orients to the utterance as such by not pursuing it as a topic of discussion. P proceeds to making her request (line 7) without the type of extended greeting (e.g., "how are you") that might follow in casual conversation. It is not until the business of the interaction is well underway that P inquires about L's vacation plans. By withholding non-business related talk, P and L show the primacy they assign to the making of the request soon after mutual orientation and the patron's arrival at the desk are achieved.

(32) Marketing in Asia

- 1 ((P is looking upward to the left, then turns forward toward L as she approaches
- 2 from directly in front of desk.))
- 3 L: ↑Hi: ((while P is off camera walking toward L))
- 4 P: Hi: ((while off camera walking toward L))
- 5 (0.4)/((L looks toward P as she approaches desk))
- 6 P: (Excuse me) (heh) (<I didn't get to wait.>) ((at desk))
- 7 .hhh [u:m/((moves to position in front of L))/u:m (.)
- 8 L: [((single nod))
- 9 P: =I'm looking for a book o:n marketing in A:sia.
- 10 (0.2)/((L turns to PC and takes mouse))
- ((continues))
- 25 L: Marketing in ↑in Asia.
- 26 P: Yeah. or to Asia uh not quite sure (.) Marketing in Asia.

- 27 L: ((while typing)) In: let's try in.=  
 28 P: [Mm  
 29 L: [Ah (I need) ((while typing))  
 30 2.2/((L types))  
 31→ P: Have you had your summer vacation yet [or are you  
 32 L: ((reading screen)) [Oh a little bit.  
 33 P: [You gonna travel or are you stay[ing home.  
 34 L: [ ((while typing)) [Hm no I (.) I (.) stayed around here.  
 35 P: Right that's nice [too  
 36 L: [How about you.  
 37 P: I::m gonna go see my parent- or my dad for a week here in August  
 38 so that'll be nice.  
 39 L: °Hm good°  
 40 (0.9)  
 41 L: Let's see uh ((turning to side))

### Discussion

In the few seconds that comprise the opening of a reference desk interaction, patrons and librarians jointly accomplish a great deal of interactional work, such as achieving a mutually ratified state of interaction and establishing a spatial arrangement that is suitable to support the transaction of reference business. The organization of the opening consists minimally of an approach-availability display sequence followed by a request (e.g., extract 6). The organization of the opening is "reduced" as compared with the canonical opening of a telephone conversation. The co-interactants accomplish this reduction in several ways. First, the elimination of a recognition-identification sequence is made possible through pre-beginning activities that align the institutional roles of librarian (as service provider) and patron (as service requester) (cf. Zimmerman & Whalen, 1987). In face-to-face library service encounters, categorical identification is generally not a relevant interactional task. Reference desks are visually identified as service points through signage, location, and a standard recognizable service counter design. With respect to the site of the data collection, all three apply. The reference desk

is prominently labeled; it is located directly in the path of users as they enter the library and it is placed out in the open with a service counter (see chapter four, figure 1). These features set expectations about the nature of the interaction that will occur at the desk. Thus, a patron approaches the desk having selected a service point for initiating an interaction and a librarian takes the stance of an institutional representative responding to an initiating move from an interlocutor who presumably seeks to make a request.

The patron's approach to the desk and the librarian's responding display of availability constitute an adjacency pair. Librarians may perform two types of display of availability in response to a patron's approach. They display distal availability to a potential patron to signal availability for an approach, and/or proximal availability to show readiness to begin a speech exchange with a patron who has reached the service point at the desk. Librarians manage their placement of gaze during a patron's approach to establish mutual gaze just in time to begin a vocal interaction at the desk.

The ratification of the state of talk that a greeting exchange usually achieves in a conversational telephone call or a face-to-face social encounter may be accomplished instead in a patron's request (cf. Zimmerman and Whalen, 1987). Nonetheless, the data demonstrate that patrons systematically deploy greetings to sustain an engagement with the librarian that has been initiated at a distance from the reference desk until the patron's approach is completed. Zimmerman (1992, p. 435) noted that the reduction of the opening sequence in service calls displays the participants' concern to get on with the reason for the call, promoting the institutional agenda at an early point in the call's opening. Similarly, the openings to reference interactions prepare for requests sometimes by projecting them in next turn (as in the case of a greeting + solicit construction), but

usually by passing a turn to the patron in which the making of a request is treated as expected and unaccountable. As presented above, when librarians initiate talk with a stand-alone greeting term, they systematically reduce the opening sequence in such a way as to provide the patron with an early possible slot for making a request by withholding talk after the patron issues a second greeting. In the following chapter I show how patrons design their turns in this organizational position to be understood and acted upon by librarians as requests.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A PRACTICE FOR MAKING A REQUEST AT THE REFERENCE DESK

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter we observed how patrons and librarians jointly manage the opening sequence of reference desk interactions, shaping the course of action to provide a slot in which patrons typically make requests. One of the tasks that speakers accomplish in telephone conversation openings is to provide an “anchor position” for the introduction of the first topic or reason for the interaction, which is usually supplied by the initiator of the interaction (Schegloff, 1986, p. 116). In service delivery interactions, utterances in the anchor position are hearable as presenting matters that make relevant an assisting response from the recipient (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987, 1990; Robinson, 2001). Service providers inspect this reason-for-the-interaction position or assistance slot for an action that is recognizable or interpretable as an “assistable” (Kidwell, 2001, p.23). As a result, the organization of opening sequences serves as a resource for the interlocutors in the formulation and understanding of requests in a service interaction. Nonetheless, turns in the assistance slot of a service interaction that result in an assisting response are designed to be heard as requests. Although requesting occurs massively in this sequential position, other actions may be initiated (Kidwell, 2001, pp. 31-33). Thus, when a turn is understood as making a request for assistance, it is the interlocutors’ local accomplishment.

This chapter examines the most common practice that patrons employ for making requests at the reference desk, occurring in twenty-four of the thirty-one cases in the data set. A key finding is that patrons recurrently build requests so as to impose minimally on

librarians. I examine the salient features of patrons' request turns: (1) formulating an assistable involving the completion of an activity; (2) constructing the request as actionable. The discussion concludes with an examination of how librarians display an orientation to patrons' turns as requests in their response turns.

In the data for this study it is unusual for a patron to directly solicit assistance as in the following example.

(1) T for Title

- 1 ((P waits at side of front counter until previous transaction is completed.))  
 2 L: Yeah.  
 3 → P: Yes can you,  
 4 (0.5)/((P moves into position directly in front of L extending paper to L))  
 5 → P: Can you show me hh (.) ((L looks at paper)) how to get this book.  
 6 L: °(Which one)° ((Looks at sheet of paper presented by P))  
 7 (0.8)/((L opens catalog))  
 8 L: You have to go into dee pack,  
 9 (0.2)  
 10 P: [Uh huh  
 11 L: [Up here,  
 12 (0.2)  
 13 P: Okay,  
 14 L: And the machines facing the wall over there,  
 15 P: Yes uh ho how also whasi  
 16 L: And then you just do tee for title,

In extract (1) the patron formulates a request by asking the librarian to show her how to accomplish the library-related activity of finding a book (lines 3 and 5). By issuing an inquiry about the librarian's ability to show her how to obtain a book, the patron creates a sequential environment in which the preferred response is for the librarian to do the task (cf. Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2005), not just affirm that he is capable of doing it. In this way, the turn projects the relevance of giving instructions in response. The librarian initially responds with a question designed to clarify the item sought by the patron and then examines the patron's paper to obtain his answer (line 6).

The librarian treats the request as an assistable by beginning to work on the library's online catalog (line 7), where the patron's book presumably may be found. Moreover, he formulates a response that is consistent with the type projected by the patron's design of the request. Specifically, he constructs his response as instruction giving by providing the patron with step-by-step directions on how to find the book starting with using the library catalog (line 8), followed by how to select that resource from among other online options (line 11). He continues the instructions by supplying the location of the computers to use (line 14) and what commands the patron should type (line 16). The patron displays an alignment with instruction receiving by receipting each step with a continuer (Schegloff, 1982) (lines 10, 13 and 15) that passes the next turn at talk back to the librarian to proceed with his instruction sequence.

In contrast with extract (1), in the data set patrons overwhelmingly formulate their requests as reports of circumstances that implicate the need for a library-related activity to be completed and thereby implement a request without explicitly doing requesting. This practice involves two key features of a patron's turn. (1) Patrons typically formulate their requests by presenting to the librarian an assistable involving the accomplishment of an activity or task. This makes conditionally relevant a response from the librarian in the form of providing assistance with the completion of the activity. (2) Patrons incorporate in their requests the information that a librarian may need in order to provide assistance. A librarian may withhold an assisting response until the patron supplies sufficient information regarding his or her circumstance to make the request "actionable". Additionally, when a librarian does not display recognition of a turn as a request at its point of possible completion, a patron may perform interactional work through repair, the

addition of an increment, or the production of an extended turn to obtain an assisting response.

As Robinson (2001) noted with regard to patients' formulation of requests to physicians, "[i]n both everyday and institutional contexts, reports of 'problems' set up the relevance of helping (Drew, 1984; Jefferson & Lee, 1981; Schegloff, 1988a, 1995a). In fact, members of service agencies routinely treat customers' first-topic (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) descriptions of problems as soliciting some form of remedy (Frankel, 1989a; Robinson, 2001; Zimmerman, 1984, 1992)." In everyday conversation, when speakers formulate a request as the report of a problem, they avoid making an overt request that carries the risk of being declined or ignored by the recipient (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). In their discussion of advice giving in interactions between first-time mothers and health visitors, Heritage & Sefi (1992) found that one of the ways in which a mother indirectly solicits advice is by describing an "untoward state of affairs" with respect to her newborn child. In this manner, the mother creates for the health visitor an occasion for advice giving by presenting a troublesome situation to an expert in the field who could assist with the situation. Similarly, a patron's report of an unfinished library-related activity to a professional librarian occasions a response that assists with the completion of the activity. In library service encounters, the accomplishment of requesting through this type of indirect formulation is aided by the organizational position in which a request for assistance is made conditionally relevant. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the opening sequence of a reference desk transaction provides a slot that a librarian inspects for a turn that implements a request.



### The Importance of Sequential Position in Making a Request

Throughout the data patrons accomplish the action of requesting by simply reporting to a librarian their interest or engagement in a library-related activity. The following group of examples illustrates that this formulation is hearable as a request due to its location in an organizational slot in which a request for assistance is expectable. In extract (2) the patron reports on a search for a book (single arrowed line), employing a formulation that denotes the activity as unfinished (“I’m looking for”).

#### (2) Marketing in Asia

- 1        ((P is looking upward to the left, then turns forward toward L as she approaches  
2        from directly in front of desk.))  
3        L:     ↑Hi: ((while P is off camera walking toward L))  
4        P:     Hi: ((while off camera walking toward L))  
5               (0.4)/((L looks toward P as she approaches desk))  
6        P:     (Excuse me) (heh) (<I didn't get to wait.>) ((at desk))  
7               .hhh [u:m/((moves to position in front of L))/u:m (.)  
8        L:        [((single nod))  
9 →    P:     I'm looking for a book o:n marketing in A:sia.  
10              (0.2)/((L turns to computer and takes mouse))

By using the present progressive tense of a verb, the patron reports an activity as unfinished and making an assisting response possibly relevant. The patron's report creates a sequential context in which the librarian may assist with the completion of the activity by helping with the search for the book. Nonetheless, merely reporting one's present involvement in an activity does not necessarily implicate a problem with completing it or constitute a request for assistance from the recipient. In extract (2) the report is hearable as a request due to its organizational position in the interaction, namely in the position immediately after the opening of the service interaction, where requesting is expectable.

Contrasting the request formulation in extract (2) with the following example

from a telephone conversation in a non-institutional setting will help identify the features of a patron's report that contribute to understanding it as a request for assistance. The key difference lies in the sequential position of the report of ongoing activity. In the case of the library reference encounter presented in extract (2) the report occurs after an opening that makes a request the next relevant action. The sequential position in which it occurs does substantial work in making it understandable as a request, for any utterance in this position will be inspected by the librarian as a possible request for assistance. The degree to which sequential position contributes to a turn's understanding as a request is observable in the contrast case from ordinary talk in which a similar report of unfinished activity is not hearable as doing requesting.

In extract (3) Cara and Rick exchange inquiries about what they are currently doing as a way to set the initial agenda for their telephone conversation (lines 1-12). In response to Cara's second inquiry (line 12) Rick reports that he is "jist sittin arou:nd jammin some tunes," Cara offers an assessment of Rick's activity as "fu:n" (cf. Pomerantz, 1984). Rick again proffers a topic of conversation by inquiring about what Cara and Leigh Ann ("you guys") are doing (line 21). Cara reports that they have been apartment hunting and are now cooking (line 23-24). Rick initiates a repair of his understanding of the word he hears as "punting" (line 26). Following Cara's repeat of "cooking" (line 28) he tries again with "kicking" (line 30). Cara's third repetition (line 31) leads to Rick's hearing of "cooking" (line 32), which Cara confirms (line 33). While Cara's report of her involvement in apartment hunting and cooking uses verb forms that frame them as incomplete activities, a similar formulation to that in extract (2), it is delivered in a sequential context that does not project the relevance of assistance. Also,

Rick's response displays that he does not orient to the report as constituting a request for assistance with completing either activity.

(3) [UTCL D08a, Ts--Glenn, 10/86]

Cara's friend, Leigh Anne, calls Pat, Rick's roommate. After they talk about two minutes, Leigh Anne announces that Cara wants to talk to Rick. There is a 22 second lapse before this conversation begins, during which whispering can be heard on both ends of the phone line.

- 1 Rick: eeY[EE: : E S ? hh] huh heh heh=
- 2 ( ): [(Hey Ri:ck) ]
- 3 Cara: =Ri:ck?
- 4 Rick: .hhh. He[Yeh(h)es?
- 5 Cara: [°hn° Yih quee:r [w(h)a]t're ya doin.
- 6 Rick: [.hhhh]
- 7 (0.6)
- 8 Rick: uh I dunno wut're you doin you queer bait,
- 9 eh [heh heh heh]=
- 10 Cara: [Nothing?h ]
- 11 Rick: =.eh [hhh ( . ) ] .ehh
- 12 Cara: [(s) go'n on.]
- 13 Rick: O:h u::uh jist sittin arou:nd jammin some
- 14 tunes,
- 15 Cara: Are yuh?
- 16 Rick: u-hm?
- 17 (0.8)
- 18 Cara: Hm::.
- 19 (.)
- 20 Cara: How fu:n.
- 21 Rick: What're you guys doin'.
- 22 (0.5)
- 23 Cara: Well- uh we've been looking fer:=apartments all
- 24 da:y n' now (.) we're keuking.
- 25 (0.3)
- 26 Rick: You're- (.) you're punting.
- 27 (0.5)
- 28 Cara: Keuking.
- 29 (0.5)
- 30 Rick: Kicking.
- 31 Cara: Cooking.
- 32 Rick: Cooking. [hh hh .e]hh
- 33 Cara: [Ye::s.h ]
- 34 Rick: Uh hhuh [ho °ho°
- 35 Cara: [Pumping. We'[re ]pumping. nhh uh
- 36 Rick: [eh ]
- 37 Cara: huh [huh huh

- 38 Rick: [.ehuh=  
 39 Cara: =.n:hh Huh what could that mean,  
 40 Rick: u:h I don' know uhh.  
 41 (0.5)

As with extract (2), Cara reports on her own involvement in an unfinished activity involving searching for something. However, the cases differ with respect to their formulations and their sequential environment. The patron *is* “looking for” books, while Cara and Leigh Ann *have been* “looking for” an apartment (lines 23-24). Cara’s search for an apartment is hearable as a not-yet-successful past attempt, therefore, it does provide an opportunity for Rick to assist with its successful completion. However, the library patron’s report projects the relevance of an assisting response more strongly due to its delivery in the assistance slot. The occurrence of an assistable in this sequential position makes an assisting response from the librarian conditionally relevant. While Rick may offer assistance in the apartment hunt if he is capable and inclined, the librarian is accountable for responding with an action that assists with finding the book. The conditional relevance of an assisting action derives from the immediately prior report of an assistable which implements the first pair part of request adjacency pair due to its sequential position following the opening sequence.

In extract (3) Cara also reports to Rick that she is currently engaged in cooking (line 24). Once again, a critical feature that distinguishes Cara’s report of her present, unfinished activity from those of the library patrons is the sequential context in which it occurs. Cara provides her report in response to Rick’s inquiry regarding what she is doing (line 21). This organizational position does not carry the implicit offer of service that is associated with the assistance slot of a service encounter. Cara does not formulate the action to be heard as an assistable, such as by characterizing the completion of the

activity as problematic. Also, she does not direct the report to an expert who would presumably be able to assist with the completion of the activity. Thus, the report is hearable as accomplishing the action of informing the recipient of her current activity. Consistent with this understanding, Rick's response turns do not display an orientation to the report as implicating a request for assistance with either cooking or looking for an apartment.

Additional evidence that position is key to how the report of a current or prospective activity may constitute a request is found in a later segment of the interaction that opens with extract (2).

(4) Marketing in Asia (continued)

The patron has approached the reference desk and reported to the librarian that she is looking for a book entitled "Marketing in Asia". The librarian responds by turning toward the computer on the desk and grasping the mouse.

- 1 P: .hh [and it's a professor <I think his name is ↑Koetler k-kay oh ee=
- 2 L: [Mm hm.
- 3 P: =tee el ee are,
- 4 (0.2)/((L starts to type))
- 5 P: something like that.=He's a (0.2) big (.) professor in marketing
- 6 in this area.
- 7 (2.8)/((L types))
- 8 L: In marketing,
- 9 P: Yes called Marketing in Asia.=It's [from nineteen ninety
- 10 L: [I-It's (spelled) th↑at's
- 11 what it's called?=  
12 P: =Yeah.=
- 13 L: =Okay.
- 14 (0.2)/((L types))
- 15 P: It's from nineteen ninety nine.
- 16 (0.3)/((L types))
- 17 L: Marketing in ↑in Asia.
- 18 P: Yeah. or to Asia uh not quite sure (.) Marketing in Asia.
- 19 L: ((while typing)) In: let's try in.=
- 20 P: [Mm
- 21 L: [Ah (I need) ((while typing))
- 22 (2.2)/((L types))
- 23 P: Have you had your summer vacation yet [or are you
- 24 L: ((reading screen)) [Oh a little bit.

- 25 P: [You gonna travel or are you stay[ing home.  
 26 L: [ ((while typing)) [Hm no I (.) I (.) stayed around here.  
 27 P: Right that's nice [too  
 28 L: [How about you.  
 29 P: → I:m gonna go see my parent- or my dad for a week here in August  
 30 so that'll be nice.  
 31 L: °Hm good°  
 32 (0.9)  
 33 L: Let's see uh ((turning to side))  
 34 P: What are you thinking.  
 35 L: Let's see if I ((gets up from chair and walks away from desk and  
 36 begins speaking to another patron)) so I didn't see it ( )  
 37 (7.3)  
 38 L: ((returns to desk)) They took off OCLC off those machines.=  
 39 P: Hm oh those are your new machines=the:y're ni:ce.  
 40 L: No well new monitors.

In the early portion of extract (2) (lines 1-22) the patron supplies the librarian with information relevant to assisting her with finding a book, including an approximate title, author's name, and date of publication. The subsequent portion of the interaction indicates that the interlocutors are sufficiently acquainted with one another to discuss their personal lives. During a gap in conversation while the librarian is working at the computer (line 22) the patron inquires about the status of the librarian's vacation (line 23) and he responds to the question (line 24). The patron extends the topic with another inquiry (line 25), which yields an answer from the librarian (line 26), followed by a sequence closing third part from the patron (line 27). At this point the librarian inquires about the patron's vacation plans (line 28). The patron responds by reporting on a prospective activity (lines 29-30). Although the patron delivers the report within a service desk interaction, unlike the same patron's prior report of an ongoing unfinished activity (i.e., "looking for a book") and other examples of patrons' reports of prospective activities it is not hearable as a request. First, it does not constitute an assistable. The patron's turn does not present a circumstance for which an assisting action in response is

relevant. Second, the report is made following an inquiry regarding her future vacation-related activity. Through sequential location and turn formulation it is understandable, and treated by the interlocutors, as informing the recipient of an activity, not as presenting a problem for which assistance from the recipient is conditionally relevant.

While the data in this study show that library patrons routinely construct their requests by reporting assistables in terms of a prospective activity or an activity in progress, the accomplishment of requesting is contingent upon a report's occurrence within a sequence of action that contributes to its understandability as a request. Prior research has shown that institutional interaction involves an orientation to a core goal or task, such as providing assistance (Drew & Heritage, 1992a), which places requests organizationally immediately after an opening sequence, whether the institutional setting is a photocopy service desk (Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2005), an emergency call center (Zimmerman, 1992), a student service counter (Kidwell, 2001), or a physician's office (Curl & Drew, in press). As the analysis in chapter five demonstrated, library service interactions open with an implicit or overt offer of service from the librarian, which makes a request from the patron sequentially relevant. Thus, the accomplishment of requesting at the reference desk involves a patron producing a turn that is understandable as a request in a sequential position in which requesting is expectable.

#### Requests Make Relevant Types of Responses

In this chapter I show how patrons design request turns so as to establish for the recipient a problem with completing an activity for which assistance from a librarian is relevant. In the data for this study patrons formulate their request turns recurrently with this feature and librarians consistently display an orientation to this feature in their

responses to utterances in this position. Patrons build their requests around either a prospective activity to be accomplished or an activity in progress that he or she is seemingly unable to complete. Moreover, patron requests in this data corpus are designed to project one of two types of responses toward the completion of the activity: (1) instructions on how to complete it; (2) access to the resources that a patron needs to complete it. This section describes how patrons' request formulations make certain types of responses relevant.

#### Requests that Make Instruction Giving Relevant

As noted at the start of this chapter, in the data for this study patrons rarely formulate requests by directly soliciting assistance from a librarian. However, when patrons do make a straightforward request, they may construct it with reference to the need to accomplish a library-related activity. In extract (1) the patron formulates the request turn as an inquiry regarding how to perform an activity that she has not yet undertaken (arrowed lines). This inquiry solicits the librarian's participation in the completion of the prospective activity. By asking to be shown how to accomplish a task, the patron claims a lack of knowledge and thereby creates an opportunity for the recipient to assist with its accomplishment. The patron's formulation of the inquiry as a question about *how* to do something makes a specific type of answer from the librarian conditionally relevant, that is, instruction giving.

The following case is similarly a request for instructions for accomplishing a task that the patron has not yet begun. The patron's display of a lack of knowledge regarding a library-related task in the assistance slot once again makes relevant an assisting action in response. However, as a request specifically formulated around *how* to do something,



it makes instruction giving the relevant action in response.

(5) Recall

- 1 L: [Hi
- 2 → P: [Ah hi:y (.) How do I request a book from another library?
- 3 (.)/(L turns to computer)
- 4 L: Okay (.) you sure it's not here?=If you're sure
- 5 [it's not here
- 6 P: [It's been checked out
- 7 (.)
- 8 P: [It says
- 9 L: [Okay if it's checked out you have to do a recall ((points)) over there.
- 10 (1.2)
- 11 P: But it's available in other libraries also and it's not checked out.=
- 12 L: =If if we own the book,
- 13 P: Okay.=
- 14 L: =You have to do a put a recall on it.
- 15 P: Okay.
- 16 L: Oka:y.

By asking for instructions on how to request a book from another library, the patron displays to the librarian a lack of knowledge that poses a problem with the completion of the activity. If one does not know how to request a book from another library, one cannot proceed with the task. Consequently, the patron's inquiry makes relevant assistance from a knowledgeable recipient in the next turn at talk and establishes a slot in the sequential organization of action specifically for the librarian to *instruct* the patron.

As the following example illustrates, a patron's report of a "want" may similarly project the relevance of an assisting response. By constructing the report of the want around how to do something, the patron makes instruction giving the relevant response from the librarian.

(6) Borrower Limitation

- 1 P: ((Approaches the desk with extended hand holding slip of paper))
- 2 L ((Gazing downward)) Ye:s::
- 3 P: <Hi how are you.>

- 4                   (.)  
 5       P:       .hhh U::h I just wanna u- (0.2) know how to read thi:s, ((points and taps  
 6               on paper)) u:h (0.5) this section (.) for the books<sub>i</sub>  
 7       L:       O:ka::y ai:tch cu:e (0.4) u::m all of the ai:t↓ches, (0.2) are on the fourth  
 8               floo:r.

In this instance the patron introduces his turn (lines 5-6) with “just” to minimize the hearable imposition on the recipient from what is to follow (i.e., his “want”) as not complex or difficult to address. The patron’s report of wanting to know how to do something makes a claim to the librarian regarding the patron’s lack of the knowledge required to accomplish the task. As a result, the turn is hearable as an assistable and in this organizational slot establishes a sequential context in which an assisting response is relevant. Presumably the activity (i.e., reading a library call number) is one that the recipient as a library professional could assist with completing. The patron’s design of the turn makes a certain kind of assistance relevant. Reporting that he wants to know *how* to read the book location information makes relevant a response that informs him how to do so and thereby makes relevant a response that entails instruction giving.

#### Requests that Make Giving Access to a Resource Relevant

The formulation of a request as the report of a “need” is common in both everyday and institutional interactions (e.g., Curl & Drew, in press; Kidwell, 2001; Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2005; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman, 1988, 1992). A consistent feature of the “need” requests in this data corpus is the patrons’ need *to do something*. Thus, patrons may use the report of a “need” to create a context for obtaining assistance with the undertaking of a prospective activity. In the following three extracts, constituting all but one of the instances of “need” formulations in the data, the patrons report a “need to use” something that one could reasonably expect the library to

provide<sup>11</sup>, whether it is access to an online service or a common publication (e.g., *The New York Times*).<sup>12</sup>

#### (7) Microfilm

- 1 → P: ((Walking to desk)) I ne[ed to use the m↑icrofilm.  
 2 L: [Yes  
 3 (0.2)  
 4 P: for the [New York Times.  
 5 L: [O-  
 6 (0.2)  
 7 => L: U:h microfilm is on the next floor (.) third floor in the  
 8 microfilm (0.2) cabinets.  
 9 P: O:kay.  
 10 L: It's gonna be alphabetically arranged so you look for New  
 11 York Times (.) look for the date that you want.

#### (8) Internet Access

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from direction ahead but slightly left of l))  
 2 L: ((Quickly looks up, narrows eyes and makes a closed mouth smile.)  
 3 P: Hi, how [a:re you:..  
 4 L: [Hi:..  
 5 (0.3)  
 6 L: Okay.  
 7 (.)  
 8 → P: U:h I need to (use some/u:se um) (.) (a:h/u:h) computer with Internet,  
 9 (1.0)  
 10 => L: Okay it's all of tho:se (.) computers (.) straight ahead.  
 11 (0.2)  
 12 L: Those [all  
 13 P: [(They all do.)  
 14 L: A-all have Internet access.

#### (9) AOL

- 1 L: ((Seated at Desk))  
 2 ((Widens eyes, makes closed-mouth smile))  
 3 P: Hello. ((off camera as approaching desk))  
 4 (.)

<sup>11</sup> Although “internet access” is not traditionally associated with library services, library users have come to expect its availability. In a survey of 1,000 adult public library users by the American Library Association (2006) twenty-nine percent of the respondents reported using the library in the past year to connect to the internet, as compared with thirty-six percent who read newspapers or magazines. Seventy-five percent of the respondents said that it is important that the library provides computer access training and support.

<sup>12</sup> Curl and Drew (in press) and Vinkhuyzen and Syzmanski (2005) observe that “I want...” and “I need...” formulations display a speaker’s confidence in the ability of the recipient to grant the request, as well as a claim of entitlement to have the request granted. Conversely, syntactic formats such as “I wonder if...”, display a weaker claim and an acknowledgement of the contingencies associated with a request.

- 5 L: Hi.  
 6 (.)  
 7→ P: I need to use aiy oh el<sub>i</sub>  
 8 (1.5)  
 9 L: Aiy oh el<sub>i</sub>  
 10 P: Mm hm.  
 11 (1.0)/((L scrunches face and shakes head once from side to side))  
 12 => L: ((points ahead)) You just put in:: (.) www  
 13 aiy oh el [dot com.  
 14 P: [On ↑any of these compu:ters.  
 15 L: Ri[ght.  
 16 P: [Thanks alot.

In each of the three examples the speaker has reported a need to accomplish the use of something that the recipient as a library professional is presumably capable of helping to make possible. A patron's report of a need in this organizational position establishes a circumstance in which the speaker may require assistance with accomplishing the task. Thus, the report constitutes a potential assistable in a sequential position in which a request is expectable. Each librarian's response indicates that the patron's presentation of a need projects the relevance of an assisting action in response. Specifically, the request makes relevant a response that provides access to the item that the patron reports needing to use. In extracts (7) and (8) the report of a need to use respectively microfilm and the Internet yields directions on where each may be found (double arrowed lines). In both cases the librarian orients to the request as projecting the relevance of providing access to the item that the patron needs to use. In extract (6) the patron's report of a need to use AOL results in a response that first directs him to the resource through the librarian's gesture of pointing to the computers on which AOL may be used. The librarian immediately follows with instructions on how to access the service using a computer (lines 12-13).

The following extract contains the only other instance of a patron's report of a

need in the data for this study. Although it does not involve the need to complete an activity, it does provide additional evidence that a patron's presentation of a need establishes an expectation of an assisting response from a librarian. In this case the librarian displays an orientation to the conditional relevance (Schegloff, 1968, 2007) of an assisting action by preparing the patron for the possibility of a non-helping response.

(10) Tax Form

- 1 P: Uh please, (.) I need the tax form for nineteen ninety nine.  
 2 (0.6)  
 3 L: [Tch  
 4 P: [for ste:ts.  
 5 (1.0)  
 6 P: State's tax fo:rm. [(st-)  
 7 L: [Ne:w York State;  
 8 P: Ye::s  
 9 L: O:ka:(h)y. (.) for nineteen ninety: ni::ne?  
 10 P: Y:es.  
 11 L: A::hm hhhh let's see. w- we might be able to find that u:m (.) by  
 12 going the uh the web site. for the uh State of New York?  
 13 P: Y:es.  
 14 L: H:a:ng on one second. I think I've got a link here.  
 15 (1.0)  
 16 L: to: it.  
 17 (0.4)  
 18 L: °ok(h)a:y.° hhh u:hm I'm hoping they've got the nineteen  
 19 ninety nine ones. °I don't know if it would be,  
 20 ((reading screen)) u::hm (0.9) this year blah blah blah  
 21 (1.0)  
 22 L: o:ka:y, numerical. is the- <are you jus: (0.2) is there a  
 23 particular one you were looking for. or:?=  
 24 P: =no, ju:st for tax fo:r:m:. it um- I never fi:led in nineteen  
 25 ninety nine so I just wait.  
 26 (0.2)  
 27 P If I get a tax form now I can file.

The patron reports to the librarian the need for a state tax form (lines 1, 4 and 6).

Through an interrogative insertion sequence, the librarian checks his understanding of the request (lines 7-10). Once the patron confirms the mutual understanding of the need for the type and date of the form (line 10) the librarian responds in a way that displays an

orientation to the patron's report as producing an expectation of assistance. He does this by preparing the patron for the possibility of a non-assisting response by formulating the turn with markers of uncertainty such as "might" ("we might be able to find that"), "hoping" ("I'm hoping they've got the nineteen ninety nine ones.), and "don't know" ("I don't know if it would be,"). The librarian proposes a course of action that involves obtaining access to the resource by using a specific Web site, but shapes the patron's expectation of the outcome as possibly unsuccessful through his commentary as he works on the solving the patron's problem (cf., Maynard, 1996; Heritage & Stivers, 1999). In this manner the librarian shows that he treats the patron's report of a need as implicating a request for assistance with fulfilling the need as well as making an assisting action in response conditionally relevant.

A patron may also formulate the need to obtain access to a resource by reporting his or her current engagement or prior attempt to accomplish the task. In the following extract the patron does this while explicitly characterizing his situation as problematic.

(11) Norton Anthology

- 1 P ((Walks toward front of desk from side.))
- 2 L: ((Observes P walking around the side of the counter.))
- 3 L: ((Turns forward while P behind computer CPU)
- 4 P: ((Gazes at L while L faces forward))
- 5 P: ((Turns corner with gaze at L while L faces forward))
- 6 P: ((Reaches front of desk with gaze at L))
- 7 L: ((Turns slightly toward P))=
- 8 → P: =How are you sir. .hh [Uh ] ((reaches front of desk)) I'm having trouble=
- 9 L: [Hi: ]/((single nod))
- 10 P: =locating this book ((pointing to paper)) call number. ((taps on paper))=
- 11 L: =F[or which book.
- 12 P: [I don't think,
- 13 (0.3)
- 14 P: Norton Anthology of World Li[terature
- 15 L: [MM ↑HM.
- 16 (1.0)/((L turns to computer and begins typing))

In extract (11) the patron designs the turn as a report of a problem (i.e., “trouble”) with completing the library-related activity of locating a book (lines 8 and 10). The patron involves the librarian by presenting a still-open matter with the use of a present progressive verb form (“I’m having trouble locating”) while he is engaged in the similarly present activity of speaking with the librarian. Through the use of a “trying to” construction the patron makes it understandable that he has already worked on his own to accomplish the task. In this way, the patron establishes the basis for requesting assistance through the implication of a prior failed attempt. The reporting of this problem in a place in the talk in which an assistable is expected makes relevant from the librarian help with accessing the book.

The data in this study consistently show that sequential position is key to understanding a patron’s turn as a request. Even though patrons would seem to have great latitude in the formulation of requests, given that librarians inspect the slot immediately following the opening for a turn that is doing requesting, the data reveal a limited range of request formulation types to achieve requesting. One aim of this study is to describe these formulations which most often involve an unfinished library activity. The data also show that patrons orient to the making of a request that may not suited for a librarian. They display this orientation through the formulation that they employ to construct the turn. The next section describes how patrons adapt the report of an unfinished activity to accomplish a request when it is one that may not be suitable to direct it to a librarian.

#### A Method for Making a Possibly Unsuitable Request

Even in an institutional setting where an offer of service frames an interaction,

there is a minimal expectation that a request will be suitable for the recipient. Callers to emergency help centers formulate their reports so that they are hearable as policeable matters (Zimmerman, 1992) and patients present their problems to physicians with attentiveness to their "doctor-ability" (Halkowski, in press; Heritage & Robinson, 2006). In those institutional settings, service requesters must reach a threshold of eligibility for assistance through the institutional representative's evaluation of the appropriateness of the request. Requests made at a library reference desk are not usually subjected to the same type of screening process. A patron who has access to the reference desk of a college library is typically qualified to make a request for information on a very wide range of subjects. Requests that cannot be handled by a particular librarian may be referred to another source, whether it is another librarian or another institution. One of the services traditionally associated with libraries is that of referral to a more appropriate source of assistance. Nonetheless, the following extract shows that a patron may display concern with making a possibly unsuitable request by identifying it as such.

(12) Syllabus

- 1       P       ((Approaches reference desk from directly ahead of L, who is turned
- 2               facing behind the desk.))
- 3               (1.0)/((P waits while L looks in opposite direction))
- 4       P:       ((Raises arm to head making a rustling sound with coat))
- 5       L:       ((turns forward)) Hi: could I he:lp? you.
- 6       P:       This may be completely out of your jurisdiction (.) .hh but do you
- 7               happen to kno:w ho:w to find out (0.2) how (0.2) uh what books:
- 8               (0.2) we need for our upcoming classes;
- 9       L:       For the syllabus you mean? =
- 10      P:       =Yeah.
- 11               (.)
- 12      L:       .hhhh Generally we don't have the syllabuses=What you
- 13               ca:n do though=You can go to the bookstore?
- 14      P:       Yeah.

In formulating the request turn the patron uses two techniques to demonstrate to



the recipient a concern regarding the suitability of the request in the library setting. First, he prefaces the question with "This may be completely out of your jurisdiction", which alerts his interlocutor that what will follow may not fall within his appropriate area of knowledge. Thus, the patron's preface displays his uncertainty regarding the relevance or suitability of the request for this recipient, thus indicating an action taken as a request should be library-relevant. In addition, he frames the inquiry as involving something that the librarian is not necessarily responsible for knowing (lines 6-7), but may "happen to know". In this manner, the patron formulates the turn to show he is aware that his assistable may fall outside the purview of the library and indicates his expectation that a request should be. As this case illustrates, one practice for making a possibly unsuitable request at the reference desk is to identify it as such to the librarian.

### Making a Request Assistance-Ready

As noted throughout this chapter, patrons report a problem, want, or need to implement a request in the assistance slot following the opening sequence of a reference encounter. Their turns are hearable as requests because they present an assistable to a librarian at the service position of a reference desk, which sequentially implicates an assisting response or an account for the absence of one.<sup>13</sup> Librarians inspect the assistance slot for an action that makes a helping response relevant. However, the request turn should provide the librarian with what is needed for the librarian to supply an assisting response. As the data show, if a request is not actionable, librarians and patrons

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<sup>13</sup> The data contain two examples of a librarian providing an account to reject a request. In both the librarians report that the library does not own the item. In addition to extract 18 there is the following:  
Cliff Notes

1       P:       ((walks up to counter while reading from a slip of paper))  
2       P:       Mm u:h where can I find the Cliff Note.  
3       L:       We don't carry Cliff Notes.

The account puts the recipient in the position of inferring that the librarian cannot help.

engage in interactional work that results in a request for which an assisting response may be supplied. In this section I discuss how patrons and librarians collaborate on the formulation of requests that are actionable in that the request provides sufficient information for the librarian to understand the patron's problem, want or need and be able to supply assistance. The discussion of the achievement of the actionability of requests begins with a description of how librarians display their understanding of patrons' turns as requests through responsive actions.

#### How Librarians Act on a Patron's Turn as a Request

In this chapter I show that in my data patrons typically formulate requests by reporting to a librarian a current or prospective activity and leaving it to the librarian to infer that he or she could assist the patron with accomplishing it. This section demonstrates how librarians and patrons display their orientation to the proposed formulation as a requesting action (cf. Schegloff, 1996b). It is through the sequential organization of talk that interlocutors display for one another their understanding of actions (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Heritage & Atkinson, 1984; Schegloff, 1984, 2007). When a patron produces an utterance in the request slot of a reference desk interaction, the librarian shows how he or she treats the action in the next adjacently produced turn. If the librarian's responsive action diverges from what the patron is seeking to accomplish, the patron has an opportunity in the next turn to initiate a repair (cf. Schegloff, 1979; 1992). One way to confirm that a librarian treats a patron's turn as a request is to observe whether the librarian has designed his or her response turn to implement an assisting action. As the following analysis shows, librarians formulate assisting actions as turns that either provide the information necessary for a patron to

accomplish an activity or display that their work toward providing such information has begun.

Helping a Patron to Accomplish an Activity. A librarian may respond to a patron's request for assistance with completing an unfinished activity by supplying the information that the patron presumably needs to proceed. In the following examples, the patron's request turn (single arrowed lines) leads to this type of assisting action from the librarian (double arrowed lines).

### (13) Internet Access

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from direction ahead but slightly left of l))  
 2 L: ((Quickly looks up, narrows eyes and makes a closed mouth smile.)  
 3 P: Hi, how [a:re you:.  
 4 L: [Hi:.  
 5 (0.3)  
 6 L: Okay.  
 7 (.)  
 8→ P: U:h I need to (use some/u:se um) (.) (a:h/u:h) computer with Internet,  
 9 (1.0)/((P and L hold mutual gaze))  
 10⇒ L: Okay it's all of tho:se (.) computers (.) straight ahead.  
 11 (0.2)  
 12 L: Those [all  
 13 P: [(They all do.)  
 14 L: A-all have Internet access.

### (14) Borrower Limitation

- 1 P: ((Approaches the desk with extended hand holding slip of paper))  
 2 L ((Gazing downward)) Ye:s::  
 3 P: <Hi how are you.>  
 4 (.)  
 5→ P: .hhh U::h I just wanna u- (0.2) know how to read thi:s, ((points and taps  
 6 on paper)) u:h (0.5) this section (.) for the books;  
 7⇒ L: O:ka::y ai:tch cu:e (0.4) u::m all of the ai:t↓ches, (0.2) are on the fourth  
 8 [flo:ɹ,  
 9 P: [((looks up at L))  
 10 (0.7)/((L continues looking at paper and P returns gaze to paper))  
 11 L: Any video you have to: ((points)) [request ov ]er there  
 12 P: [to circulation?]  
 13 (0.4)/((P nods))  
 14 P: Okay. (0.2) So any aitch is on the four↑th floor.  
 15 L: Right.

16 P: Okay. Thank you. ((Leaves desk))

In extracts (13) and (14) the librarians build their response turns to be heard as implementing assistance. First, in both cases the librarian receipts the patron's request with "Okay", which also marks the transition from a service provider's receiving of information from a requester to the delivery of an assisting action (Merritt, 1976; Beach, 1993). The librarian then proceeds with providing information that could help complete the activity that the patron has specified in the request turn. The librarians specifically design their turns to be hearably responsive to the patron's prior turn. For example, in extract (13) the librarian directs the patron to the computers that would enable him to use the Internet by beginning the utterance with the anaphoric pronoun "it" to refer back to the request turn. In extract (14), the librarian demonstrates how to read the call number section by directing the patron to the appropriate location in the stacks, even though the patron's request is sequentially implicative of instruction giving. Here the librarian initiates the turn with a portion of the call number that corresponds to what is written on the paper that the patron has presented as part of the request turn (line 7). The portion she utters in her response represents a section of the book stacks. She completes the response turn by reporting to the patron the more general fact that books in an encompassing category are located on the fourth floor (lines 7-8). She similarly provides him with general information about the location of videos (line 11), which is the material type of the other item on his list. In this manner, she designs her turn to conform in format to a request that projects the relevance of providing access to a resource, rather than instruction giving.

In this group of examples the librarians construct their response turns as doing

assisting by (1) receipting the request by using “okay” to mark the transition of the librarian’s action from the recipient of a request to the provider of assistance; (2) establishing the relevance of the turn to the patron’s immediately prior request turn through lexical terms; (3) providing information that could understandably aid with the completion of the activity reported by the patron in the request turn.

Demonstrably Working on an Assistable. A librarian may also display an orientation to the patron’s turn as implicating the need for assistance by responding with an action that shows that he or she is working on obtaining the information required to assist the patron with the completion of the activity. Since the answers to patrons’ requests are commonly found in the library catalog, an online database, or the Internet, a librarian’s shift of body position and gaze to the computer on the reference desk may signal to the patron that work on an assisting response has begun. In cases such as extract (15) a librarian’s re-orientation to the computer accompanies or follows the librarian’s initiation of an insertion sequence that solicits information recognizably related to the patron’s assistable.

(15) Norton Anthology

- 1 P ((Walks toward front of desk from side.))
- 2 L: ((Observes P walking around the side of the counter.))
- 3 L: ((Turns forward while P behind computer CPU)
- 4 P: ((Gazes at L while L faces forward))
- 5 P: ((Turns corner with gaze at L while L faces forward))
- 6 P: ((Reaches front of desk with gaze at L))
- 7 L: ((Turns slightly toward P))=
- 8 P: =How are you sir. .hh [Uh ] ((reaches front of desk)) I'm having trouble=
- 9 L: [Hi: ]/((single nod))
- 10 P: =locating this book ((pointing to paper)) call number. ((taps on paper))=
- 11 L: =F[or ((leans forward)) which book.
- 12 P: [I don't think,
- 13 (0.3)
- 14 P: Norton Anthology of World Li[terature
- 15 L: [MM ↑HM.

16 => (1.0)/((L turns to computer and begins typing))

At the conclusion of the patron's request turn (line 10) the librarian is not prepared to respond with a solution to the patron's problem. The patron has presented a recognizable assistable, but it becomes apparent that it is deficient because the librarian does not yet have enough information to provide the patron with access to the book. The patron's request refers to a book title that is listed on the paper he is holding. He informs the librarian of the title solely by pointing to it and then tapping on the paper, but the librarian is too far from the paper to see what is written on it. The librarian responds to the patron's turn with two actions designed to locate the trouble source: (1) an inquiry that solicits the title of the book (line 11); (2) leaning toward the paper on which the title is written. When the patron utters the title of the book that he is "having trouble locating" (line 14), the librarian receipts the information with an affirmation token that shows his recognition of the title (line 15) through the increased volume of the utterance. The librarian shows that he is not using his response as a continuer by turning toward the PC and beginning to type, which also displays that the repair has yielded the information he needs to proceed with working on a solution to the patron's problem. This action is understandable as seeking a remedy to the patron's problem, because in the organizational slot immediately after a request for a book, the librarian has begun a search of the online catalog, which is the source for locating the call number of a library book.

The data for this study contain two practices that librarians employ to respond to patrons' requests: (1) providing the patron with the information that would aid with the completion of the activity implicated in the assistable; (2) demonstrating that work on

obtaining this information has begun. A librarian may show that work is underway by turning attention to a likely source of a solution, such as an online catalog, or initiating an interrogative insertion sequence that solicits additional information necessary to provide assistance when a request is not initially actionable. The remainder of this section examines the additional interactional work that librarians and patrons undertake to produce actionable requests.

### The Joint Production of Actionable Requests

The following practices for producing actionable requests are evident in the data:

(1) a patron formulates a turn that is recognizable as projecting the relevance of an assisting response and provides sufficient information to enable the librarian to formulate an assisting action; (2) a patron may repair or augment a request turn when a librarian does not respond with an assisting action; (3) when a patron's initial request turn in the assistance slot does not provide enough information for the librarian to understand it or act on it, the librarian may initiate an interrogative insertion sequence to solicit the information necessary to provide assistance; (4) a patron and librarian may collaborate in the patron's formulation of a multi-unit turn in the assistance slot that constitutes a narrative actionable request.

Assistance-Ready Request Turns. In some cases a library patron produces a request turn consisting of a single turn constructional unit (TCU) that provides sufficient information for the request to be understood and acted upon by the librarian, as illustrated in the following example.

#### (16) Internet Access

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from direction ahead but slightly left of I))
- 2 L: ((Quickly looks up, narrows eyes and makes a closed mouth smile.))
- 3 P: Hi, how [a:re you:.

- 4 L: [Hi:.  
 5 (0.3)  
 6 L: Okay.  
 7 (.)  
 8→ P: U:h I need to (use some/u:se um) (.) (a:h/u:h) computer with Internet,  
 9 (1.0)  
 10⇒ L: Okay it's all of tho:se (.) computers (.) straight ahead.  
 11 (0.2)  
 12 L: Those [all  
 13 P: [(They all do.)  
 14 L: A-all have Internet access.

In extract (16) the patron formulates a request turn as a single TCU (single arrowed line) that reports his need to engage in the prospective activity of using a computer with Internet access. The librarian shows that she understands the turn to be a completed request by receipting it with “Okay” and supplying directions that may enable the patron to accomplish the activity referenced in the request (double arrowed line). This response shows that the request turn has supplied the recipient with enough information to be able to proceed with an assisting action.

Augmenting a Request. In the following case, the patron uses increments (lines 14 and 16) to make a request actionable when the original formulation (line 12) does not result in an assisting response from the librarian (lines 13 and 15).

(17) Number Systems

- 1 P: ((Waits at side of desk while another patron (X) is assisted.))  
 2 X: (To L) O:h I just bought this one [so I just wanted=  
 3 L: [Uhhuh  
 4 X: =to see,=  
 5 L: =O[kay  
 6 X: [Okay  
 7 (.)  
 8 X: Thank you though. ((Turns and walks away from desk))  
 9 L: Okay. ((Turns to left))=  
 10 P: =(walks to desk) Hi ((L is facing opposite direction))  
 11 (1.0)/((L turns to P))  
 12 P: .hh I'm looking for some books on different number systems,  
 13 (.)/(L and P hold gaze))



- 14 P: topics on number systems,  
 15 (0.2)/((L and P hold gaze))  
 16 P: in mathe↑matics.  
 17 L: Mhm. ((slight nod))  
 18 (0.4)/((L and P hold gaze))  
 19 L: ((Shifts body toward computer)) °Let's see° just (.) a particul  
 20 P: I don't kn[ow just any  
 21 L: [You have a particular one  
 22 (1.8)/((P shakes head))  
 23 L: ((Faces computer and types)) °U:h°

In the discussion of an earlier example (extract 2) I showed how a patron's report of the unfinished activity of looking for a book established the relevance of an assisting response from a librarian. In extract (17) the patron delivers a similar report (line 12), but the librarian does not demonstrably work on a solution until several turn constructional units later (line 19). The patron's initial request turn may not be sufficient for the librarian to produce an assisting response, so the interlocutors perform interactional work to make the request actionable. First, the patron adds to her initial request turn in the transition relevance space (lines 14). Based on her recycling of part of the original turn, she produces the increment to be more specific about the type of books on number systems that would be relevant to her request. At a point of possible completion of the patron's turn the librarian does not respond vocally, through physical movement, or shift of eye gaze (line 15). In the absence of an assisting response from the librarian and following sustained eye gaze that may be understood as a non-verbal continuer, the patron extends her turn at talk with another increment (line 16) that clarifies the search for books on number systems to the domain of mathematics.

The patron's addition of the increment may serve another interactional goal. The increment makes the completion of the turn more prominent through falling intonation, which projects turn completion more strongly than the final continuing intonation that the

patron had used in the prior TCU. Thus, the addition of the increment supplies the librarian with another opportunity to provide a response through a recognizable point of completion of the patron's turn. The librarian responds with a continuer (line 17), passing the next turn to the patron. In this way the librarian displays that he orients to the request as incomplete and gives her the opportunity to provide additional information that will make it actionable. However, the patron does not elect to continue. The librarian and patron then hold gaze during almost a half second of silence (line 18).

In the absence of further information from the patron, which indicates the patron's orientation to the request turn as complete and her expectation of a response, the librarian shows that he is beginning to work on the request through three actions. First, he turns to the computer, where the solution to the patron's problem of locating books could be found. Second, he utters a muted marker of the initiation of work (°Let's see°), which indicates trying to work on the problem. Finally, he initiates an interrogative insertion sequence (see next section) to clarify his understanding of the patron's request (line 19). The patron's use of "some books" in the request turn is ambiguous in that it does not make clear whether she has some particular ones in mind or would accept any books on the topic. The patron answers by reporting that she does not know and rejecting the librarian's formulation of "just (.) a particul" with the contrastive "just any" (line 20). However, as the patron completes the first part of the turn, in overlap the librarian reissues his prior utterance, this time as syntactically complete (line 21) and the patron rejects it again (line 22). As noted above, the librarian displays the start of work on the request by shifting his gaze to the computer, beginning to type, and thinking aloud (line 23).

Insertion Sequences. At times a patron's request turn does not provide sufficient information for the librarian to understand what is being requested or propose a course of action for the patron. Consequently, a librarian may initiate an interrogative insertion sequence to solicit the information necessary for assistance to proceed.

(18) Executive Summary

- 1 L: Hi. (.) wuh'c'n I do for yu:h.  
 2 (0.6) ((patron approaching desk))  
 3 P: Ye:a:h I'm try:nuh find some- a- a book about business  
 4 communications;  
 5 (0.2)  
 6 L: Oka:y, 'hh[h  
 7 P: [U:m I'm try:na find a:h exe:cutive summary, <something about  
 8 executive summarie:s;  
 9 L: U::m ehr-ar yu- (.) like i-w- in what sense. like whuh ar:e y- (.)[you=  
 10 P: [ih  
 11 L: = wanna find out how to ↑do it or you're [in(te)rested in what they're  
 12 P: [Yeah how to do it. (.) how  
 13 to[do (a)  
 14 L: [How to write executive [summaries.  
 15 P: [See: cuz I'm supposed to write a (e)xecutive  
 16 summary for a: project,  
 17 (0.2)

In extract (18) the patron produces a request turn as a single TCU (lines 3-4) that reports her interest in accomplishing a task. The librarian does not respond immediately (line 5), but issues a receipt token with continuing intonation, which suggests that he is expecting the patron to extend her turn at talk (line 6). By passing the opportunity to respond with an assisting action, the librarian has left it up to the patron to infer that the request is unfinished. The patron pursues assistance by reformulating the turn using the same construction as her initial request ("I'm try:nuh find") followed by an elaboration of the topic (line 7). The push to start a new utterance at a transition relevance place and the reformulation of the immediately prior utterance with some lexical substitution (line 8) suggest that the patron is engaged in a repair. Based on the reformulation the repair was

accomplished to clarify that she is not looking for an example of an executive summary, but information about executive summaries. The librarian responds with an inquiry that solicits more information about the assistable (line 9). He also offers for her confirmation a candidate understanding of the activity she is trying to accomplish as finding out how to do an executive summary (lines 11 and 13). The librarian's questions are designed to obtain information that is absent from the patron's request turn and are hearably relevant to providing assistance. Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) observed that questions from a service provider that occur between a request and the response to the request are conditional for the provision of a response. The patron is expected to answer them because organizationally the question is the first pair part of an adjacency pair. In this case, the patron's strong agreement (line 12) with the librarian's proposed understanding, which is indicated by her production of the affirmation token during his turn at talk, followed by her own formulation of her request regarding the executive summary serve as the second pair part of the insertion sequence. This new information that she wants to know how to write an executive summary contributes to the formulation of an assisting response, for it narrows down the range of actions that would be understandable as being responsive to the patron's request. Although the patron's initial report of her unfinished attempt to find a book constitutes an assistable, the librarian treats the request as insufficiently formulated for him to act on it. Through the production of the interrogative insertion sequence, the librarian and patron collaborate on making the patron's request actionable.

Narratives. Another way by which librarians and patrons co-produce an actionable request is through the construction of a request as a multi-unit turn that

supplies an assistable in narrative form. In extract (19) the patron begins his request turn (single arrowed line) in the usual assistance slot following the interlocutors' achievement of co-orientation, but the librarian does not supply an assisting response until the patron has formulated a recognizable assistable. The librarian's assisting turn occurs several TCUs later in the interaction (double arrowed line). After the possible completion of each TCU the librarian passes on an opportunity to initiate an assisting response turn until the patron produces a TCU that clearly presents the assistable in the form of an unfinished activity. This confirms that librarians inspect a patron's turn for an assistable that provides sufficient information for the librarian to provide an assisting response. The librarian may withhold an assisting response and the patron may extend his or her turn at talk until an actionable request is produced.

(19) Video Games

- 1 ((P waits at counter during prior interaction. When previous patron leaves  
2 P does not move from the far end of counter. L looks toward him then  
3 turns away, then toward him again.))  
4 P: Hi:=  
5 L: =Hi:  
6 (1.7) ((off camera))  
7→ P: I've been doing a search on video ga:mes,  
8 (0.2)  
9 P: [on uh ((moves toward front position))  
10 L: [Mm hm  
11 P: I've narrowed uh the catalog down to,  
12 (0.5)/((P arrives at front position))  
13 P: the {campus} catalog in dee pack,  
14 L: ((single nod))  
15 P: .hhh and uh I was here last week and there  
16 was a: (0.3) tch book that was being ordered,=  
17 L: =((single head nod))=  
18 P: =There was like some temporary control num[ber;  
19 L: [ <Mm hm./((vigorous  
20 head nods))  
21 P: And I thought I wrote down what it wa[s,  
22 L: [Uh h↑uh  
23 P: A:nd I can't [seem to: ]=

- 24=> L: [((takes mouse and turns to PC))]= And it wa:s?  
 25 (0.5)  
 26 P: Hhh  
 27 (0.2)  
 28 L: It was video games [or¿  
 29 P: [hh .hh Well I did video games it didn't come up  
 30 under that.=  
 31 L: =Mm=  
 32 P: =I di:d computer games.  
 33 (.)  
 34 P: I did electronic games.  
 35 (.)/(L begins typing))  
 36 P: I got all (0.3) kinds of hits but (0.4) the title of that (.) one  
 37 (.) u-in particular is not on there.  
 38 (1.0)  
 39 L: Mm  
 40 (1.4)  
 41 L: Mm hm  
 42 (2.8)  
 43 L: Mm  
 44 (0.2)  
 45 L: (Branch only) Okay this is:: things with games  
 46 (0.2)  
 47 L: <Everything with games video game this one trigger happy¿>  
 48 P: I have that one that's [this one well it's in my bag.  
 49 L: [Oka:y

Unlike the majority of the preceding cases in which a patron produces the request turn in a single TCU, the patron formulates this request as a step-by-step telling of his prior activity, thereby linking the actions reported in each utterance to a larger course of action (Sacks 1992, II, p. 231). The patron builds the request as a multi-unit turn by designing each TCU as projecting continuation as well as being a recognizable continuation of the prior. Although each unit is hearable as complete semantically and syntactically, this is not the case prosodically or pragmatically (Ford & Thompson, 1996). At each point of possible completion of his turn (lines 7, 13, 16 and 21) the patron ends the utterance with continuing intonation. Moreover, he produces the units as continuations by initiating them with “and” (lines 15, 21 and 23). The librarian’s

orientation to the units as constituting an extended turn is evidenced by his supplying a continuer at each point of possible completion, thereby passing an opportunity to initiate the next turn at talk (lines 10, 14, 17, 19, and 22).

A more detailed examination of the patron's extended turn shows that the librarian passes on issuing a response until the particular point at which the patron produces a TCU that identifies a circumstance for which assistance may be provided. The patron initiates talk by reporting his involvement in a library-related activity in progress (line 7). The patron shows attentiveness to designing the report for a recipient who is knowledgeable of the library by using the proto-technical term "doing a search", which suggests an online database search of some type. The patron's start of the turn with "I've been doing" makes it understandable that the activity has been in progress for longer than the immediate present. The patron's characterization of the activity as ongoing or incomplete suggests, as in the above instances with "I'm looking for", that there is a possible need for assistance with bringing the activity to completion. However, two features make it hearable as incomplete as a request. First, the unit ends with continuing intonation, which signals to the recipient that the speaker may be attempting to extend his turn. Also, the unit does not provide enough information regarding the patron's search to make it actionable by the librarian, because the patron has only reported that he has been searching on the topic of "video games" and the librarian does not yet have an assistable associated with the patron's search. It is through the patron's further construction of a report about the unfinished activity that his problem becomes apparent and immediate.

The patron continues to build his request turn by formulating the second TCU

(lines 11 and 13) as the report of a specific step taken in the process of “doing a search”, namely limiting it to the holdings of a particular library in the catalog. His use of the proto-technical term “dee pack” (Database Public Access Catalog) displays his technical grasp of the task and enables him to present himself the librarian as a knowledgeable library user. The patron marks this additional information as only part of the ongoing construction of his problem narrative through the use of continuing intonation at the end of the unit. In the subsequent unit he provides another step in the report of his prior search activity (lines 15-16), supplying the detail that the search involved a book that was being ordered. The patron ends the unit with continuing intonation. Thus, the librarian treats the turn (i.e., request for assistance) as incomplete by issuing another continuer (line 17). By facilitating the extension of the patron’s turn and providing an opportunity for the patron to supply more information about his problem, the librarian collaborates in the patron’s construction of a request that is actionable.

The patron builds his report of the problem by providing another specific piece of information and displays himself again as a knowledgeable library user with reference to an institution-specific designation (“temporary control number”). At the same time, by designing the unit with final rising, “try-marking” (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979) intonation, he shows attentiveness to the expertise of the recipient by seeking confirmation of his use of the term, which the librarian provides (lines 19-20).

The patron casts the search activity as problematic in line 21 by employing a “first thought” formulation (Sacks, 1992, II, p. 181; Jefferson, 2004; Halkowski, frth). The patron’s report of “I thought I wrote down what it was” forecasts that his initial assumption was subsequently proven wrong. This construction enables the librarian to



expect that in fact the temporary control number was not written down. However, the activity reported by the patron remains in the past and it is still not presented overtly as problematic in the here and now. Thus, the librarian signals to the patron to continue with his narrative (line 22). The patron's next unit ("I can't seem to:") not only confirms the implication of the "first thought" formulation, but also shifts the problem to the present. The librarian shows that he orients to the still-in-progress utterance as making assistance relevant by taking the computer mouse as if to prepare for working on the problem (line 24). In addition, he initiates an interrogative sequence that would provide the information necessary to locate the book just after the patron says, "A:nd I can't seem to:". This utterance is similar to the patron's previous TCUs in that it is not designed to be an overt request, but rather as another piece of the unfolding narrative that reports a failure. Nonetheless, it is here that the librarian provides an assisting response.

The occurrence of the librarian's assisting action at this specific moment in the patron's request formulation makes evident two important points with regard to how requesting is accomplished at the reference desk. First, it shows that requesting is accomplished as the presentation of an *immediate problem* (that is, an assistable) to a recipient capable of providing assistance toward a solution. The patron constructs this sequence so that it leads from events reported in the past (e.g., "I've narrowed uh the catalog", "I was here last week") to a failure in the here and now ("I can't seem to:"). In this way, he designs the report with a story structure that leads to the present problematic circumstance, thereby creating a context for the recipient to provide assistance with the completion of his library-related activity. Along with the prior examples, this case further demonstrates that librarians orient specifically to the presentation of assistables in

patrons' turns at talk and patrons formulate their assistables in terms of a library-related activity to be accomplished.

Another point that the prior example allows us to make is that librarians do not necessarily respond with an assisting action at the first possible completion of the patron's request turn. Librarians rely on patrons to supply sufficient information regarding their request to establish a current ongoing problem and to enable the formulation of an assisting response. In extract (19) it is only after six turn constructional units that the patron provides enough information for the librarian to know that he needs assistance and that it is assistance with locating a specific book on video games that has an unknown temporary control number that is needed.

The third point is that the librarian does not wait until the possible completion of the current TCU to launch an embodied response. Instead it occurs at an assistance-recognition point in the turn. The librarian orients to the "adequacy" of the patron's turn for projecting a relevant next action, rather than syntactic or prosodic "completeness" (cf. Jefferson, 1984b). This reasonable incursion of the librarian into the patron's turn shows that librarians monitor a patron's narrative for a place where what is being said is sufficiently available to the librarian to provide assistance. The request is treated as substantively and "for all practical purposes" completed when what the patron is doing with the turn is recognizable and the librarian has sufficient information to issue an assisting response.

The collaborative effort between a librarian and a patron in the production of an actionable request is also observable in the following excerpt. As in the prior case, the librarian does not treat the patron's first turn constructional unit as actionable and it is

only through the accomplishment of an extended request turn that the patron's problem leads to an assisting response. In this case the patron designs the request turn so as to prepare the librarian for the likely difficulty of providing assistance and pursues an assisting response when one is not immediately forthcoming.

(20) Business Quotation

- 1 P: ((Waits behind S at reference desk))
- 2 L: Oka:y? ((to S))
- 3 S: Thank you very [much.
- 4 L: [You're welcome
- 5 (1.5)/((S steps away from counter while L looks down at counter
- 6 and writes. P remains in same position.))
- 7 L: ((Gazing down at counter while writing)) Hi could I help? you.
- 8 P: ((walking to desk))Ye:a:h u:m: <I hope. ((smiles))
- 9 (.)
- 10 L: Yeah/((nod))
- 11 P: I:m looking for: <I'm writing a paper about (.) investing?
- 12 L: ((nod))
- 13 P: And there was a quote that I heard a long time ago.
- 14 (0.3)/((L and P share gaze))
- 15 P: I th- I'm not sure [who said it or exactly what it wa:s:~]
- 16 L: [ ((smiles)) ]
- 17 (0.2)
- 18 L: ((slight nod while smiling))
- 19 P: And I've (.) s:coured the Internet looking for it and I can't ↑find it,
- 20 (0.4)/((L gazes ahead while P gazes at him))
- 21 L: ((scrunches face)) hhhm ((looks down))
- 22 P: [I dunno (.)] maybe yo:u would kn[o::w or you'd know] [who I'd talk to,
- 23 L: [Hmm ] [((leans back)) ] [((sighs and
- 24 makes facial expression of disbelief))
- 25 (0.4)/((L turns to computer and grabs mouse))
- 26 L: [To get the quote]/((turns back to P))
- 27 P: [The quote was ] (.) the quote was something li:ke=I ((finger point
- 28 begins)) thou:ght it was Warren Buffett ((finger point ends)) that said it (.)
- 29 but I'm not sure.
- 30 (1.0)/((L turns to computer))

In this case the patron builds the report of the problem that presumably brought him to the reference desk over a sequence of four TCUs, while the librarian orients to each unit as a piece of an extended turn at talk. The interaction begins with the

librarian's solicitation of a request (line 7). The patron responds by acknowledging the offer (Ye:ah), but quickly works to shape the recipient's expectation of the forthcoming request as a difficult one with "I hope." The patron starts the subsequent utterance (line 11) with a report design seen earlier in single unit requests ("I:m looking for:"), but abandons it and restarts with "<I'm writing a paper about (.) investing?" This single utterance establishes an activity and a broad subject area in which the patron is engaged in working, but it does not yet constitute an assistable for which assistance could be provided. The librarian treats the utterance as the opening unit in an extended turn by nodding (line 12), which passes the next turn back to the patron to continue his report. The patron then provides another piece of information toward constructing his assistable. He initiates the unit as a recognizable continuation of the prior with "And" ("And there was a quote that I heard a long time ago.") and ends it with final intonation. Here is a clear point of possible completion where the librarian could initiate a turn at talk. However, the addition of this information still does not constitute an assistable for which a librarian may respond with an assisting action. Also, the circumstance that the patron reports in this unit is situated in the past, although one might infer a present difficulty recalling something "heard a long time ago". The librarian does not treat the turn constructed thus far as completed or permitting an assisting response. Instead he displays that he is awaiting more of the patron's report by passing on the opportunity to speak and showing his continued engagement through shared gaze (line 14).

With the next unit the patron makes his problem an immediate one for the librarian ("I th- I'm not sure who said it or exactly what it wa:s:?" ). With this utterance he makes explicit the nature of the problem (i.e., the inability to recall a quotation or the

source) and locates it in the present tense. When the patron utters “I’m not sure”, the librarian responds with a smile, perhaps displaying his assessment of the incipient request as difficult or un-actionable. Nonetheless, he treats the patron’s turn as incomplete by passing on the next turn at talk (lines 17-18). The patron builds the next unit (line 19) as another continuation that accomplishes two interactional tasks. By reporting that he “s:coured the Internet looking for it.”, the patron establishes for the librarian that he has done extensive work on the problem before seeking assistance and reinforces the severity of his problem. The utterance concludes with the upshot of the report, namely an explicit statement of his problem in terms of a failure: “I can’t ↑find it<sub>6</sub>”. This unit of talk brings the patron’s problem again to the here and now for the librarian, where an assisting action is relevant, but key information necessary for the librarian to solve the patron’s problem is still outstanding. Although the patron has reported that he has been diligently looking for a quotation, he has not yet supplied enough information about the quotation for the librarian to act on solving the problem.

The librarian initially responds only by holding gaze with the patron (line 20). Then he makes a facial expression and releases an audible closed-mouth exhale that may indicate a negative assessment of the report (line 21), which is reinforced by his shift of gaze from the patron down to the counter. This response, which possibly shows unease at the difficulty of the request, is not an expected response to an interlocutor’s report of a problem. The patron displays his understanding that the report as delivered at this point is sufficient to yield an assisting or receipting response by pursuing one from the librarian. The patron delicately (“I dunno maybe yo:u would kn[o::w or you'd know who I'd talk to,”) reissues the request by suggesting that the librarian could supply the quote or

make a referral (line 20). He upgrades the strength of the request by explicitly situating the recipient in the position of an expected source of assistance through “yo:u would kno::w” and “you'd know who I'd talk to,” (line 21). The librarian at first responds with the markers of a dispreferred turn design (Pomerantz 1984; Sacks, 1987); specifically, he delays talk with sighs, shifts his body away from the patron, and makes facial expressions that indicate difficulty with supplying assistance. These actions indicate that he is postponing his answer to the patron's request (lines 23 - 24). However, he does follow with an assisting action by turning to the computer and grasping the mouse as if to prepare to work on a solution to the patron's problem (line 25). In addition, he returns to facing the patron and demonstrates that he understands the request by completing the patron's immediately prior utterance (line 26). The patron then supplies the information necessary for the librarian to engage in a search for the quotation (line 27-29), that is, he makes the request actionable. The librarian responds by showing that he is working on a solution by orienting to the computer again (line 30).

Librarians' responses to patrons' requests display an orientation to the core task of providing assistance (cf. Drew & Heritage, 1992a). This focus on assisting distinguishes the service encounter from other action sequences that involve responding to a speaker's problem, such as troubles-telling.<sup>14</sup> Librarians collaborate with patrons in the formulation of a request that supplies sufficient information to make a responsive assisting action possible. Four practices were identified in the data: a patron's initial formulation of an actionable request; a patron's repair of a request turn; a librarian's

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<sup>14</sup> Jefferson and Lee (1981) note the close relationship between troubles-telling and service encounter sequences, both of which involve the report of a problem. The authors identify one of the discriminating characteristics of a service encounter as the service provider's “essential interest” in the properties of a problem and “essential indifference” to the person presenting the problem (p. 413).

initiation of an insertion sequence; and a patron's formulation of an extended request turn.

This chapter has concentrated on a single means of formulating a request at the reference desk, which is through the presentation of an assistable in the form of an unfinished library-related activity. In the following section, I present cases from the data in which patrons do not employ this practice to accomplish requesting, yet the librarians nonetheless show their orientation to an unfinished library-related activity in their design of an assisting response. In this way, the next group of cases shows that librarians consistently inspect a patron's turn in the assistance slot for an assistable specifically in the form of an unfinished library-related activity.

#### Evidence from Alternative Request Formulations

In this chapter I have argued that patrons design request turns so as to establish for the recipient an assistable in the form of an unfinished or prospective activity for which assistance from the librarian is relevant. In the data for this study patrons typically formulate their request turns with this feature and librarians repeatedly display an orientation to this feature in their interpretation of action in this position. The data below provide additional evidence that the presentation of an assistable in terms of an unfinished library-related activity is not an analyst's construct developed exogenously and applied to the interactions, but the practice is meaningful to the interactants as displayed in the talk. When a patron does not formulate a request turn using this feature, a librarian may design a response as if the patron had done so or solicit a patron's reformulation of the turn to incorporate an unfinished activity.

In extract (21) the patron produces a request turn as an inquiry that does not

present an unfinished activity, but the librarian nonetheless displays an orientation to one in constructing a response. In doing so, the librarian treats the request as not merely seeking information, but implicating the need for assistance with accomplishing the activity.

(21) On Reserve

- 1 ((L is seated at the desk looking down to the left. When P approaches
- 2 from the right he turns forward to face her.))
- 3 P: ((off camera)) Hi: ((arrives at desk almost in front of L))
- 4 L: Hi. ((P moves closer))
- 5 P: ((Turns body toward L)) If it says an item is on reserve (0.4) how- what
- 6 does (.) that mean exactly.
- 7 L: Generally it means it's ((points)) at that d:esk, (0.4) you call- take
- 8 ((motions as if writing)) down the call number=You can request it
- 9 from that desk=You can't take it out the building generally,
- 10 (0.2)
- 11 P: [((single nod))
- 12 L: [Generally you have to use it within (0.3) the library for about an
- 13 ((shrugs)) hour.
- 14 (0.3)
- 15 P: Okay ((nods)) thank you [so much.
- 16 L: [You're ((smiles)) welcome.

In contrast to the prior examples, the patron formulates an inquiry that does not explicitly mention an unfinished activity, whether ongoing or prospective (lines 5-6). In this case the patron is seeking information that presumably will enable her to use the library's reserve service. Further, the patron constructs the turn as a request for the definition of a library term without making reference to its relevance to her. She opens the turn using the conditional "if", which further depersonalizes the inquiry by allowing for a hypothetical situation. She does not associate the inquiry with any activity in which she is engaged, such as the search for a specific book that carries a reserve location designation.

The librarian displays that he is "answering" the patron's inquiry by building his



response parasitically on her request using "it means". Notably, he opens with "generally" (line 7) and repeats it (line 12), which would seem to contrast with the patron's "specifically". In this manner, he hedges his answer about what tends to apply to items on reserve, but leaves open the possibility that his information might not apply to a particular item. The librarian's response constitutes a set of instructions in that it comprises a sequence of steps that the patron would take to use an item on reserve.

- (1) you call- take down the call number,
- (2) You can request it from that desk,
- (3) You can't take it out the building generally, Generally you have to use it within (0.3) the library for about an ((shrugs)) hour.

By constructing a response that shows the patron how to use the reserve service, the librarian displays that he understands the inquiry as making relevant the supplying of instructions.<sup>15</sup> This may have been occasioned by the patron's initial attempt at the construction of her request. After the patron opened her turn by setting up the condition "If it says an item is on reserve", she first proceeds with what seems will be a "how" question, but aborts it in favor of her request for a definition as a "what" question ("what does (.) that mean exactly"). The librarian formulates the turn as responsive to the patron's initial, then retracted question, which projected the relevance of instructional assistance. Also, a patron's request for the meaning of the term "on reserve" may suggest

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that even though the librarian provides instructions, he does not formulate this response as doing instruction-giving. His turn does not have the canonical features of an instruction giving sequence (Goldberg, 1975). For example, it lacks an organization around instruct-receipt pairs, a pre-beginning or lexical initiator that prepares the receiver for such a turn structure, allowance for repetition of receipted information by an interlocutor, and the negotiation of closure. He instead designs his response to align noticeably with the patron's formulation of the inquiry as a request for a definition. He accomplishes this by supplying the steps as the characteristics of an item on reserve latched together so as to deliver them as part of a single multi-unit turn.

the intended use of such an item, even though, as noted above, the patron's construction of the inquiry does not make reference to its relevance to her. The librarian does not treat her request for the meaning of the term "on reserve" to be an academic question, but one related to the unstated, yet implied project of using the reserve service. Thus, even though the patron's inquiry does not incorporate a reference to a prospective or unfinished activity, the librarian formulates a response that displays an orientation to assisting with the completion of such an activity.

Another way in which we see a strong orientation on the part of a librarian to providing an assisting response regarding an unfinished library-related activity is that when a patron does not formulate a turn in this manner, the librarian may solicit a formulation that does. In the following example, the librarian treats the patron's inquiry regarding the existence of an item as a request for access to the item. In doing so, he displays that he orients to the inquiry for how it implicates him in solving the patron's problem that involves doing more than answering the question (cf. Kidwell, 2001, p. 24). This response is unremarkable in that as part of mundane social action we routinely perform the minor inferential work that leads to inquiries being acted upon as requests for assistance. For example, when someone asks us "Do you have the time?" we know that to simply respond to the inquiry affirmatively without supplying the time would violate the norms of social interaction (Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1967). Thus, when the patron asks the librarian whether he has a call number diagram (lines 7-8), he responds both with a vocal affirmation and the delivery of the item (line 9). This example from the data corpus deserves attention due to the actions that follow. When the librarian's assisting action proves to be insufficient, the librarian performs interactional work that leads the

patron to formulate a new request so that it incorporates a report of an unfinished library-related activity.

(22) Call Number Directory

- 1 P: ((Approaches front of desk in clockwise move from around the side.))
- 2 L: ((Swivels chair toward P, but mutual gaze is blocked by the monitor.))
- 3 P: ((Gazes downward at paper in her hand))
- 4 P: [((Looks up with extended hand holding paper))
- 5 L: [((Faces forward)) P moves toward L with extended hand holding paper.
- 6 ((Mutual gaze as P arrives almost at the front position of desk))
- 7 P: Do you by any chance have a diagram of what (.) call numbers are on
- 8 what floors in stacks.=
- 9 L: =If you have good eyes (.) yes. ((Gives patron handout))
- 10 P: O::h my goodness my dear hehehehehehe[hehehehehehehehehehe
- 11 L: [What are you looking for then.
- 12 P: U::m I'm looking for ee and aitch eff.
- 13 L: Ees are gonna be upstairs on the (0.4) third floor,
- 14 P: Oka:y.

By opening his response turn (line 9) with “If you have good eyes”, the librarian shapes the expectation of the patron toward the likelihood of a less than satisfactory outcome (Maynard, 1996; Heritage & Stivers, 1999). Although the valence of the ultimate answer is positive (“yes”), the librarian’s preface forecasts that there is a problem with the usability of the diagram. When the patron confirms the problem with the small print on the diagram (line 10), the librarian orients to it as indicating an assistable and solicits a request for assistance with the inquiry “What are you looking for then.”, with the turn-final “then” associating the offer as a consequence of the diagram’s non-usability. The librarian formulates this inquiry in terms of an activity in which the patron is currently engaged. The patron designs her response as a recognizable answer to the librarian’s question by initiating it with “I’m looking for”. Thus, through the soliciting inquiry the librarian has gotten the patron to formulate her second request in terms of an explicit need to complete a library-related activity. The librarian treats the

request for the call number directory as insufficient as a request. The interactional work he does to get the patron to reissue the request suggests an institutional orientation to the formulation of assistables around a library-related unfinished activity.

An institutional orientation to the formulation of requests around the completion of library-related activity is also evident in the following case (extract 23), in which the librarian ignores a patron's inquiry and pursues a reformulation of the request in terms of such an activity. Thus, when a patron does not design a request turn as an assistable with this feature, a librarian may issue an inquiry designed to organizationally prefer a request that is formulated with this feature.

(23) Literature Section

- 1 P: ((Approaches desk from side)) Sorry hhh=
- 2 L: =That's oka[:y.
- 3 P: [Is there any where there is literature section: (.)
- 4 except that. ((pointing))
- 5 (.)
- 6 L: .hh ↑Yeh. ((nods, reaches for computer mouse and maintains gaze))
- 7 P: Where i-
- 8 L: ((turning to computer)) Okay what are you looking for.
- 9 P: U:[hm
- 10 L: [A particular book or]
- 11 P: No jus:t literature.

The patron presents the librarian with a yes/no question regarding the availability of a literature section in the library other than a leisure reading collection nearby the reference desk (lines 3 and 4). The librarian responds with a simple affirmation token (line 6), but also reaches for the computer mouse on the reference counter, which indicates that he understands the inquiry to be associated with a request for service and is preparing to work on a request. However, he maintains gaze and body orientation toward the patron, which shows that he has not yet shifted to working on the computer. In this manner, the librarian displays that he does not treat the patron's inquiry as an actionable

request, but is preparing for a forthcoming request. The patron follows with an inquiry as to the location of the section (line 7). This move provides evidence that the patron designed the initial turn as a request for service and therefore treats the librarian's "Yeh" as insufficient for the course of action projected by her turn. The librarian responds by receipting the request ("Okay") and initiating an interrogative insertion sequence, specifically asking the patron to identify the activity in which she is engaged (line 8). By choosing to construct his inquiry using "looking for", the librarian links the patron's request with an unfinished activity, even though the patron had not formulated the initial inquiry with this feature. Moreover, in doing so the librarian displays an orientation to requesting as a practice that entails the presentation of an assistable involving the accomplishment of a library-related activity.

The counter-examples presented in this section provide insight into what constitutes an assistable for a librarian. Throughout the data in this study librarians treat patrons' reports of unfinished activities as requests for assistance, or assistables that make relevant an assisting action in response. In each of the counter-examples the librarian responds to a patron's initial request with a turn that leads to the construction of the request in terms of an unfinished activity. When librarians inspect a patron's turn in the assistance slot for an assistable, one of the salient features of the turn that aids in recognizing it as an assistable may be the patron's reference to an unfinished library-related activity. If the turn is not formulated with this feature, the librarian may undertake interactional work to reformulate it as such.

### Discussion

The aim of this chapter has been to describe a particular communicative practice in the library setting, namely, how patrons formulate requests in reference desk service interactions. Pre-beginning interactional work also contributes to the accomplishment of requesting. The patron issues the turn at a designated library reference desk to a librarian who is located at the service position. The sequential position in which requesting occurs provides a very strong interactional resource for the treatment of an action in this assistance slot as implementing a request. A patron's turn in the assistance slot does not carry a heavy burden for doing the work of requesting for librarians inspect this institutionally established space for an assistable. An action in this sequential environment will be taken to be doing requesting unless a patron formulates the turn specifically to be implementing another type of action.

In the data for this study, patrons typically formulate their requests by presenting to a librarian an assistable in the form of an ongoing or prospective library-related activity to be completed. Patrons may design a request to show that they have already attempted to accomplish the activity or explicitly characterize their circumstance as problematic as a means of establishing the basis for the request for assistance. Patrons formulate their request turns to indicate the type of assistance that is needed, although librarians do not always issue format-conforming responses. The data for this study reveal two types of assisting responses that are made relevant by particular request formulations: (1) assisting to accomplish the activity through instruction-giving; (2) giving the patron access to the resource(s) necessary to accomplish the activity.

Librarians routinely treat patrons' reports of an unfinished activity as soliciting assistance with accomplishing its completion, whether it is by helping the patron accomplish the activity, beginning to work on obtaining the information necessary to help, or initiating an interrogative sequence that solicits the information relevant to aiding the patron. When a patron issues a request that is not assistance-ready, the librarian and the patron collaborate in the production of a request that is actionable through practices that provide sufficient information to enable assistance: (1) a patron's repair of an initial request turn that is not actionable; (2) a librarian's interrogative insertion sequence; (3) a patron's extended narrative.

The data show that librarians inspect patrons' turns for reports of an unfinished activity not only as a means of interpreting the patron's turn as a request, but also in a way that is organizationally consequential for the interaction, for if a patron does not design the request in a way that presents an assistable as an unfinished library activity, the librarian may respond as though it had been or solicits a reformulation of the request in these terms. The formulation of an assistable as an unfinished library-related activity appears to be a critical feature in the understanding of patrons' turns as requests for assistance. In more than three-quarters of the cases in this study patrons design their turns with this feature. Moreover, in those few cases in which patrons choose a different turn design, librarians' responses display an institutional orientation to the formulation of assistables with this feature.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Summary of Findings

This study provides an account of the opening sequences of face-to-face library reference desk transactions based on video recordings of actual service interactions in a college library. I show how librarians and patrons work together to reach a place in the interaction where a request by the patron is the next relevant action. In addition, I show how patrons construct these requests and librarians construct their responses. Although the literature of reference librarianship treats a patron's request as a unilateral action, the analysis of the data in this study reveals that requesting is a collaborative communicative practice. Moreover, requesting is observed to be one action in a sequence of actions that comprise a reference service encounter. Patrons and librarians jointly shape the course of action in an opening sequence to provide an organizational slot in which patrons' requests typically occur. While requesting is expectable in this sequential position, the data show that patrons consistently design their turns in this slot to be understandable specifically as requests while they provide the information necessary for the recipient to respond with an assisting action.

#### Openings Set Up Requests

During the opening sequence of a reference desk transaction patrons and librarians accomplish several interactional tasks. First, they achieve a mutually ratified state of interaction. Second, they establish a spatial arrangement at the desk that is suited to the transaction of the business of a reference service encounter. The organization of the opening sequence consists minimally of an approach-availability display pair



followed by a request.

This study identified three ways that greetings are used to advance the accomplishment of requesting in reference desk transactions. (1) Patrons use greetings to maintain a state of engagement in an incipient interaction when it has been initiated too far from the reference desk to transact business through talk. (2) Librarians use greetings to project the conditional relevance of a request in the next turn through a greeting + solicit construction. (3) When librarians initiate talk with a stand-alone greeting term, they may reduce the opening sequence by passing on the next turn at talk if the patron returns the greeting. This interactional move provides the patron with a sequential position in which to make a request.

#### Requests as Assistables Involving the Completion of an Activity

In the data for this study patrons typically formulate their requests by presenting an assistable in the form of an ongoing or prospective library-related activity to be completed. Patrons may design their requests to show a prior attempt to accomplish the activity on their own or make a strong case for assistance by characterizing their circumstance as problematic. The data revealed two types of assisting responses that patrons' requests made relevant: (1) instruction giving; (2) giving access to library resource(s).

Librarians respond to patrons in ways that display their understanding of a turn as doing requesting. Assisting actions that were observed in the data are: (1) proposing a solution to the patron's problem; (2) beginning to work on solving the problem; (3) initiating an interrogative sequence that solicits information relevant to solving the problem. When a patron issues a request that is not assistance-ready, the librarian and the

patron collaborate on the production of an actionable request through one or more of the following practices: (1) the patron may augment the initial request turn; (2) the librarian may initiate an interrogative insertion sequence; (3) the patron may construct an extended, narrative request turn.

In the data for this study librarians consistently recognize a patron's report of an unfinished activity as constituting an assistable. Librarians' common orientation to requests as involving the completion of a library-related activity has not been reported in prior research. This study identifies the feature of needing assistance with completing a library-related activity as highly relevant to request-making in library reference service encounters as evidenced in the participants' talk-in-interaction. In addition, it shows the librarians' orientation to this feature to be consequential to the trajectory of action, for even when a patron does not construct a request around an unfinished activity, the librarian may formulate a response as though the request had been or may solicit a reformulation of the request in terms of an unfinished activity.

### Implications

The results of this study have implications in two primary areas: (1) the study of social interaction; (2) the practice of reference librarianship. For researchers who study social interaction, this dissertation adds to a body of literature that relies on actual talk-in-interaction to provide empirical accounts of how interlocutors collaboratively accomplish actions in everyday conversation and institutional settings. For practicing librarians, this study demonstrates the utility of adopting an alternative model of communication and an associated methodology to understand requesting in reference service interactions. I elaborate on the potential contributions to both domains in the remainder of this section.

### Implications for the Study of Social Interaction

This study contributes to a corpus of research that recognizes the centrality of action in the understanding of social organization and promotes the analysis of naturalistic data to provide accounts for how actions are accomplished. More specifically, the findings of this study support and extend prior conversation-analytic research that focuses on institutional talk. The findings suggest that requesting should be approached as a collaborative accomplishment of service providers and service requesters, rather than as the unilateral action of a single actor. The remainder of this section discusses implications with regard to two practices that have already received considerable attention in the study of social interaction: (1) how requesting is done, (2) openings in service interactions,

How Requesting is Done: This study provides a description of requesting that shares features with accounts of the practice in other institutional settings. Prior research has shown that one of the ways by which a speaker may request assistance from an expert is to report an assistable for which the recipient is presumably able to provide help (e.g., Kidwell, 2001; Robinson, 2001). Library patrons overwhelmingly formulate their requests in this manner. My findings provide further insight into the practice of requesting by showing how a service provider and a service requester jointly act to make a request actionable. In this way, it extends prior work that investigates the use of interrogative insertion sequences (e.g., Merritt, 1976) and the construction of problem narratives (e.g., Halkowski, in press) in the enactment of service encounters.

The results of this study also support prior work that has identified the tendency of speakers to formulate requests indirectly, perhaps due to the imposition any request

carries on the recipient (cf. Lerner, 1996). There is distributional evidence in everyday conversation that requests are dispreferred first pair parts (Schegloff, 2007). In mundane talk, requests are typically delayed in interactions or avoided entirely through pre-requests that result in offers of assistance. While requests in this study occur early in the interaction, as they do in other institutional service encounters, library patrons rarely produce a direct request for assistance. Instead, they present an assistable that is understandable as a request for assistance due to its occurrence in an organizational slot in which requesting is expected. Nonetheless, the data show that patrons use certain formats for these turns; with regard to the cases in this study, patrons formulate these assistables as reports of unfinished library activities. The indirectness of request formulations in service encounters has been observed in other settings (e.g., Gill, Halkowski & Roberts, 2001) as a reflection of the imposition of requesting even in a setting which is institutionally designed to support requests for assistance.

Openings in Service Interactions: This study contributes to our understanding of the interrelationship of verbal and nonverbal communicative practices to advance a course of action in institutional service encounters (see Robinson, 1998). In order for a librarian and patron to transact a reference service encounter that involves physical co-presence they must first manage their entry into an interaction and create a frame of space in which to conduct it, specifically at the reference desk service point. As the data illustrate, these interactional tasks are accomplished primarily through gaze and body orientation. Nonetheless, the co-interactants deploy these nonverbal resources along with talk as part of establishing an organizational slot in which the patron may make a request for assistance.

This study also provides strong evidence for the burden that sequential position carries in the understandability of turns as doing requesting. Library patrons are able to formulate requests as reports of unfinished activities, because they are issued in a sequential slot in which an assistable is expected. The data also support prior research on the organization of openings to service encounters that identifies a reduced structure vis-à-vis openings of telephone conversations. Zimmerman and Whalen (1987) posited that the reduction of the opening sequence of telephone calls to emergency services displays the interlocutors' orientation to two factors: (1) their anonymity, which accounts for the absence of greeting and *howareyou* sequences; (2) the "sequential achievement of prompt response to urgent need" (p. 178). These features are evident in extract (1).

(1) [MCE/20-7a/191] (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987)

- 1 CT: Mid-City police and fire
- 2 C: Yes kin ya get uh kin ya get somebody over her eright away we've got uh
- 3 gal that's just .hh ready tuh pass out. She's hh oh: (1.0) she's passed out,
- 4 okay
- 5 CT: Okay what address?
- 6 C: Okay thirty thirteen Sixteenth Avenue an hurry, she's passed right out,
- 7 she's forty five years ol:d an=
- 8 CT: =thirty what?
- 9 C: Okay, three zero one three

The call taker (CT) responds to the call with an institutional identification (line 1). The caller (C) ratifies the initiation of the interaction with the intended recipient of the call through a minimal affirmation token ("Yes") and immediately proceeds to a request for assistance (line 2). As Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) pointed out, the accomplishment of the opening so that the patron's first turn at talk is an organizational position for a request supports the transaction of business involving an emergency situation.

The data in the present study suggest that it may also be fruitful to approach the

organization of the opening sequence of emergency service calls as an *elaboration* of the minimum sequence organization of a service encounter, with the elaboration consisting of actions deployed by the interlocutors as resources to address the contingencies of telephone-mediated communication. In contrast to face-to-face reference desk transactions, emergency service calls require a vocal identification sequence due to the absence of visual resources to accomplish this work. In the following case of a reference encounter collected for this study the opening sequence appears to be reduced even further than the typical emergency services call, yet there is no urgent need associated with this interaction.

(2) Cliff Notes

- 1     P:     ((walks up to counter while reading from a slip of paper))
- 2     P:     Mm u:h where can I find the Cliff Note.
- 3     L:     ((X ← gaze meets here))
- 4     L:     We don't carry Cliff Notes.

In a single turn at talk (line 2) the patron initiates and ratifies the interaction, as well as provides a reason for the encounter. P secures L's attention, as displayed through gaze coordination (line 3), with a turn-initial speech perturbation. As noted above, library patrons may establish themselves as seeking assistance by the action of approaching the desk. Due to the interactants' focus on the core goal of service delivery (cf. Drew and Heritage, 1992a, p. 22) in service encounters such as a reference desk transaction, an opening sequence may be as minimal as illustrated in extract (2). When openings in institutional service interactions are elaborated, analytical attention may be directed toward understanding what the interlocutors are accomplishing with the additional turns at talk.

### Implications for the Practice of Reference Librarianship

This dissertation has both substantive and methodological implications for the future study of library reference interactions. Researchers may begin to approach reference service encounters as jointly-produced social activities and direct their analytical attention to how librarians and library patrons use interactional resources for achieving intersubjective understanding. Requesting may be reconceptualized beyond what the literature now labels as “questions” or “queries.” Finally, researchers may explore what other actions are understandable for the type of turn formulation that a librarian or patron uses in a specific position within a sequence of action.

With regard to methodological implications, one of the aims of this study is to demonstrate the value of taking a conversation-analytic approach to examining a particular communicative practice in the library setting, namely, the enactment of an opening of a reference interaction, including requesting. While this study dealt with only one segment of the reference interaction, the methods and theoretical foundations of conversation analysis may be applied to a wide range of communicative practices that constitute social interaction in the library. Certainly, the lack of library research using actual talk-in-interaction has diminished the effectiveness of library school curricula to prepare reference librarians for work in the field by limiting their training to idealized representations of service interactions. In the remainder of this section I discuss the potential implications of the results of this study with regard to further research on: (1) the importance of sequential position; (2) displaying availability; (3) request formulations; and (4) types of relevant responses.

Sequential Position: One of the findings of this study is the importance of

sequential position in the accomplishment of requesting. Similarly, librarians may look to the organizational position of other actions in reference service encounters for alternative understandings that previously have been attributed to the intentions of librarians and patrons as presumed by a researcher or factors that are exogenous to interaction such as power (cf. Robinson, 1998). The results of this study may encourage researchers and practitioners to look instead to how librarians and patrons display in their talk an orientation to their understanding of one another's actions, as well as how these actions are shaped by and shape the organization of an episode of interaction.

Displaying Availability: A persistent concern in the library literature has been the reluctance of library patrons to approach a reference librarian when they need assistance (Swope and Katzer, 1972; Gothberg, 1977; Lederman, 1981; Larason & Robinson, 1984; Liu and Redfern, 1997). Radford's (1998) interviews with library patrons immediately following reference desk transactions demonstrate that when patrons have a choice of librarian to engage in an interaction, a salient factor in the selection is which librarian displays availability through eye contact or change in position that signals awareness of the patron's approach to the desk. Radford distinguished nonverbal displays of availability from the active "initiation" of the interaction through a solicitation of a request and or physical movement toward the user. The results of the present study confirm Radford's conclusion with respect to the importance of librarians' displays of availability in the initiation of the interaction, as well as the general means by which they are accomplished. Throughout the data the most common method that librarians use to accomplish a display of availability is through the placement of gaze and the orientation of body toward a potential interlocutor. This finding conforms with the results of prior



studies that have documented the use of gaze and body orientation to enact engagement (C. Goodwin, 1981; Robinson, 1998).

This study extends Radford's (1998) observations by demonstrating that librarians' displays of availability may be understood as part of a larger sequence of action initiated by a patron's approach to the desk. These approach-availability display sequences serve to secure attention and align reciprocity as a means of initiating an interaction. When a patron's approach to the reference desk fails to secure a display of availability in the form of gaze direction or a verbal response, the patron employs another attention-securing action. This finding encourages librarians to view all verbal and non-verbal actions within a context of social interaction, rather than continuing to treat actions as isolated unilateral moves. While this study specifically challenges the dominant treatment of librarians' opening talk, facial expressions, or movement as the presumed initiation of an interaction, the library literature is replete with analyses of communicative phenomena that are investigated without regard for the action that may have preceded it. My results may encourage librarians to take into account the complete interactional context of a communicative behavior in order to understand the action it is accomplishing.

This study also serves to inform librarians that approach-availability sequences accomplish additional interactional goals when the reference interaction involves physical co-presence in a setting such as the library reference desk. These sequences establish and maintain a spatial arrangement appropriate for the occasion of talk. In openings to reference desk transactions, the interlocutors jointly pursue a line of action that first establishes co-orientation and ratifies their state of mutual participation, while

achieving the relative proximity and position at the desk that is necessary for them to conduct business. Furthermore, through the management of action formation in the opening sequence, the interlocutors display a concern for advancing quickly to the request position and thereby achieve an institutionally-constrained focus to the talk. The training of librarians in specific settings should take into account that the management of the patron's approach to the reference desk is not simply a function of architecture and furniture placement. The reference interaction begins before the patron reaches the desk and librarians need to pay attention to how their verbal and nonverbal behaviors promote the achievement of co-orientation, availability display, and spatial arrangement. As this study shows, patrons may use greeting terms to maintain co-orientation during an approach to the desk from a large distance. If the patron produces the first utterance on the way to the desk and the librarian responds, there may be a delay before the patron can achieve the physical proximity necessary to issue a hearable request turn. The analysis in chapter five illustrates that a patron may issue another greeting turn in this situation or remain silent until at the desk. Librarians should be prepared to assist with advancing the action to a request slot by soliciting a request at this stage of the opening (e.g., "How may I help you?").

Schegloff (2002, p. 368) argued that "availability" is better understood not as the state of one's potential interlocutor, but in terms of the relative states of availability of co-interactants. As the data in this study demonstrate, librarians and patrons manage their mutual displays of availability to engage in an interaction throughout the patron's physical approach to the desk so that the interaction takes place at a recurring location and within a consistent physical distance vis-à-vis one another. If librarians begin to treat

availability as a collaborative achievement, training will focus less on the proper deployment of unilateral welcoming gestures, facial expressions and utterances and more on what moves would be recognizably responsive to a patron's prior action while advancing the interaction to an assistance slot in which a request may be made.

Request Formulations: As discussed in chapter two, previous research on reference service encounters treats requests as questions or queries. The association of the action of requesting with a specific syntactic format has influenced research that informs the practice of reference librarianship. For example, Dewdney and Michell (1998) claimed that that patrons frequently begin their requests with "Do you have", "Where is", or "I need information on" (p. 532). The authors based their analysis on a database of several hundred records of unsuccessful reference service encounters. While the authors did include transcripts of actual reference transactions as a source for their data, most of the sources they cited are based on librarians' recollections of episodes such as reports from librarians attending workshops, interviews with librarians, postings on an Internet newsgroup for reference librarians, and anecdotes reported to them. Given the findings in this study, researchers and practitioners may begin to acknowledge the full range of request formulations used by library patrons and perhaps identify practices for request making that are not contained in the collection of requests that I assembled.

Types of Relevant Responses: Taylor (1968) asserted that "[w]hen a patron approaches the reference desk, he has some picture in his mind as to what he expects his answer to look like, i.e., format data, size, etc." (p. 187). Previous research on reference requests has relied on typologies that are based on the resources that would be used to respond to a request or the subject area into which the request may be classified (Carter &

Janes, 2000; Diamond & Pease, 2001; Epps, 2003). This study provides evidence that patrons formulate requests to project the relevance of specific types of assisting responses. Thus, the focus of this study on *actions* in the reference encounter may contribute to a re-conceptualization of the types of responses that patrons expect from a specific request formulation. Instead of classifying requests according to the library resources they implicate, librarians may attend to the type of responsive action they make relevant (e.g., instruction-giving).

### Limitations of the Study

Although the conclusions reached in this study are grounded in the data presented, the study might have benefited from a larger number of cases. While valuable conversation-analytic research has been accomplished using only a single episode of interaction for analysis (e.g., Schegloff, 1987a), access to a large collection of instances aids in the description of an action such as requesting that can be enacted in a variety of ways. My analysis of the approach-availability display sequences had to rely on only a few cases, because the recordings were not set up to track patrons as they approached the reference desk. The significance of the management of a patron's physical approach to the desk was not foreseen when the study was originally designed. Given the number of crew members and the equipment available, recording focused on the conduct of patrons and librarians at the reference desk. Fortunately, there were several instances in which the camera recorded patrons as they approached the desk and these were analyzed in detail. In retrospect, if I had known that the organization of the opening to the interaction would be an object of analysis, the recordings would have been designed to capture all the patrons at the earliest possible point of their physical approach in the library.

Data collection for this study was scheduled intentionally during non-peak hours at the reference desk when the desk is staffed by only one librarian. During higher volume periods the reference desk at the host institution is staffed by at least two librarians. Thus, the results of this study do not account for the enactment of openings of reference desk encounters when the patron may initially address more than one possible request recipient. Similarly, the analysis does not account for cases where librarians at the desk may jointly construct a response to a patron's request. One reason for the timing of the recordings was to accommodate the host institution, which preferred the data collection to be minimally intrusive. Performing the recording during peak hours posed a greater risk of interfering with the conduct of business at the reference desk, especially since users were required to sign consent forms to participate in the study. The scheduling was also intended to collect data to support the study of interactions between one patron and one librarian, because reference service encounters are generally enacted in dyads. In one case that was omitted from the study for technical reasons, a librarian who was a member of the crew recording the interaction became involved in responding to a patron's request after the patron had already engaged with the reference librarian on duty. The episode provided a glimpse into how the participants might manage the entry of a librarian into the interaction when he or she was not the recipient of the request. Such a situation undoubtedly occurs at reference service points when they are staffed with multiple librarians, but no research has been done on this phenomenon. The analysis of non-dyadic reference service encounters may be suitable for a future study based on a collection of instances specifically assembled for this purpose.

By scheduling the data collection during a school intersession the study contains a

disproportionately high number of service encounters involving international students, who are more likely to be on campus at this time. As a result, more than half of the cases may involve patrons who are non-native speakers of English. There are some instances in which the librarian initiates a repair to clarify the hearing of a patron's request possibly based on non-standard pronunciation. However, the enactment of the repair sequences conforms to the general organization of repair (see Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence in the data of librarians orienting to a patron as a non-native speaker or any special relevance of this status displayed in their talk. While cultural differences may be found in practices for requesting, the data in this study do not contribute to addressing that issue.

Despite the limitations of this study, its strength lies in its unique analysis of naturally-occurring cases of talk-in-interaction to describe a set of communicative practices in reference service encounters. The cases on which the descriptions are based provide strong examples of these practices and the co-participants clearly display their orientation to the interactional work described. Thus, the actions are members' concerns, rather than constructs imposed by the analyst. The transcripts of the data and the

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<sup>16</sup> For example, in the extract below P self-initiates repair with a repeat of the trouble source (lines 4 and 6) after his request does not yield a response from L (lines 2, 3 and 5).

Tax form

- |    |    |  |
|----|----|--|
| 1  | P: | Uh please, (.) I need the tax form for nineteen ninety nine.             |
| 2  |    | (0.6)  |
| 3  | L: | [Tch   |
| 4  | P: | [for ste:ts.   |
| 5  |    | (1.0)  |
| 6  | P: | State's tax fo:rm. [(st-)  |
| 7  | L: | [Ne:w York State;  |
| 8  | P: | Ye::s  |
| 9  | L: | O:ka:(h)y. (.) for nineteen ninety: ni::ne?                              |
| 10 | P: | Y:es.  |
| 11 | L: | A::hm hhhh let's see. w- we might be able to find <u>that</u> u:m (.) by |
| 12 |    | going the uh the web site. for the uh State of New York?                 |

accompanying images used as the basis for the claims made in this study are available to other analysts to confirm or reject.

### Future Research

In addition to the findings reported above, the data in this study suggest that further conversation-analytic research may yield other insights with regard to reference service encounters. The analysis of the data in this study opens opportunities to investigate or re-examine interactional phenomena in libraries and develop professional practices grounded in a richer understanding of social action in the library setting. Each of the topics below is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but may be a fruitful source of inquiry for future research.

Managing Expectations: The data in this study indicate that patrons may formulate their request turns to prepare the librarian for the degree of difficulty (or imposition) associated with an incipient request. In the following example, the patron opens his report of wanting to know something with the qualifier “just” to characterize the request as posing a minor demand on the recipient in terms of difficulty or scope (line 5).

#### (3) Borrower Limitation

- 1     P:     ((Approaches the desk with extended hand holding slip of paper))
- 2     L     ((Gazing downward)) Ye:s::
- 3     P:     <Hi how are you.>
- 4         (.)
- 5 → P:     .hhh U::h I just wanna u- (0.2) know how to read thi:s, ((points and taps
- 6         on paper)) u:h (0.5) this section (.) for the books<sub>l</sub>
- 7     L:     O:ka::y ai:tch cu:e (0.4) u::m all of the ai:t↓ches, (0.2) are on the fourth
- 8         floo:r.

In contrast, the following extract demonstrates how a patron prepares a librarian for a potentially difficult request. The patron responds to the librarian’s solicitation of a

request with “Ye:a:h u:m: <I hope” (line 8). The patron’s use of “I hope” introduces uncertainty about whether the librarian may be able to provide assistance. The delay in the issuance of the request through this prefatory utterance and the dispreference marker “u:m:” foreshadows the possible delivery of an especially imposing request.

(4) Business Quotation

- 1 P: ((Waits behind S at reference desk))
- 2 L: Oka:y? ((to S))
- 3 S: Thank you very [much.
- 4 L: [You're welcome
- 5 (1.5)/((S steps away from counter while L looks down at counter
- 6 and writes. P remains in same position.))
- 7 L: ((Gazing down at counter while writing)) Hi could I help? you.
- 8 → P: ((walking to desk))Ye:a:h u:m: <I hope. ((smiles))
- 9 (.)
- 10 L: Yeah/((nod))
- 11 P: I:m looking for: <I'm writing a paper about (.) investing?
- 12 L: ((nod))

The data also suggest that librarians work to manage patrons’ expectations regarding the outcome of a request for assistance. As the first-pair part of a request-response adjacency pair, a patron’s request projects the relevance of an assisting action in the librarian’s next adjacent turn. Librarians are accountable to patrons for the absence of an assisting response. The data provide instances in which a librarian shapes the patron’s expectation for the possibility of failure. In this manner, librarians account for the potential absence of an expected second pair part. Ross and Dewdney’s (1998) data also provide examples of librarians managing patrons’ expectations.

The librarian warns the user to expect defeat because the topic is too hard, obscure, large, elusive, or otherwise unpromising. One librarian responded to the initial request for information about a character called Alice Bluegown by saying, “I don’t know if we will be able to find that. Gee, that’s pretty obscure. Well I’ll try this [typing ‘gown’ into the computer] on the off chance.” When neither “gown” nor “Bluegown” produced promising hits, she said, “I didn’t think we would find anything. You might want to try [another city] Library or maybe Toronto” (negative closure strategy number two above). Asked for information on



how carnival glass is made, another librarian typed in “carnival” and got sixty entries dealing with carnivals and fairs. She typed in “glass,” found glass manufacturing, and said repressively, “This is quite large.” Another user commented, “She seemed to imply that this was going to be a long drawn-out process and that probably nothing would be found.” “Your question is rather elusive,” warned another librarian. This strategy blames the anticipated failure to get an answer on the intractable nature of the question itself rather than on ineffective search skills.

Ross and Dewdney (1998) interpreted the librarians’ interactional work of preparing a patron for a negative service outcome as a tactic for avoiding responsibility for potential failure. An alternative interpretation of the librarian’s action is available if we approach the utterances from the perspective of sequence organization. From this view, the librarian’s interactional move displays an orientation to the conditional relevance of an assisting response and the normative accountability for providing such a response. The librarian may be preparing the patron for the possibility of failure with respect to the delivery of assistance and thereby shows his or her own accountability to the patron for an assisting response. An analysis of the interactions referenced in Ross and Dewdney’s study would be necessary to determine if this interpretation is supported by the displayed orientations of the co-participants, but unfortunately the actual talk was not recorded. Further research is needed on practices for managing expectations that are enacted by patrons in making a request and librarians in responding to a request.

Initial Requests: Eichman (1978) differentiated a patron’s “opening” question in a reference service interaction from the subsequent questions that a patron poses as part of the reference interview. This distinction is preserved by Wu (2005), who denoted the latter as user “elicitations” and treats them as exemplary of micro-level information

seeking<sup>17</sup>. Now that this study has provided an account of how requesting is done in reference service encounters, research could be applied to test the claim of a difference in initial and subsequent requests. Are there differences that are demonstrably relevant to the interactants? Do patrons formulate requests as recognizably “initial”?

Lexical Choice: Prior research on institutional talk-in-interaction has shown that through the use of technical terminology speakers make claims to specialized knowledge and invoke an institutional identity (Drew and Heritage, 1992a). In several cases in the data for this study, library patrons appear to use proto-technical library terms to display their competence as a library user and present themselves as someone who has attempted to solve a problem before seeking assistance from, or imposing on, a librarian. Future studies could focus specifically on the role of lexical choice in patrons’ knowledge claims and their design of requests to a recipient who is a librarian (cf. Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974).

Re-examining Closure: In the data for this study one of the recurring actions of librarians in response to a patron’s request is a shift of body and/or gaze toward the computer on the desk. In none of the cases in which this occurred did the patron display an orientation to this action as closure implicative. However, Ross and Dewdney (1998) regarded this type of behavior as a move toward closure in the only empirical research on the topic. In support of their position the authors cite the following report from a participant in an experiment that involved library school students who were instructed to visit a library of their choice, ask a question that mattered to them, and provide an account of the experience.

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<sup>17</sup> For a different application of the term “elicitation” to librarian-patron interactions, see Spink, Goodrum and Robins (1998).

At the desk, I asked, “I was wondering if you could help me find some information about degenerative muscle diseases.” The librarian reacted to my question by grimacing somewhat. She was not responding in a negative way, but rather in a way [that] indicated that this question would be tricky. She did not comment at all however, which I found rather awkward. She began typing at her monitor and continued to type quite a long time without saying a word ... I felt so silly standing there silent that I finally spoke when she stopped typing for a moment. I said, “Are you searching for the subject, ‘Degenerative Muscle Diseases?’” She said, “Yes, but I’m not finding anything with those terms.” ... Then she said that the only thing she could suggest I do would be to go to the stacks and try looking at the medical books. She told me the medical books were assigned the number 610.

Ross and Dewdney (1998) classified the librarian’s behavior as a “without-speaking-she-began-to-type” maneuver, which they denote as a tactic designed to end the transaction. The authors attribute this strategy to the need to manage the work flow at the reference desk. Librarians are faced with more patrons than they are able to handle effectively with a thorough reference interview. In order to deal with the volume of users, they look for opportunities to refer them elsewhere, declare the problem solved or unsolvable, or eliminate a lengthy interrogative insertion sequence that would constitute a reference interview. While the patron in this particular interaction may have been uncomfortable waiting while the librarian was performing the search in silence, her report does not suggest that this is due to an understanding of the librarian’s action as initiating closure. Rather, an alternative interpretation of the patron’s account is that she felt excluded from the librarian’s work on the solution to her problem and thereby displays a view of the task as a collaborative one. This suggests that librarians may need to pay attention to the use of online commentary (Heritage and Stivers, 1999) as way to display continuing engagement with the patron and shape expectations of the outcome.

Ross and Dewdney’s (1998) work shares one assumption in common with this dissertation in that the authors conceptualize closure as a collaborative social action.

According to their model, although a librarian may act unilaterally to initiate closure, in response the patron may initiate blocking moves to extend the interaction. However, they base their study on the recalled interactions of library school students in quasi-experimental situations. The results of this dissertation with respect to the action of requesting demonstrate that further research on other actions, such as the achievement of closure may be approached fruitfully using recordings of actual, user-initiated interactions involving lay library patrons. In addition, Ross and Dewdney based their findings on what they consider negative closure initiating moves that are isolated from their context as part of a larger sequence of action. Additional research on closure using recorded interactions should take into account the preceding and subsequent actions of the co-participants in reaching conclusions regarding the communicative strategies of the co-participants. In some cases, a seemingly unilateral move may be an action that is made conditionally relevant by an immediately previous action on the part of an interlocutor. For this reason, analyses of isolated actions may lead an analyst to attribute an outcome to exogenous factors, such as the asymmetry of status between librarian and patron, when the explanation may lie in the sequential organization of the action.

Displaying Preparation: The data for this study contain cases in which patrons formulate their request turns so as to display their own work on the assistable before they sought assistance from the librarian. The following extract provides an example.

(5) Business Quotation

- |   |    |  |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | P: | I'm looking for: <I'm writing a paper about (.) investing?         |
| 2 | L: | ((nod))  |
| 3 | P: | And there was a quote that I heard a long time ago.                |
| 4 |    | (0.3)/((L and P share gaze))                                       |
| 5 | P: | I th- I'm not sure [who <u>said</u> it or exactly what it wa:s:~?] |
| 6 | L: | [ ((smiles)) ]   |
| 7 |    | (0.2)  |

- 8 L: ((slight nod while smiling))  
 9→ P: And I've (.) scoured the Internet looking for it and I can't ↑find it;

In extract (5) the patron uses the verb “scour”, which intensifies the degree of the effort he applied before involving the librarian. The patron’s formulation accomplishes at least two interactional tasks: (1) it foreshadows a difficult request for the librarian; (2) it demonstrates to the librarian that the patron made an attempt to solve the problem independently before imposing a request. There is evidence in the library literature that librarians are attentive to the amount of prior work that a patron has done when a request is made. Similarly, patrons may recognize the need to display prior work to the librarian. Ross and Dewdney (1998) reported a case in which the patron and the librarian appear to orient to the expectation that a patron will attempt to solve a problem independently before seeking assistance from a librarian and that librarians may hold patrons accountable for this preliminary work.

The librarian implies that the user should have done something else first before asking for reference help. When a user in our library visit study asked for information about good mystery writers, the librarian said in a manner that was “quite severe: ‘Well, of course you’ve already checked in our microfiche catalogue under authors’ names to see if there is any information there.’ ... I felt he was rebuking me for asking for help rather than looking for the information myself.” Questions such as “Have you checked the catalogue?” feed into users’ anxiety about asking for help, for as one user wondered, “Was it irresponsible of me to seek assistance without first having done any searching myself?”

Radford (1999) provided the following report from a librarian asked to describe barriers to the successful reference service encounter: “The poor library...user is one that has not done the proper preparatory work, has not...read the assignment prior to the reference interview and then proceeding to thrust the assignment in front of the librarian’s eyes and expecting immediate digestion and comprehension of what the ultimate aim is” (p. 60). Future research could take a conversation-analytic approach to

describing how patrons display having done prior work and how librarians display their regard for such preparation or the lack of it. In this manner we could gain an understanding of how the situated enactment of a patron's un-preparedness is realized through talk-in-interaction.

### Conclusion

A core goal of this study has been to demonstrate how a perspective on social interaction in libraries that relies on close observation of the recorded details of these interactions can deepen our understanding of how librarians and patrons communicate. I have shown that conversation analysis offers an alternative to the system-centered, information transfer model of communication that has guided research and practice in reference librarianship. In the framework of CA, actions that had previously been regarded as unilateral are understood to be interactional accomplishments. With respect to requesting this approach shifts our attention from the quality of a patron's request to the interactional practices that librarians and patrons jointly enact in request-response sequences. Sacks (1992, I, p. 484) observed that in social interaction "there is order at all points." The analysis of openings of reference service encounters in this study showed that even during the several seconds over which a patron approaches the reference desk, and before a single utterance is produced, the patron and librarian engage in a sequence of coordinated actions that consistently result in the transaction of reference business at a designated service location. My analysis showed this consistency to be an interactional achievement and suggests that the routine nature of other social conduct in libraries may also be described and understood through analysis as talk-in-interaction (cf. Schegloff, 1986).

The results of this study have the potential to change how librarians conduct and study their interactions with patrons. My findings encourage librarians to consider actions within a larger sequential context and seek explanations of social phenomena by examining how they are made relevant by their location in a sequence of action, rather than assuming that they are rooted in the motivations of a single actor. This study uncovered the rich organization of a few moments of several related practices in only one type of library service encounter. The same methodology could be employed to explicate the orderliness of the full range of communicative practices in libraries and re-visit central assumptions regarding social interaction that form the basis of library work. Moreover, this study illustrates the need to ensure that our investigations of librarian-patron social conduct take into account the inter-related use of gaze, talk, and body action. Wider adoption of a research perspective that approaches communication as talk-in-interaction would advance the profession by building a foundation for library practice informed by empirical analysis of actual interactions between librarians and patrons.

## APPENDIX A

### Transcript Notation

The transcript notation used in this study was developed by Gail Jefferson. The description below is based on the explanation provided by Atkinson and Heritage (1984, pp. ix-xvi).

- =      An equal sign indicates when no time interval separates two utterances. It also marks a speaker's continuous flow of speech from one line of transcription to another when an interlocutor's utterance occurs during the turn.
- [      A single left-hand bracket indicates the point at which an ongoing utterance overlaps with another, including when two utterances begin simultaneously.
- ]      A single right-hand bracket marks the point at which utterances stop overlapping.
- { }    Braces enclose data that have been modified to preserve the anonymity of the participants or the data collection site.
- (0.0)   When a time occurs between utterances or within an utterance it is measured in tenths of a second and indicated in parentheses.
- (.)    A pause of less than two-tenths of a second is indicated by a single dot in parentheses.
- A single dash indicates a cut-off of an utterance.
- .      A period indicates a stopping fall in tone.
- ,      A comma indicates continuing intonation.
- ?      A question mark indicates rising intonation
- ↑↓    A single upward or downward arrow marks a rising or falling shift in intonation.
- HI    Upper case marks an utterance that is produced more loudly than the talk



surrounding it.

- ◦ Degree signs enclose an utterance that is produced more softly than the talk surrounding it.
- < > An utterance that is produced more quickly than the surrounding talk is enclosed between “less than signs”.
- > < An utterance that is produced more slowly than the surrounding talk is enclosed between “greater than signs”.
- .h Audible inhalations are indicated by a dot preceding the letter “h”, with the number of letters marking the length of the inhalation.
- h Audible aspirations are indicated by the letter “h”, with the number of letters marking the length of the aspiration.
- \_\_\_ A speaker’s emphasis is indicated by underlining.
- : A colon indicates the extension of a sound with the number of colons marking the length of the stretch.
- (( )) Double parentheses enclose a vocalization ((snort)) or describe a non-verbal activity ((walking to desk)).
- ( ) Single parentheses enclose talk involving transcriptionist doubt. Empty parentheses mark talk that is insufficiently audible to transcribe.
- X On a line of gaze transcription an X marks the point where the gaze of the transcribed reaches a co-interactant.
- ... On a line of gaze transcription dots mark a transition from non-gaze to gaze.
- \_\_\_ On a line of gaze transcription a solid line marks when the gaze of the transcribed talk is directed at a co-interactant.

## APPENDIX B

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## CURRICULUM VITA

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## Education:

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1994	New York University	Linguistics	M.A.
1982	Rutgers University	Library Science	M.L.S.
1979	Rutgers College	Political Science	A.B.

## Employment:

## Baruch College/CUNY

2001-	Chief Information Officer
1997-	Chief Librarian

## New York Academy of Medicine

1992-1997	Director of Information Resources & Director, MAR/NNLM
1991-1997	Academy Librarian
1990	Head, Bibliographic and Access Services Departments
1985-1989	Head, Bibliographic Services Unit

## Kilmer Area Library, Rutgers University

1984-1985	Public Services Librarian
1982-1983	Coordinator, Reference Department
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## Publications:

(2003). Excellence as congruence between library mission and that of the parent institution. *Urban Library Journal* 12, 13-21.

(2001). The impact of the Internet on library administration. In L. G. Liu (Ed.), *The role and impact of the Internet on library and information science* (pp. 25-57). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

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