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ANALYSING TALK

**INVESTIGATING VERBAL INTERACTION
IN ENGLISH**

David Langford

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MACMILLAN

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Preface

The study of language has traditionally focused on the grammatical, lexical and phonological features of particular languages or language varieties. It is in these areas that systematic patterning has been most evident and describable. It was assumed that the use of language in verbal interaction was not subject to predictable patterning. However, the investigation of how people interact verbally with one another has become over recent years an increasingly important part of language study. We do make sense of each other as a matter of routine in all sorts of interaction and in making sense of each other we go beyond the words used. The investigation of how people interact verbally amounts to the investigation of the ways in which we go beyond the words used.

This book sets out to provide beginning students of language use with a guide to setting about their own descriptions of how speakers in particular interactions have behaved in systematic ways and made sense of each others' behaviour. Records of interaction that have been collected by myself, colleagues and students and used in teaching form the basic data of the guide. Transcriptions have been made of material privately recorded or publicly broadcast. Care has been taken to acknowledge the original data sources but given the nature of the material this has not always been possible.

The general analytical approach adopted is derived from the work of conversation analysts such as Paul Drew, Anthony

Wooton, Gail Jefferson, Anita Pomerantz and Emanuel Schegloff. However, the book has concentrated on practical approaches to data analysis rather than on the substantive findings of researchers in the field. The aim has been to demonstrate that there is exciting research potential in any record of conversation and that the skills needed for original description can be developed by individuals working at quite different levels of sophistication in language study.

I do hope that the reading of this book will begin to bring into sharper focus the richness and complexity of everyday verbal interaction.

For those who wish to familiarise themselves with current research, other works have been more concerned to reflect the range of investigations into verbal interaction that have been informed by the approach presented here. In particular the reader's attention is drawn to Robert E. Nofsinger's *Everyday Conversation* (1991) for an accessible recent summary.

DAVID LANGFORD