

○ A TODDLER'S TREATMENT OF *mm* AND *mm hm* IN TALK WITH A PARENT

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The study to be reported in this paper examined the work accomplished by *mm* and *mm hm* in the interactions of a parent and his daughter aged 0;10–2;0. Using the findings of Gardner (2001) for adults, the analysis shows that *mm* accomplished a range of functions based on its sequential placement and prosodic features, whereas *mm hm* was much more restricted to its use as a continuer. The principal concern of the study, however, was to investigate how the child treated these tokens in next turn position. It was found that she was able to display her acceptance or rejection of the response and that she had acquired a stock of conversational resources to do so. Included in the stock were the ability to initiate self and other repair, to correct, and to initiate a new topic to mark completion of a sequence. It is argued that through these actions the child was offering a display of her understanding of sequential connections and appropriateness of fit, and importantly what she deemed to be a sufficient response. The paper ends with a discussion of the child's emerging knowledge as it is revealed in the minutiae of interaction.

INTRODUCTION

In the transcription of a set of interactions between a parent and his child (aged 0;10–2;0), an interesting pattern emerged in the child's treatment of *mm* and *mm hm* from the age of 1;5. There were occasions when she produced either a full or partial repeat of her initial utterance in third turn position, that is, the turn after her father produced a response token *mm* or *mm hm*. An example (which will be analysed shortly) illustrates:

1. Mother: orso. ((bear))
2. Child: bear. (0.7) ook, (0.2) ook a bear;
3. Father: → °°mm°°,
4. Child: → bear.
5. Father: → ((Sniffles)) mm::,
6. Child: → BEAR::.
7. (0.3)
8. ook, (0.2) bear, (0.2) see? (0.2) (bear) okay
9. () ook...

It can be seen, through her repeats in lines 2 and 4 following her father's *mm*, and her subsequent expanded turn in lines 8 and 9 built with an invitation to look, that the child is initiating repair of the trouble source by treating these responses as inadequate. In the conversation analysis (CA) literature, it is well established that any sign of a problem in hearing or understanding is initiated in the next turn relative to the utterance that was the trouble source (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977). The repair can manifest itself as either a full or partial repetition of the original turn, as is the case with the example above.

At the time, these observations and transcriptions were put aside. Only recently did I have cause to revisit this phenomenon when interacting with my adolescent son, a transcript of which follows:

1. Mother: the plastic bag i've given you today is perfect for lunches. don't
2. throw it away.
3. Son: °mm°.
4. Mother: have you understood?
5. Son: mm hm,
6. Father: she wants a bit more commitment from you.
7. Son: mm means yes. look it up in the dictionary.

My son's observation that *mm* means *yes* is partially correct. Gardner's research shows that both *mm* and (more rarely) *mm hm* can mean *yes* (Gardner 2001). The terminally falling *mm* in particular has been shown to do the work of acknowledging, although it is a weaker token than *yes* and shows low involvement. *Mm hm* produced with a terminal rise is prototypically a continuer. In the above conversation, *mm hm* is produced as an answer to a yes/no question. It is rarely used to do such work.

Through the parents' immediate next turns after *mm* (*have you understood?*) in line 4 and after *mm hm* (*she wants a bit more commitment from you*) in line 6, we are able to observe that neither parent has accepted these tokens as appropriate responses. The parents needed a stronger comeback and a commitment that the plastic bag would be returned for recycling. This is borne out by the son's own statement about *mm* and *mm hm* as being synonymous with *yes* in the next turn. The fact that the plastic bag did not come back after this exchange suggests that the son was not prepared to make a commitment to doing so, which may have been reflected in his choice of tokens. This is an interesting point, because it may provide some basis for showing how a cognitive state (an intention to ignore a request or the treatment of the subject as requiring only scant attention, therefore making it easier to subsequently forget) emerges in the interaction.

This paper provides evidence that a child in the second half of her second year of life similarly treated these tokens as not being enough. She may not have recognised them as carrying enough force in the way that *yes* does. This accords with Gardner's characterisation of *mm* in particular as 'a weaker, less committed and less affirming version of *yeah*' and as a 'semantically empty' token (Gardner 2001: 99, 130).

As an aspect of language acquisition, both in the adult's and the child's utterances, these tokens are likely to be ignored or excluded from the analyses. I know of no study that has addressed how children as young as two treat them in conversation. A perception exists that these small but nonetheless important aspects of conversational behaviour, as shown to be so by the participants in the examples just discussed, are not considered worthy of the same intensive scrutiny as more phonologically and semantically prominent words.

So why might the analysis of *mm* and *mm hm* in interactions between children and adults be important to study? A view of language acquisition as grounded in the social can no longer ignore these aspects of conversational behaviour. Findings from studies on adults' use of these tokens can now serve as the basis for making comparisons with children and provide an impetus for focusing on the acquisition of these important aspects of social behaviour at various stages of human development. Furthermore, the child's response to these tokens provides a window on her cognitive growth, as manifested in her ability to make sequential connections and her ability to make this visible to her co-participant through her actions in the ongoing talk. It also provides a window on the conversational resources she has acquired in her second year of life.

Research that attempts to integrate interactional research with studies of cognition is gathering momentum. Molder and Potter (2005: 5), citing the work of Drew (2005), Schaeffer and Maynard (2005) and Pomerantz (2005) in their volume, state that 'interaction analysis can reveal the role of particular kinds of cognitive entities'. In studies of interaction with the very young, both Filipi (2001) and Jones and Zimmerman (2003) argue that notions of intentional behaviour present a real problem if the issue is dealt with as an abstract concept. Focusing on what action is being achieved in interaction, and how adults and children design their responses, results in a different and much richer perspective on this otherwise slippery notion. This provides a much more powerful and palpable way of approaching the otherwise slippery issue of cognitive states and processes such as intentional behaviour, and serves to ground interaction with children as an integration of social and cognitive development.

Wootton's (1997) work in first language acquisition is particularly pertinent here. The analysis of his daughter's requesting devices shows that when she chooses particular

forms of requests, the linguistic selections used ‘attend to, and have systematic connections with, interactional considerations’ (Wootton 1997: 184). As part of her development, the child also becomes aware that others can exercise control over her actions. She therefore monitors their reactions and, in so doing, learns about the constraints on her own conduct. This in turn allows her to draw on her understanding of her experience in earlier sequences of inappropriate behaviour, and to display that she knows that such understandings are shared (Wootton 1997). By analysing how a child in her second year of life treats her co-participant’s response in the next turn position when the response is *mm* or *mm hm*, the study to be reported in this paper builds on Wootton’s work.

In the more traditional Language Acquisition studies, this kind of understanding, and the resources brought to bear on making this understanding explicit and available to her co-participant, are not something of which children as young as (or indeed younger than) two have been shown to be capable. Indeed, as a field, Language Acquisition continues to be dominated by research that deals largely with the actions of the speaker either as parent or as child in isolation from the interactional context. The contribution of the hearer is largely absent. However, much can be missed by focusing simply on the contribution of one speaker or on words, gesture or vocalisations as discrete entities distinct from the unit of talk. Conversely, much can be gained by shifting the focus to participation frameworks (Goffman 1981; Goodwin and Goodwin 2006) where both speaker and hearer align to and shape the talk in progress, as the small but growing number of studies using this approach to investigate the interactions of young children have shown (see for example, Corrin, Tarplee and Wells 2001; Filipi 2003; Jones and Zimmerman 2003; Kidwell 2005; Tarplee 1993; Tarplee 1996; Wootton 1994; Wootton 1997).

The findings and methods of CA provide the best means for getting at the organisation of talk as the achievement of both parent and child, despite some of the difficulties inherent in analysing such talk as identified by Wootton (1997). Chief among these is the adults’ understanding of the child’s utterances that can be in opposition to the child’s intended meaning, evidence for which is provided by the child’s early acquisition of the ability to repair such misunderstandings (Wootton 1991; Wootton 1994; Wootton 1997).

RESEARCH DETAILS

The excerpts chosen for analysis and discussion in this paper represent a series of interactions between one child aged 10–24 months interacting with her father. The child is being brought up bilingually using the one parent one language approach (Döpke 1992),

and some of the excerpts chosen for analysis will be examples of the child's productions in Italian, the language she speaks with her mother. Videotaping took place in the home over a period of fifteen months for two 30-minute sessions a month. In the excerpt at 24 months (fragment 7), the father is deliberately playing with the child by repeating *mm* and *mm hm* in a bid to get a reaction from her. This type of 'play' is a common feature of interactions with young children when parents are keen to show others present in the room how their child reacts to a given situation or what she is capable of producing, and is consonant with some of the research techniques used in Language Acquisition.

All the interactions were transcribed using notations well established in CA (for example, Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson 1996: 461–465). Additional notations to capture non-verbal features include { which denotes the onset of a feature, → to denote data of special interest, P→ to denote pointing, ---→to denote gaze engagement, and ,, to denote gaze disengagement. In keeping with the conventions of Language Acquisition studies, the age of the child in years and months appears in brackets next to the header at the start of each fragment. Analysis begins by focusing on sequences that feature *mm*.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

THE TOKEN *MM*

In sequences when the child is aged 9–13 months, *mm* has a ubiquitous presence in the parents' speech. In this early stage, the most frequently occurring *mm* is the one characterised as a repair initiator by Gardner (2001). It is uttered with a rising intonation contour. Gardner (2001: 94) observes that in his (adult) data, this use of *mm* is infrequent – (it) 'is unusual, an exceptional use of *Mm* rather than a regular one'. The first fragment offers a typical example of its use in these early dyadic interactions. At this early stage, the child's reaction is simply to turn away, in spite of the slot created for some kind of response through the father's actions:

Fragment 1 (0;10)

1. Father: cassie?
2. Child: (0.5) - - - → ((father))
3. Father: how ya ↑doin'?
4. (1.1)
5. → m{m?
6. Child: {, , ,

The father can be seen to be eliciting his child's attention through his summons in line 1. He is able to get the child's attention when she looks up in response to his summons. The long gap and the absence of an action by the child after his question, despite continued gaze engagement, prompts the father to produce the repair initiator *mm*, which works to elicit a response from the child which is something more than gaze. Prosodically, it has a rising contour. At this point the child looks away and the sequence lapses.

Even though the child is not able to produce words at this stage, she is nonetheless able to produce actions, including gestures and vocalisations, which could act as second pair parts, or as Jones and Zimmerman (2003) refer to them, as proto-second pair parts. It is this expectation that prompts the father's action in the fragment above. He is orienting to a missing second pair part or action to fit the first pair part *how are you doing?* The repair is addressed to this absence. This use of *mm* hands the floor to the child, but importantly it also creates a slot to show that a response is being projected. As such it could be characterised as a didactic device.

In the next example, *mm* is again working as a repair initiator. This time the child orients to it as such by repeating her initial turn:

Fragment 2 (1;5)

1. Child: {(eky)
2. {(P→father's ears and hair.)}
3. Father: → what?
4. Child: {(eky.)
5. {(P→father's hair.)}
6. Father: → mm?
7. Child: {(eky.)
8. {(P→father's face.)}
9. Father: → mm?
10. Child: {(eky!)
11. {(P→father's mouth.)}
12. Father: () ↑MOUTH.
13. (0.2)
14. Child: {metch.
15. {(P→a part of father's face.)}
16. Father: ouch.
17. Child: meof.

The child's actions appear to be treating her father's *mm?* as an orientation to her initial turn as a problem of misunderstanding. Unlike the sequence in fragment 1, here she is reacting to *mm?* by following up with the action of repeating her vocalisation. We

note, however, that her turns are not merely a repeat. Her vocalisations co-occur with a pointing gesture. Thus while her vocalisation (*eky*) is repeated three times, the point shifts to a different part of her father's face each time, eventually leading to a label (*mouth*). This label appears to be a satisfactory outcome, as the child's subsequent action of repeating the label makes evident.

Through her actions here, we observe the child's growing competence. Her (re)action shows that she understands the interactional import of *mm?* as a repair initiator and that she is able to deploy a stock of interactional resources (repetition of a vocalisation, the co-occurrence of vocalisation and gesture) to solve the problem of making herself understood.

Fragments 3 and 4 provide further examples of the child's growing competence. The sequence in fragment 3 comes after a long activity of playing with a mix-and-match wooden bear puzzle. The puzzle consists of colour and expression variations of a bear's face, his torso and his lower body. The activity has generated a lot of language on different attributes of the bear. At the point at which the sequence begins, the child is holding up a torso and labelling it *bear*. The father has just responded to the child's label with *that's a nice shirt*, which the child ignores by repeating *bear*, addressed to the mother this time, who responds with the Italian label for bear – *orso*:

Fragment 3 (1;9)

(The child is sitting next to her father and briefly looks at her mother who is off screen.)

1. Mother: orso.
2. Child: {bear. (0.7) ook, (0.2) ook a bear.
3. {,,,
4. Father: → {°mm°°,
5. {((Nods))
6. Child: → bear.
7. Father: → ((Sniffles)) mm::,
8. Child: → BEAR::!
9. (0.3)
10. Child: → ook, (0.2) bear, (0.2) see? (0.2) (bear) okay
11. () ook. (0.2) {off papà? (0.2) (bear)
12. off? (0.2) off?
13. {(She puts a piece of the
14. puzzle on her father's stomach without
15. turning or looking at him.))
16. (0.2) ((The father produces a turning
17. gesture to indicate in which direction to turn
18. the puzzle in.))

19. Father: → °°mm. (0.3) {tha-'s it.'°(0.8) [°beautiful work°.
20. {(Nods)}
21. Child: {{{ook at dis}
22. {{(P→ and picks up
23. another piece; attempts to fit it into the slot.)}
24. Father: nice colour combination cass.
25. Child: ()

In responding to his daughter's label *bear* with a very quiet *mm* in line 4, uttered with a slightly rising intonation, the father is producing a continuer. However, as the child's subsequent repeat of *bear* in line 6 shows, she appears to be orienting to *mm* as an inadequate response. Indeed we note a further repetition and counter-repetition by both father and child in their subsequent turns (lines 7 and 8), although this time the child's *BEAR* is louder. By expanding and reformulating her turn in line 10 to include the attentional *look* and the invitation to see, the child appears to be appealing to some other kind of action as she builds the bear with the puzzle pieces. Perhaps her rejection of both the mother's Italian label and the father's assessment *that's a nice shirt* in the immediately preceding sequence (as evidenced by her continued repetition of *bear* as a response), project that she desires a stronger acknowledgement of the bear that is emerging with each part of the puzzle. There is no uptake by either the father or the mother. A possible reason for its absence could be the fact that the child is looking down as she engages in this activity, and it is therefore not clear who she is addressing. Each parent could thus be orienting to her actions as being aimed at the other parent, or alternatively this can be interpreted as the child engaging in private speech, which is a common phenomenon throughout the period studied.

The father's final *mm* with falling pitch (line 19) is followed by an assessment as the child has successfully placed the puzzle piece. Noteworthy here is the child's action of pointing to the puzzle and uttering what appears to be *look* in overlap with the father's second assessment *beautiful work*. She accepts both assessments and then shifts her attention to another piece of the puzzle. The actions of both participants here indicate that they are both satisfied with the outcome of their actions.

In the next fragment, where the focus is on clarifying meaning, we have another example of *mm* as a minimal receipt coming at the end of a sequence. Here the pitch is falling:

Fragment 4 (2;0)

1. Child: shoe:nɿ
2. (0.9)
3. Father: wha- was that?
4. (0.2)
5. Child: shu:nɿ
6. (0.3)
7. Father: shunɿ
8. (0.4)
9. °what's a shun°ɿ
10. (0.5)
11. Child: (pu:sh,)
12. (0.4)
13. Father: ° mm: , °
14. (0.3)
15. Child: ()
16. (0.5)
17. Father: → ↑mm::↓
18. (4.2)
19. what's that?
20. (0.4)
21. Child: ↑lunch↓
22. (0.4)
23. Father: E:XCELLENT.

It is evident here that the father doesn't understand the child's utterance. This is made explicit through his repair initiations – a possible mishearing (*what was that?*) in line 3, a request for confirmation expressed as a repeat, and a request for a clearer meaning in line 9, which makes explicit what the trouble source is (*what's a shun?*). Through these actions the father treats the child as having the interactional skills to be able to engage in clarifying meaning by producing a clearer version of her initial offering. We note that in response to each of the father's repair initiations, the child self-repairs by attempting to rework her turns. The result is a different articulation of her word each time.

The child understands what is being asked of her, and despite her limited linguistic resources she provides appropriate actions in each of her turns. However, despite these efforts, the father is still unable to comprehend what the child is trying to say. His final response is to respond minimally to the child through *mm*. It is placed in line 17 after the child's indecipherable turn. Intonationally, this *mm* has a falling contour unlike the continuer *mm* in line 13, and it occurs in a topic attrition environment, as evidenced by the switch in topic after the long gap in the next turn (line 18). These are features that are consistent with Gardner's (2001) characterisation of this *mm* as functioning to

complete the sequence. Even though there have been problems in understanding, the *mm* placed at this juncture marks the sequence as complete and acknowledges the child's efforts at making her meaning clear. The significant gap after this *mm*, the absence of a child-initiated action, and the switch in activity, indicate that the child has accepted that her answer was acknowledged and that the *mm* was an adequate response.

Mm, then, is a recurring feature in the parents' talk throughout the period under study. Interactionally, it accomplishes a variety of work, as an analysis of its sequential placement and intonational contours suggests. In the child's responses to these *mm*s there is evidence that she is increasingly sensitive to their interactional import as she develops both linguistically and socially.

MM HM

From the age of 15 months, the child starts to engage in 'practice' activities where she repeats a label very softly, suggesting that she is repeating it to herself and engaging in sound practice. This 'practice' behaviour is part of language play in which children of this age engage (Tarplee 1993). As actions they are an example of private speech, a phenomenon that has its ontogenesis in social interaction (Vygotsky 1962), and which gradually becomes internalised with development (Diaz 1986). In these interactions, *mm hm* is associated almost exclusively with these labelling sequences, as illustrated in the next fragment:

Fragment 5 (1;6)

1. Child: .hhoh-! (.) o:cchi! (.) o:cchi! ((eyes))
2. ((Turns to teddies, points then touches them.))
3. Father: o:cchiζ
4. Child: o:cchi.
5. Father: → mm hm,
6. Child: °°oh::cchi°°.
7. Father: they're his ↑EYE::S.
8. (0.3)
9. Child: oh::cchi.
10. Father: → mm hm. (0.3) ((Moves forward in his chair.))
11. where's his ha::nd?
12. (0.3)
13. Child: ess=
14. Father: =°that's the teddy's ha::nd°.(.) ok. where's the
15. teddy's EAR::ζ

In the next fragment, the father is similarly treating the child's label as a 'practice' action by choosing to respond with the continuer *mm hm* in second turn position:

((Father and child are looking at a catalogue. The child is pointing to a picture.))

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12. Father: {that's a- that's a BOAT.
 13. {P→
 14. Child: {°boat °.
 15. Father: {SP
 16. °mm °.
 17. (1.8)
 18. there are a lot of good things in here.

Here the child invokes her father's attention and involvement in this activity through the attentional *look* in line 1. His response in line 2 is treated as being deficient by the child, as is made evident in her repeat. By producing a clarification question which goes to the heart of the trouble source in the next turn, the father accepts that his initial response was inadequate. He is orienting to the child's repeat as an indication that she wants more involvement from him than the continuer *mm hm* provides. We note the successful outcome of this labelling sequence when a long pause ensues, followed by the shift in attention to another picture and label, which is initiated by the father. In other words, by refraining from producing a turn after the father has produced the label *water*, the child offers a display that she is satisfied with his response.

In the final fragment, the father is playing with the child by deliberately and continuously responding to his child's initiating turn with *mm* or *mm hm*. The child is playing with duplo blocks and building a house in which to put the blocks:

Fragment 7 (2;0)

21. Child: {put de (next) (in) (0.4) inside_i
 22. {, , ,
 23. Father: {mm hm,
 24. {(((nods))
 25. (1.0)
 26. Child: (it's see) (datsa) in{SIDE!
 27. {- - ->father
 28. Father: {mm,
 29. {(((nods)) - - ->C
 30. Child: → ye::s↓.
 31. Father: {mm,
 32. {(((nods)) , , , - - ->C
 33. Child: {yes.
 34. {((Moves her upper body forward towards her
 35. father as she repeats yes.))
 36. Father: {mm,
 37. {ND

38. Child: {yes!
39. {((Moves her upper body forward.))
40. Father: {mm,
41. {((nods))
42. Child: {yes!
43. Father: {mm,
44. {((nods))
45. Child: {YES!
46. {((Moves her body forward.))
47. Father: {mm,
48. {((nods))
49. Child: {YES!
50. {((Moves her body forward.))
51. Father: {mm hm,
52. {((nods))
53. Child: {YE::↑:S:!
54. {((Moves her body forward.))
55. Father: {mm hm,
56. {((nods))
57. Child: {YE:S!
58. {((Moves her body forwards and slams hand down on floor.))
59. , , ,
60. Father: {mm hm,
61. {((nods))
62. (1.0)
63. Child: alex got shoes off, {alex.
64. {((Points to her brother.))

The child seems to be treating *mm* and *mm hm* as equivalents of each other in this sequence. She reacts to their prosodic qualities rather than their phonetic differences. It is evident, as the father's repeated *mm* and *mm hms* continue to be produced, that the child rejects them as insufficient tokens, which mirrors her reaction in fragments 3 and 5. However, on this occasion she does not merely produce a repeat in the next turn. She begins by slightly reformulating her sequence-initiating turn by inviting her father to see. He responds with *mm hm*. In the next turn she rejects his response outright by producing *yes*. This is a clear display of what her expected response is: it makes the father's previous *mm hm* interpretable as deficient.

As the sequence develops and the father continues to produce *mm* and *mm hm*, the child persists with her display of the inadequacy of his responses to her. Each repeat of *yes* becomes louder, and she begins to bring her body into play by moving her upper body towards the father while maintaining her sitting position on the floor. The alignment

of her body with her production of *yes* has the effect of drawing inescapable attention to the full force of her intended meaning. This culminates in the action of slamming her hand on the floor, which offers a display that she is treating her father's actions as completely inadequate. She finally gives up, as evidenced by the shift in topic.

Although there has been some attempt to manipulate the interaction through the father's behaviour here (which, as indicated earlier, is a practice that is both in keeping with research approaches in Language Acquisition and a feature of parent behaviour), the sequence nonetheless provides a very potent picture of the child's growing skills and capacity to use whatever resources she has to display that *mm* and *mm hm* are not her expected response. She initiates repair, and when that fails, she provides insistent correction by producing *yes*, the word she wants him to produce. In the face of what looks like imminent failure, she brings both verbal and non-verbal resources together incrementally and powerfully so that we are left with no doubt as to how she treats her father's responses.

GENERAL SUMMARY

As Gardner's research shows, *mm* and *mm hm* are important features in adult conversation (Gardner 2001). They are no less frequent or important in interactions with the very young, as I have sought to show. In the father's production of these tokens, they accomplish a range of functions that are dependent on their placement and prosodic characteristics. It is in the structurally important third turn position that the speakers are able to appraise the adequacy of the responding action to the sequence-initiating first action (Schegloff 1992).

The child's skills in being able to verbally display her acceptance or rejection of the response in this position develop quite markedly in the second half of her second year of life. At ten months she is able to respond to her father's summons, but reacts with silence to his repair-initiating *mm*. At seventeen months, however, she reacts to this *mm* by repeating her vocalisation. In order to make herself understood, her repeat vocalisations may co-occur with a pointing gesture, so that she is able to refine her intended meaning. At 18 months she offers clear displays of whether she accepts as sufficient her father's *mm* and *mm hm* when they function as minimal responses or as continuers. She does this by repeating her turn, by expanding her initial response with attentionals such as *look* and *see*, by initiating a shift in topic or activity, or by accepting her father's initiation of a shift in topic or activity. By 24 months she adds yet another resource, when she reacts by correcting her father, and stating unequivocally the response she desires. By tracking the child's responses to *mm*, *mm hm* over an extended period of time, we are thus able

to see the increment in the resources that the child is able to deploy to achieve a response which she deems to be acceptable and sufficient. How meaning is intended, understood as a cognitive process that is negotiated and made visible and accountable, is revealed in the minutiae of the interaction as it unfolds turn by turn.

CONCLUSION

The challenge for very young children is how to make themselves understood when they have such limited verbal resources. The challenge for the adults interacting with their children is how to understand them. Built into this is the question about how much parent and child should pursue and how much s/he should pass up. This is a decision that is not made in isolation from the interactional space, as meanings and intentions are shaped and emerge through speakers' delicate and at times quite complex actions, even before they are proficient in their first language. Yet despite the limited resources and unequal competencies, the analysis of *mm* and *mm hm* and the child's treatment of them shows that shared understandings are achievable. They emerge turn by turn as both parent and child take responsibility for shaping the talk. Neither party is a passive recipient in this process.

If we accept that talk involves shared and orderly practices for producing and interpreting talk, then as Wootton (1994; 1997) states, it is through exposure to this experience that the child learns about these practices, and that she develops a capacity to use her sequential knowledge to shape her behaviour and that of others. In other words, she draws on her understanding of her experience in earlier sequences and shows that she knows that such understandings are shared (Wootton 1997). The knowledge that emerges through and in the experience of interaction is part of her cognitive and her social development: indeed it is clear that the two cannot be separated.

By participating and gaining experience in talk with her parent, the child in the present study has developed the skill of initiating repair, of self repairing, of correcting others and of switching activity or topic to mark cessation of a sequence. By displaying her treatment of a response to her turn as deficient or acceptable (made hearable and visible in the next turn), she is also offering a display of her understanding of sequential connections and appropriateness of fit.

I conclude with a quote from Sanders (2005, 78) in his exhortation to cognitive scientists to pay attention to the details of interaction:

... while Bruner's (1975) position is generally accepted that pre-linguistic children are communicative, and behave so as to achieve specific

functionalities, there is much less consensus about when very young children (between the ages 1 and 4) become capable of doing this with words. There has been relatively little close analysis of children's participation in interactions before the age of 3;0 and it is difficult to administer tests of grammatical 'knowledge', let alone pragmatic and neo-rhetorical reasoning, to very young children.

As I have tried to show, a very different picture of what children can actually do with limited verbal resources as they interact with adults emerges when the focus is on the details of interaction. Researchers of Language Acquisition can no longer afford to ignore these details.

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