CA as a methodology in investigating the language of decision-making

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ABSTRACT:

The present article draws on authentic business meetings data collected during a longitudinal study undertaken in a British Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2005–2006) and uses these to set out an applied methodology to the analysis of decision-making in meetings. Specifically, it makes a case promoting the suitability of Conversation Analysis (CA) in examining the role of talk in decision-making. Due to the interdisciplinary character of the research enquiry, an analysis of this kind poses a number of challenges that need to be subsumed into the design of the methodology adopted. These typically include the complexity of multi-party interactions, the volume of data, and the requirement for the linguistic findings to be interpreted in the wider context of the business organisation. CA provides a flexible and robust methodology through which to address these challenges. In order to illustrate some of its potential, the article will demonstrate how CA's principle orientations towards turn-taking, turn design, and the sequential character of spoken interaction were applied to business meetings data, and how these assisted in understanding the talk in enacting the process of decision-making in meetings. On a more general level, the article argues that while the robust nature of CA has historically been established in the analysis of ordinary conversation, it is through its more recent and often somewhat creative applications that it is also becoming increasingly employed in the analysis of workplace and institutional discourse.

KEY WORDS:

business meetings, Conversation Analysis (CA), decision-making, discursive practices, multi-party talk, workplace discourse

1. INTRODUCTION

The power to direct and influence organisational interaction and make decisions has always granted meetings the attention of management; furthermore, it has stimulated research into how meetings should be performed to the best of their potential. In Discourse Studies, meetings have been researched from a variety of perspectives. Although the aim of research has remained very much the same, the respective routes taken by researchers in order to provide more widely informed findings about the nature of meetings interaction have changed greatly. This shift of focus dates back approximately to the 1980s and is conventionally ascribed to the hallmark study by Marion Williams (1988), after which meetings research moved from being predominantly prescriptive towards becoming more analytical, interpretative, and grounded in natural data.

Consider the following exchange extracted from authentic meetings data:

Speakers: <n Ben> Acting Chair (due to absence of Senior Manager); <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Andrew> Project Manager.

16	<n Doug>	For some reason, (0.3) Sharin thought I was gonna chair this, just to let you know, I have no intention to. (emphasis added)
17	<n Andrew>	[(laughs)] (politely)
18	<n Ben>	[(laughs)] All right, [[yeah]] (0:57)
19	<n Doug>	[[I'm]] a visitor.
20	<n Ben>	That's fine. ... (the turn continues, Ben introduces the format of their team meetings)

DATA SAMPLE 1: Performance Review — Chairing arrangements.

In talk, as well as in meetings, positions, power, and individual roles are negotiated or re-stated. In this case, Doug is the company's Chief Executive Officer, who has invited himself to the meeting in order to undertake a review of performance targets. While it may rightly be assumed that he will take the role of Chair because he is the senior person of authority, the team must react to his forthright refusal — 'just to let you know, I have no intention to' — announced in Turn 16. Doug had already made this decision prior to the meeting and it would be difficult for the team to negate it. In this case, the decision announced in Turn 16 suspends the anticipated "participation framework" (Goffman, 1981) and the interaction takes a new course of progression as the team reacts to his announcement (Turn 20). The exchange thus demonstrates that decisions may be made prior to, during, or after a meeting.

Only in real data is it possible to observe this fluidity of spoken interaction and to gain an insight into how the individual contributions are locally managed. Harvey Sacks, one of the principal founders of Conversation Analysis (CA), had already advocated in the 1960s the need for recording natural language rather than focusing analyses on invented conversational examples.[1] Linguistic research, however, started to implement Sack's insights considerably later. The development of a clear-cut focus of meetings research grounded in natural data and in real workplace and institutional settings only accelerated post Williams' (1988) publication.

Business meetings have provided a continuous focus of linguistic studies including, for example, Boden (1994), Charles (1994), Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris (1997), Bilbow (1998), Rogerson-Revell (1998), Poncini (2002; 2004), Holmes and Stubbe (2003), Koester (2004; 2010) and Handford (2007; 2010). Further studies are continually emerging and being published such as in the special issue of the journal *Discourse Studies* (2012, vol. 14, no. 1), demonstrating the ongoing depth of research interest in this topic area. The examination of how decision-making is achieved discursively in workplace or business meetings still, however, invites further enquiry; hence the motivation for the original research to focus on decision-making in meetings.

1 See Sacks (1992, p. 5) and also Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998, p. 24) for the original discussion of this CA methodological orientation.

CA was employed as a methodology through which to undertake the analysis. Although the ideas of CA are flourishing and finding favour across academic institutions, the tradition of CA's being applied to the understanding of workplace and social interactions is historically confined to North America and Northern Europe, predominantly then in the English language (e.g., Atkinson — Drew, 1979; Atkinson — Heritage, 1984; Drew — Heritage, 1992; 2013; Hutchby, 1996; 2006; 2007; Sarangi — Roberts, 1999; Clayman — Heritage, 2002; Peräkylä et al., 2008; Heritage — Clayman, 2010; Llewellyn — Hindmarsh, 2010; Antaki, 2011). This solid grounding subsequently corresponds with a considerably high level of scholarship and recognition of CA as a discipline of social impact.

In the Czech Republic, CA research emerged from studies in stylistics. It could be argued that Hausenblas was one of the founding advocates for Czech CA; more recently CA has continued to feature in the work of Czech linguists, notably represented by Čmejrková (†), Hoffmannová, Müllerová and Havlík, all working for the Institute of the Czech Language of the Academy of Sciences. In *SALi*, for example, further CA research was reported by Sieglová (2011) who investigated the role of 'silence' in child second language interaction as part of her doctoral thesis (Sieglová, 2009). In parallel to research activities, the increasing importance of CA as a methodology may also be noted through the introduction of CA courses into linguistics oriented study programmes at institutions of HE, e.g., a CA course offered by Peter Kosta at the University of Palacký in Olomouc.

Importantly, the research by the 'new' generation of CA linguists draws almost exclusively upon larger volumes of authentic data and focuses the analyses on the interpretation of language in social context (e.g., Čmejrková et al., 2013). This dimension of CA is very important as it lends credibility both to CA findings and to CA as a methodology. This orientation is also supported widely by linguists working in the area of applied CA (cf. Drew et al., 2006; Antaki, 2011). Through their work they aim beyond merely shedding light on talk in organisations and institutions; rather, they seek to apply CA towards finding solutions to practical problems and "suggest improvements in the service that such an institution provides" (Antaki, 2011, p. 1).

In the Czech Republic, the impact of CA research, as argued for example by Havlík (2007, p. 159), is still rather insignificant in terms of its influence and application in the Czech human sciences. The same holds true about CA research undertaken by Czech linguists in the areas of workplace and institutional discourse. The aim of this paper is therefore to demonstrate the appropriateness of CA methodology in investigating the language of decision-making and thus perhaps pave the way for a comparative study undertaken in a Czech business context.

2. FOCUS ON DECISION-MAKING

One of the fundamental truths about organisational decision-making is that it develops through talk. In organisations, talk and communication sustain every stage of the process — the identification of the need for change, the formulation of a decision, and its implementation. Through talk, organisational members establish their individual roles in the decision process and rationalise the level of commitment they will contribute to the implementation of the decision. Talk, including both the horizontal and vertical lines of communication, helps organisations to set their goals, clarify ways of working and, most importantly, create engagement. As Nutt (e.g., 1997; 1998; 1999; 2001; 2008) frequently states, the ability to create an organisation-wide engagement crucially influences the effectiveness of the entire decision process; engagement often determines whether the decision will be implemented successfully or whether it is doomed to failure. In research terms, organisational decision-making is therefore being increasingly viewed and approached as a situated socio-linguistic, rather than as a technocratic, process. Decision-making is constituted through talk and as a consequence may be examined and understood through an analysis of this discourse.

When meetings discourse and interactions are recorded and transcribed — a fundamental CA technique, a pool of research data, is created and may be subjected to a range of analyses to investigate what is actually occurring through talk. A linguistic analysis of the transcribed data subsequently enables the identification and understanding of discursive practices employed in the decision-making process. By establishing the parameters of an informed use of these practices, it becomes possible then to consider how the findings could be applied within a workplace to aid the meeting participants' understanding of how to manage their decision-making interactions in meetings.

A discursive examination of the decision process in meetings is, however, complicated by a number of issues. These are essentially threefold. Firstly, organisations call meetings and assemble work groups for a whole range of purposes, some of which may not require any decision-making activity. Secondly, not all decisions made in the meetings are appropriate to business. For example, decisions such as 'Which biscuit would you like, a Jammie Dodger or a Jaffa Cake?' and 'Tea or coffee?' are not business decisions and should therefore be excluded from the analysis. Finally, the decision-making process is very fluid and decisions are often not reached in meetings; yet, due to the incremental construction of decision-making in organisations, the process of decision-making itself is advanced in meetings even if decisions are lacking.

Prior to the undertaking of a linguistic analysis, it is therefore important to conceptualise these issues and consider them within the design of the research methodology. The adopted framework provides a prerequisite for the data analysis and informs the interpretation of the findings. The present study addressed the three issues introduced above in the following manner:

First of all, it was important to define a business decision. For the purposes of the analysis, a business decision was defined as a point at which an action committing people, resources, or time to the delivery of business objectives was either agreed or rejected (i.e., it is legitimate to make a decision not to do something). A decision was formulated either as an explicit summary of action to be undertaken or in terms of its being a staged decision, functioning as a step towards a future action.

Secondly, the study determined operational meetings as suitable for the discursive analysis of decision-making and targeted these consistently for the collection of spoken data. Operational meetings were found to contain a high level of business decisions and to be influenced by both strategic and day-to-day operational matters. It was also noted that operational meetings introduced certain information, discussions, and agreements to have emerged from other meetings (at which the researcher was not present). These included, for example, Senior Operational Managers' meetings, external partner and contractor meetings, and policy meetings; these were used to inform and influence the current meeting, in effect summarising the outputs of past meetings and advancing them in the meeting at hand.

Finally, the fluidity of the decision-making process and the role of meetings within this was conceptualised through an expanded Input-Process-Output (IPO) Model that situated the analysis of decision-making in meetings in the wider context of the organisation. In its generic form, IPO is used as a functional scheme and is particularly helpful in deconstructing processes into their individual components. The Input-Process-Output Model of organisational decision-making considered in the present study is summarised diagrammatically in Figure 1.

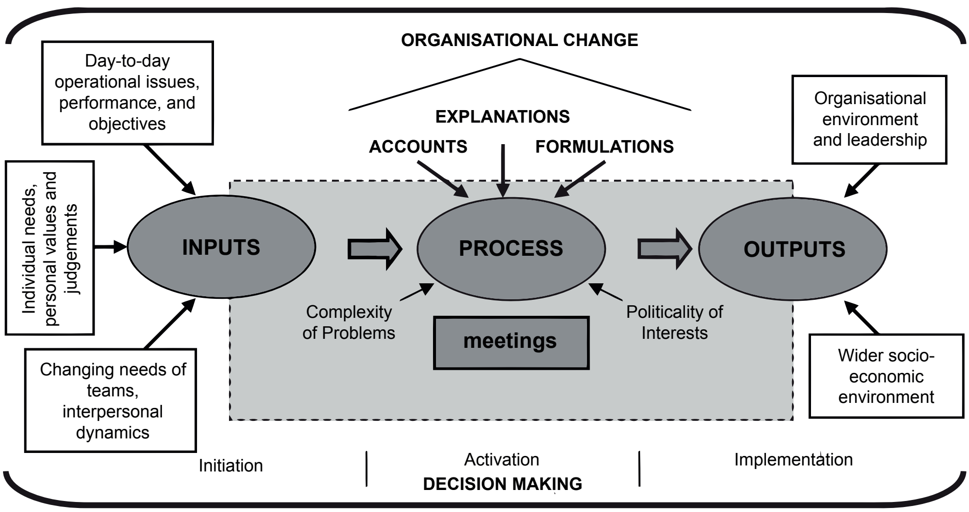

FIGURE 1: Expanded Input-Process-Output (IPO) Decision-Making Model.

The proposed scheme incorporates the findings of the Bradford Studies, which identified the parameters influencing decision-making at each stage of the process.[2] In its entirety, the model acknowledges the incremental and process

2 The Bradford Studies were a large-scale research project undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s. They investigated over one hundred and fifty decision case histories in Britain. Drawing on more than ten years of systematic fieldwork, the Bradford Studies produced one of the most robust analyses of strategic-decision-making across all major industry sectors in the UK. The project identified the *matter for decision*, the *complexity of decision*

nature of decision-making. It recognises that decisions may either take place in the meeting or be made externally as pre-meeting decisions, requiring the meetings' participants to act upon them. In addition, the IPO scheme highlights how the implementation of decisions made in meetings is further contingent upon the wider socio-economic environment, the organisational environment, levels of executive authority, and leadership. While the outputs of a meeting are usually formulated straight away, as are often small administrative types of decisions, major decisions need not automatically be so. It is possible that decisions made in meetings may not be implemented because of external socio-economic, organisational or personal influences. Alternatively, a meeting may produce no decision at all, yet its output and discussions will inform a decision at a later point separate from the meeting.

In sum, the IPO Model sets out the interrelationship between discourse and the wider organisational context in which the teams operated. Also, it clarifies why the focus of the decision-making analysis must be on examining the discursive practices constituting the actual decision process from meeting to meeting and not on assessing singular instances of decisions made in the meetings. In the context of the study undertaken, the IPO Model therefore created an interpretative framework and effectively moved the focus of the analysis to the level of the discourse constituting the meetings.

3. TARGET ORGANISATION — CONTEXT AND DATA

At the time of the research (2005–2006), the host organisation, a large Chamber of Commerce (250 staff) was undergoing a period of major change stemming from the restructuring of the delivery of publicly funded business support services across the region. It entailed the relocation of the Business Link services — then delivered sub-regionally by six Chambers of Commerce — into a single regional body, with a concomitant and significant loss of staff, financial contribution, and influence. This organisational context framed the communication of work teams and provided a rich source of data through which to investigate decision-making in the meetings.

The data were collected across three Chamber work teams: 1) the Regeneration Team (REG); 2) the International Trade Advisers' Team (ITA), and 3) the IT User Group (ITUG). These teams were selected as they were typically representative of the Chamber having a membership of between 10 and 15 individuals, were led by a Senior Operations Manager (SOM), had functional responsibility for Chamber work, kept a defined programme of meetings, and were continuously required to make operational decisions.

The collection of the data took place over a year. Sixty-seven meetings were recorded, comprising over sixty hours of spoken data of which eight hours were

problems, and *politicality of decision interests* as three decision-making parameters instrumental for the decision process to occur (cf. Bradford Studies model of decision-making, in Hickson et al., 1985, p. 166).

transcribed and subjected to analysis. In addition to the observation, access was granted to a wide range of source documents. These included business plans, team delivery objectives and targets, performance reports, minutes of meetings, e-mails, memos, attendance at the Regeneration Team Away Day, and other internal materials.

4. DATA ANALYSIS — APPLYING CA

Having introduced the discursive character of organisational decision-making, the data analysis section aims to introduce CA and illustrate how its principles were applied to the analysis of decision-making in business meetings. Conversation Analysis (CA) is conventionally employed for the examination and interpretation of naturally occurring conversation. The principle orientations of CA were established in the 1960s and 1970s by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, who centred these on what they labelled "the orders of talk-in-interaction" (ten Have, 2004). CA methods may be described as systematic and replicable, enabling researchers to undertake an in-depth analysis of localised instances of natural talk, of its turn-taking and conversational management.

CA's probably most empowering methodological contribution is that it analyses the sequential ordering of spoken discourse and has therefore the capacity to identify its prospective features. Prospectivity in discourse is absolutely critical to the understanding of the incremental progression of talk and therefore, by extension, how the decision-making process unfolds. John Sinclair (2004, pp. 12–13) explains the role of discourse prospective qualities in the following words:

> [A] major central function of language is that it constantly prospects ahead. […] [I]t does mean that whatever does happen has a value that is already established by the discourse at that point. So the scene is set for each next utterance by the utterance that is going on at the moment. Over the years, the more that attention has been focused on the prospective qualities of discourse the more accurate and powerful the description has become.

The upshot of this methodological proposition requires that a text be considered in its entirety, with attention being paid to its sequential unfolding and interactional detail. As an established methodology, CA is ideally suited for an analysis of this kind. Echoing the proposition made by Sinclair, I would argue that CA's principle orientations, including the analysis of turn-taking, turn design, and the sequential character of spoken interaction, provide a universal and unbiased set of tools enabling the accurate and powerful description of how language functions.

In order to illustrate how these orientations assisted in the analysis of the meetings data, consider the following exchange continuing on from the Regeneration Team's Meeting 14. The interaction occurred approximately four minutes into the meeting and effectively opened the performance review of one of the projects managed by the team:

Speakers: <n Ben> Acting Chair; <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Andrew> Project Manager; <n Maria> Project Manager.

62	<n Ben>	Hello, Maria. (the door closes) (3)
63	<n Doug>	We're- we are concerned about the pressures that we're getting from (0.4) (name of regional organisation), about hitting the targets (0.3) set by (name of national organisation), and I just wanted to get some confidence, uh hopefully with you guys, (04:27) that we were going to hit the targets in terms of outputs. I know we've had a lot of delay, we've lost what three to six months in the lead up to the contract, due to the bureaucracy and the difficulties, getting systems in place, but we're now stuck with uhm four months left, [<A> Mhm] (pp) of the year to try and produce (0.2) the outputs in terms of of (04:47) assists. How likely is it, that you're gonna hit your targets? (3) How unlikely is it you- - ('you' said in pp, with no real intention to carry on)
64	<n Andrew>	I'd say that's seventy per cent likely. (0.9)
65	<n Doug>	Does that mean you'll hit seventy per cent of the targets?
66	<n Andrew>	Mhm.
67	<n Doug>	Is there anything that we could do in terms of resource, or help, or assistance, that could make that hundred per cent (05:07) (2)

DATA SAMPLE 2: Performance review — Hitting the targets.

Turn-taking is "one of the most fundamental organizations of practice for talk-in-interaction" as it reveals how tasks and actions are accomplished through talk (Schegloff, 2007, p. 1). From the transcript, it is immediately noticeable which speaker is talking at any one time; that talk becomes "inspectable, and is inspected, by co-participants to see how it stands to the one that preceded" (ibid.). In Turn 63, Doug opens the formal part of the meeting by declaring the purpose of his attendance. The subsequent distribution of turns in the opening part of the review is in the main dyadic, taking place between Doug and Andrew, the manager responsible for this area of work. The team therefore relies on him in answering Doug's specific and direct question — "How likely is it, that you're gonna hit your targets? (3) How unlikely is it you- -" — and to deal with what has the potential to become a confrontational debate.

Turn design describes the variety of turn form, turn content, and turn length as these are free to vary depending on what people say and how they say it (Hutchby — Wooffitt, 1998, p. 47). For example, in his long turn (Turn 63), Doug is utterly explicit about the necessity for the organisation to hit the targets and insists on a time frame of four months to do so. He negates the natural response of the team to justify or make excuses for not yet having delivered by acknowledging that he understands the difficulties and delays to date. The direct question raised at the end of the turn and followed by a three-second-long pause then serves the purpose of obtaining commitment from the team. The pause of three seconds is unprecedented in length in the pace of talk thus far; it marks the first transition-relevance place possible and indicates a speaker change as desirable. Visually, Doug's Turn 63 may be summarised as in Data Sample 3:

Speakers: <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Andrew> Project Manager.

declaring the goal

63 <n Doug> **We're- we are concerned about the pressures (04:17) that we're getting from (0.4) (name of regional organisation), about hitting the targets (0.3) set by (name of national organisation),** and I just wanted to get some confidence, uh hopefully with you guys, (04:27) that we were going to hit the targets in terms of outputs. *I know we've had a lot of delay, we've lost what three to six months in the lead up to the contract, due to the bureaucracy and the difficulties, (04:37) getting systems in place*, but **we're now stuck with uhm four months left, [<A> Mhm] (pp) of the year to try and produce (0.2) the outputs in terms of of (04:47) assists.** How likely is it, that you're gonna hit your targets? (3) *How unlikely is it you- -* ('you' said in pp, no real intention to carry on)

ACCOUNT

setting the time frame

direct question

DATA SAMPLE 3: Performance Review — Declaring the goal.

The sequential character of turn-taking reveals a great deal of information regarding the dynamics of the interaction as it was occurring at the time. It enables researchers to identify the prospective features of discourse and to investigate these in detail. In this case, the sequential ordering of Turns 63 to 67 is set in motion by Doug, who in Turn 63 signals the degree of concern about the potential for not meeting the targets. The team may infer from Doug's statement that its performance has been discussed already at a higher level of the organisation — "We're- we are concerned about the pressures that we're getting from (0.4) (name of regional organisation), about hitting the targets (0.3)" — presumably at the Senior Management Team meeting, and that this resulted in a decision for Doug to attend the current meeting, i.e., a decision made externally to the meeting and now requiring the team to take action. Andrew's hedged response in Turn 64 — "I'd say that's seventy per cent likely. (0.9)" is non-committal as he is probably still thinking about the answer although decides not to talk about it at that point in the discussion. Also, Andrew's absence of commitment in Turn 66 — "Mhm" — comes across as relatively vague, making Doug realise that if he wants the team to start opening up and becoming engaged in thinking about alternative ways of meeting the set targets, he must change tack. In Turn 67, he therefore starts softening the blow of his initial intervention by re-framing the issue in terms of providing assistance, committing the resources, and helping the team to succeed.

In summary, this section has attempted to demonstrate that decisions in meetings do not occur out of the blue; rather, if we consider Doug's contribution, it becomes clear that he starts early on in the meeting shaping the need for the team to take action. He formulates a firm perspective, declaring his authority and his determination to provide additional resources. By engaging the team in thinking about the assistance rather than about the impossibility of meeting the targets, he re-routes the talk from confrontation to a collaborative process of formulating a plan to address underperformance. Here is the first indication of a decision being prepared.

5. DATA ANALYSIS — FINDINGS AND DATA MANAGEMENT

CA traditionally invites a very close inspection of the data, as it is the recognition and description of the fine detail that enables the researcher to uncover the orderliness of talk in interaction. When undertaking the analysis of decision-making, it was therefore necessary to expand the examination beyond isolated instances of talk. Methodologically, it was important to embrace the overall dynamics of the meeting interactions and be able to interpret the talk of decision-making in the context of what was happening in the organisation as a whole.

Two key findings emerged from the analysis of the data. Firstly, it identified a number of discursive practices as occurring repeatedly, and as having a direct impact on the meetings talk and the decision-making process. Secondly, in utilising the practices and communicating detailed information and ideas, the shape and design of some of the turns became substantially long and complex. Interestingly, it was noticed that speakers who used these practices and combined them maintained the floor for a significant period of time. Long turns enabled speakers to develop ideas and proposals incrementally; it was either in these turns or in their vicinity that most decisions were found.

The three key discursive practices identified were Explanations, Accounts, and Formulations. Each contributed in its own unique way to the progression of the talk or to maintaining the turn of the speaker. The occurrence of these practices was coded in the transcribed text. For the purposes of the present article, these practices will be introduced in a limited fashion to describe how they helped advance talk in meetings and build towards decisions being made. A more detailed use of these practices will be the subject of a later paper. The original research may be reviewed in Lohrová (2012).

The definitions of Formulations and Accounts adopted in the research draw on the original concepts as defined in the CA literature, i.e., Formulations by Heritage and Watson (1979) and Accounts by Scott and Lyman (1968). Traditionally within CA, Explanations have not received exclusive attention; rather, they have been amalgamated with Accounts. The research reported has taken the decision to differentiate between the two practices as it is argued that they performed related yet substantially diverse functions in the decision-making process.

In business meetings, Explanations fulfilled the aspects of information and experience sharing and were frequently responsible for the production of very long turns. Their role was to furnish detail or create a general information pool, establishing common ground rather than a reason or justification for a shortfall of some kind. Explanations provided reference points against which prospective action could be evaluated or, if decided against, the level of risk assessed. They were the building blocks on which a decision could be formulated, or else provided the direction for further exploration.

Accounts, in contrast, were typically employed to bridge the gap between actions and expectations (Scott — Lyman, 1968). Frequently, they were problem-led and were produced either in response to a failure or in anticipation of one. In meetings, Accounts created new, personalised interpretations of debated issues. They consisted of opinions or interpreted experiences and provided a view based on these, i.e., they might or might not inherently be true. Accounts were then honoured — or not, depending on how the audience received the Account. The result could either help progress the discussions in the meeting or derail them.

Formulations were used to accomplish the "summarising, glossing, or developing the gist" of the previous talk (Heritage, 1985). They were employed to signpost the progression of a conversation, summarising the speakers' understanding up to a specific point in time, or projecting a new meaning implied from the preceding discussion. Formulations typically featured the "preservation, deletion, and transformation" of the previous talk, which has made them highly implicative for the subsequent talk or prospective decisions (Heritage — Watson, 1979).

Explanations, Accounts, and Formulations were found to be at the core of the decision-making discourse as it was observed in the Chamber of Commerce meetings. The practices clustered around decisions or led up to them. When analysing the data it was therefore appropriate to look for such clusters, given that they often signposted conversations in which decisions were progressed or made.

Conceptually, the link between decisions and the discursive practices of Explanations, Accounts, and Formulations may be visualised as in Figure 2:

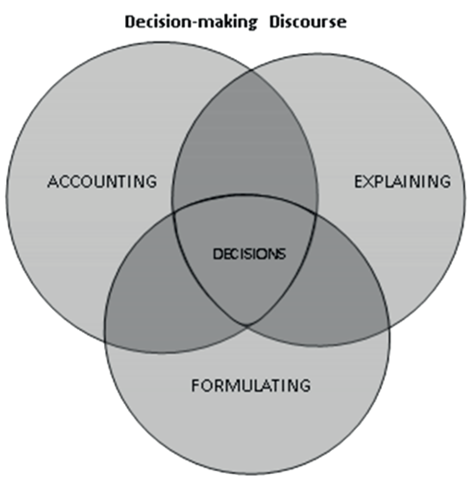

FIGURE 2: Decisions at the Interaction of Explanations, Accounts, and Formulations.

Decisions principally determined the circumstantial 'what, who, when, where, how, and why' of what is to happen. The 'what, who, when, where, how, and why' were also encapsulated into the three practices. At the interaction of the discursive practices with the decision: 1) Explanations furnished the decision-making process with additional detail, were usually fact-based, and built an information pool that may potentially inform the decision process; 2) Accounts typically addressed the 'why yes' and 'why not', providing past experience and opinions of a decision or of an act in question, and 3) Formulations did the "summarising, glossing, and gisting" (Heritage, 1985) of the subject matter under discussion and provided the platform from which to launch a decision or a decision proposal. Decisions thus principally integrated, resulted from, or were facilitated by any one or two, or all of the three discursive practices.

As regards the long turns, the analysis revealed that the frequency of long turns used by speakers in the meeting and the duration of these were in a compelling relationship: approximately 11% of turns represented more than 50% of the meeting talk. In other words, although long turns were considerably less frequent than were short turns, they constituted the majority of the meetings talk. Furthermore, the prominence of long turns was in their providing the leads to the subject matter discussed and to the decision-making orientations presented in the meeting. Long turns facilitated the information exchange, debate, clarification, and negotiation enabling the decision process to take place.

In order to understand the frequency and sequential ordering of the three discursive practices in their relation to decision-making it was necessary to create a framework in which this conversational activity could be mapped out and analysed. For this purpose, a set of interactional matrices was developed. In the case of the discussed Regeneration Team Meeting 14, the interactional matrix was constructed as in Figure 3 below:

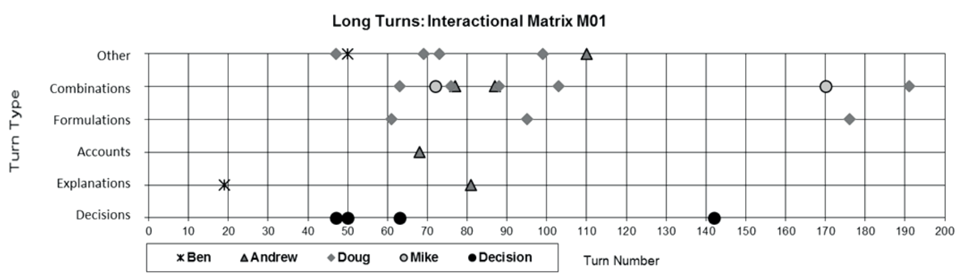

FIGURE 3: REG_M14_070905 — Interactional Matrix.

The interactional matrix exhibited in Figure 3 logs all turns longer than ten seconds of speaking time and assigns these to the respective speakers. The ten-second criterion, although apparently arbitrary, was decided on as a result of observations of the meetings. It was noted that if the speaker maintained the floor for more than ten seconds, her/his contribution established evident dominance in the debate. In the matrix, each speaker has been assigned their own unique symbol. All decisions made in the meeting were identified and marked with a circle. The horizontal *x* axis represents turn-taking. The vertical *y* axis notes Decisions, Explanations, Accounts, Formulations, Combinations consisting of (E), (A), or (F) in any arbitrary combination, and the miscellaneous category Other.

The development of the interactional matrices assisted the researcher in working with a large volume of data and also in embracing the multi-party contribution to decision-making. The matrices supported the macro-analysis of the meetings and the interpretation of the findings in the wider context of the business organisation. Specifically, the matrices traced the progression of the meeting, logged the individual contributions at the level of long turns, identified decisions, and assisted the understanding of the relationship among those discursive practices that directly influenced the decision-making of the teams. The trends and clustering of the practices visualised in the matrix subsequently focused the point of enquiry at the level of a micro-analysis of the transcripts, based on CA principles.

6. DATA ANALYSIS — UNDERSTANDING OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS THROUGH TALK

It has been demonstrated that decisions are not automatic; they are dependent upon how the talk unfolds in the meeting. It is therefore important to examine relatively long stretches of conversation that contain hints and clues about future talk and the possibility of decisions being proposed and made. Building on the data extracted from Regeneration Team Meeting 14 discussed previously, this final analytical section illustrates how the CA approach to the analysis of the sequential ordering of turns as well as the ability of CA to provide focus on the fine detail of these, contributed to the understanding of the decision-making process.

Doug's (CEO) attendance at the meeting resulted from an external decision made at the senior level in the organisation; immediate action had to be taken to address the area of underperformance, and no excuses for failure would be tolerated. In order to achieve this task, Doug took control of the meeting and led it. He adopted a specific style of behaviour with which to engage with the team.

Interactively, Doug was highly assertive in gaining or even hijacking the conversational floor. This may be exemplified, for example, through his use of a "transitional overlap" (Jefferson, 1983) as in Turns 69, 73, and 90 (underlined):

Speakers: <n Andrew> Project Manager; <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Mike> Business Development Manager; <R> Roxanne – Contracts Manager.

68	<n Adrew>	… as a cross-sector awareness [session, or education]
69	<n Doug>	[Mhm, can I] come into that. It seems so where- - that sitting the way back, that the the model doesn't work, (0.3)
…		
72	<n Mike>	… and also putting the infrastructure in place as well, it's been you know- —
73	<n Doug>	I understand that, and … it's been hugely complex bureaucratically, … but nevertheless, …
…		
89	<n Roxanne>	Some of them will fit cross-sector anyway, so we can segment and we can define where we want- - =
90	<n Doug>	= I mean the one area /above of all that/ we've all agreed that doesn't work, is the segments, …

DATA SAMPLE 4: Performance Review — Transitional overlap.

A characteristic of a “transitional overlap” is that the speaker using it commences his/her next turn at a projected transition-relevance place, and not actually at a transition-relevance place. This type of overlap indicates certain conversational confidence or even arrogance. Through its use, the speaker manifests that s/he has grasped the gist of the previous turn and can therefore progress the conversation further.

Discursively, Doug continually applied Formulations to emphasise the importance of meeting the targets, to which he had alerted the team right at the outset of the meeting (Turn 63). The frequent use of Formulations functioned as a highly assertive and uncompromising technique. The following three turns demonstrate how the single message “The targets must be met” (underlined) was preserved and maintained from turn to turn by Doug the CEO:

Speakers: <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Ben> Acting Chair; <n Andrew> Project Manager.

76	<n Doug>	Uh:m pretty much the same. Uhm I think, Black Country are not performing too well, [<B> Right] and Coventry and Warwickshire don’t appear to be doing anything /but there was nothing at all/. So there are two issues here, one is, firstly, we make every effort to try in our time, (08:27) but if we could step up, and take ahead over others, that would be even better, but I don’t know how difficult the job is going to be, and if it was around resource, there’s you know, I could do something about that. If it’s just due down to the complex nature of the, and the difficult (0.4) nature of the offer, then I don’t know what we can do.
…		
95	<n Doug>	[Sorry], well not necessarily, well yes, you can come up with a pile of strengths but I mean it’s really what can I do to help you guys, help achieve the targets. [<B> Mhm] And it’s- - and, you know, let’s think about possibly breaking the rules, this is an enormously bureaucratic- - (12:07). [<A> Mhm] and if we can bypass the rules, break the rules, or ignore them, or throw them out, and we can achieve the outputs by doing so, that’s fine!
…		
103	<n Doug>	I can’t see where they’re going to come from to (name of external organisation), through the bigger issue. So that’s just to say, by all means, continuously rethink your way through this, [<A> Yeah] don’t be constrained by levels of bureaucracy, don’t be constrained by the lack of resource, (13:07) if you need something ask (name, CEO) or me, [<A> Mhm] or both of us, [<A> Mhm] because what we really can’t afford is for this to (0.3) to be, seventy per cent /?/ should be the absolute worst case, you know, seventy per cent of the outputs. [<A> Mhm] I don’t think government office are- are gonna be as tough as they say they are. They’re telling /us to achieve or to pull/ back the money.

DATA SAMPLE 5: Performance Review — Use of Formulations.

Although taking place at different times of the meeting, the message is clear and insistent: the targets must be achieved and everything must be done to ensure this. The form of each of these three turns may be described as sophisticated in that while there is a change in the vocabulary, the meaning is nevertheless sustained. In doing this, Doug employs effectively both the format and function of Formulations. Firstly, he launches the Formulations in a classic way, either through the use of 'so' — 'So there are two issues here' (Turn 76) and 'So that's just to say, by all means' (Turn 103), or by means of editing and deleting past talk — 'but I mean it's really' (Turn 95). Secondly, Doug's variation of words in his sequence of Formulations and his avoidance of simple repetition himself allows him to maintain his turn, re-state his key message and thereby preserve the aim of the meeting. By adding detail about future possibilities, Doug's Formulations thus also serve to leave the conversation open to other meeting participants and to encourage their engagement should they choose to contribute.

The upshot of this discursive strategy is that the team begin to take ownership of the problem — Data Sample 6 below — and Doug's key message is progressed to the proposal of solutions:

Speakers: <n Ben> Acting Chair; <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Andrew> Project Manager; <n Maria> Project Manager; <n Kevin> Project Manager; <n Roxanne> Contracts Manager.

109	<n Doug>	Do you want me to get the team wound up, (13:47) to come down and chat with you then?
110	<n Andrew>	Yeah, yeah, I think that might be an idea, 'cause I mean, for- - if we got the people primed, that they are looking for finance, I know we've got the difficulties then of actually managing their expectations, but in a sense you're better have sixteen people knock your door down and say I'm looking for finance, and we reject ten of them, to get six conversions_
111	<n Doug>	Ok, so maybe telesales? (14:07)
112	<n Roxanne>	[Some PR].
113	<n Doug>	[Direct marketing_]
114	<n Andrew>	Yeah, PR, [[a good way of marketing, yes]].
115	<n Roxanne>	[[PR]].
116	<n Doug>	[[/awareness/]]
117	<n Kevin>	Targeted marketing, probably, yeah?
118	<n Doug>	Targeted marketing?
119	<n Kevin>	Targeted marketing.
120	<n Doug>	Targeted marketing
121	<n Mike>	Targeted marketing, it should be more effective

DATA SAMPLE 6: Performance review — Transition to action.

This quick-fire, brainstorming exchange marks a transition point of the entire meeting. In the only long turn of this sequence, Andrew vocalises his engagement in the process and actively expresses his thinking and ideas. He has discarded his previous hedging and cautious position, and begins to align himself with Doug. As Andrew was the manager responsible for the project, the team had been waiting for Andrew to take the lead and were willing to give him the time to do so. The subsequent rapid exchange of talk is marked by many overlaps, with everyone trying to talk at once.

This engages the whole team. The pace of the meeting quickens as ideas begin to flow. Doug's attempts to transform the meeting from inaction to action have been achieved.

This radical change in the dynamic of the team comes to a climax in the following segment of the data (Turns 142 to 145):

Speakers: <n Ben> Chair; <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Andrew> Project Manager.

action point agreed **decision ratified and a new point made**

142	<n Doug>	**Ok, I'll get Karyn to come, and do some proposals.** So targeted marketing, uhm fi- fi-financial aware- - any needs for- -, wait a minute, how are we gonna encapsulate this?
143	<n Ben>	It should be- -, **shall we send you an email with the thoughts?** (15:07) [<A> Yeah] I'm just I'm just thinking, if we do that by today. [<A> Yeah]
144	<n Doug>	**If you send it to me, and copy to Karyn, I'll speak to Karyn.**
145	<n Ben>	Yeah, 'cause then that way it gives us time to actually (0.8) to articulate it properly, and say what we think it means.

decision proposal

DATA SAMPLE 7: Performance Review — Marketing campaign decision.

In Turn 142, Doug commits resources to addressing the marketing issues by offering the support and input of Karyn, Chamber Marketing Manager. Indicating the shift from debate to planning the solution, Ben fulfilling the role of Acting Chair (Turn 143) proposes a course of action by formulating a solution of the past talk and discussions, in effect determining how to take action to achieve the targets. Doug (Turn 144) subsequently ratifies the action, thus enacting his authority as the CEO, and transforms the proposal made in Turn 143 into a decision.

Finally, Turn 176 marks the end of Doug's participation in the meeting as he has achieved his outcomes and gained the commitment of the team to taking action:

Speakers: <n Doug> a guest and CEO; <n Ben> Acting Chair; <n Andrew> Project Manager; <n Roxanne> Contracts Manager.

176	<n Doug>	[leave you with a thought that], it's not about chivvying you up, [<R> Mhm] it's about saying, is there anything I can do to help you guys meet- -, you know, hit the targets, [<A> Mhm, ok] [<B> Ok (pp)] and any quick wins any- any quick fixes please let me know. Ok, thank you very much, that was all. And while I'm here, while you remember, do you want to throw things at me or- - (17:47)

DATA SAMPLE 8: Performance Review — Transition to the next meeting point.

In this 'exit' turn, Doug opens with an Account in the form of a justification "it's not about chivvying you up", which the entire session was clearly about. He still continues to reinforce the idea that if "the team needs help, just ask". Doug thanks the team then attempts to ameliorate how he finishes his participation in the meeting by inviting the team to throw things at him. This informal tone has the effect of relaxing the team and enabling the transition of the meeting to the next agenda point, which the team undertakes without Doug's participation.

In summary, the above example of data analysis demonstrates how it is possible to observe the incremental progression of talk as it builds towards a decision. In the opening part of the meeting, the team was entirely non-committal. However, through the sequential unfolding of talk and the skilful use of appropriate discursive practices, the team moved from not wanting to become involved to actively progressing how the issue of their underperformance would be addressed and action taken. In the process, the ability of the individual speakers to maintain their turn was critical to communicating their perspective to others and, in this instance, it also increased the opportunity for collaboration in the meeting.

7. CONCLUSION

The current paper has demonstrated that the adoption of CA and its core principles is a methodology appropriate to the study of decision-making in meetings. Traditionally, decision-making is seen as a linear process that, if applied methodically, will lead to the right decision. In reality, the process of decision-making is far less systematic. Individuals have repeatedly been observed as having a tendency "to make choices in ways that are markedly at variance with normative decision theory" (Harrison, 1995, p. 11). In business meetings, the process of making decisions is constructed through verbal interaction. This is integral to the organic unfolding of team decision-making and is often less rational than we are generally prepared to accept. Talk in meetings follows particular conversational rules even though the precise nature and timing of each speaker's contribution cannot be known until it is made. At such a time it has the potential to move the discussion in unplanned or unforeseen ways.

By applying CA, it is possible to track discourse leading to decisions within these interactions to determine how the decision-making process unfolds. Both the sequential and the prospective nature of talk underpin its progression as speakers move the discussion on towards a conclusion. In the context of business meetings, the turn-taking mechanism, the selection of specific discursive practices, and the structured extension of turns allowed speakers to create opportunities to form and influence a decision. When managed properly, these properties assisted in developing talk incrementally, enabling speakers to progress from talk to action.

Although the study was undertaken in the UK and published in English, it is believed to be of interest to researchers working in the area of workplace and institutional discourse. Applying the methodology of CA to the analysis of workplace and institutional interactions has merit irrespective of the language used or the culture within which the research is based. While the findings of the analysis may vary due to language, culture and context, the conceptual model of how talk operates in a specific institutional or workplace environment is transferable as it takes such constraints into account.

The study reported therefore aimed to illustrate how CA as a methodology may be applied for purposes other than the investigation of practices of talk in interaction: the orientation at the heart of applied CA and central to the studies of workplace and institutional discourse (Heritage — Robinson, 2011, p. 16). Specifically, CA enabled a detailed analysis of the entire conversation in context and supported the ability to track the individual contributions as they meandered through the meeting and moved towards a decision. By offering a way of applying CA to embrace the complexity of multi-party interactions, manage the volume of data, and interpret the linguistic findings in the wider context of the business organisation, this paper has provided a more natural and informal route towards the understanding of organisational decision-making.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS[3]

<n Name>	speakers' names or other identification at the beginning of a turn
.	falling intonation at the end of a turn, or at the end of a tone unit/"sentence" within a turn
,	slightly rising intonation at end of a turn, or at the end of a tone unit within a turn, e.g. showing continuation
?	high rising intonation at end of a turn or "sentence"
!	animated intonation
:	colon following vowel indicates elongated vowel sound
::	extra colon indicates longer elongation
(1.5)	noticeable pause or break between or within utterances, length indicated in seconds given in round brackets/parentheses
—	truncated, unfinished word
— —	sound abruptly cut off — false start (but not an unfinished word)
CAPS	emphatic stress
/ /	words between slashes show uncertain transcription, transcriber's best guess
/?/	indicates inaudible word: one? substitutes for up to one word
/??/	indicates inaudible utterances of more than one word
[	onset of overlapping or simultaneous speech
]	end of overlapping or simultaneous speech
[[	onset of second consecutive overlapping or simultaneous speech
]]	end of second consecutive overlapping or simultaneous speech
[ ]	utterances or back-channel responses interjected by a speaker/speakers within another speaker's turn

3 Adapted from, although not identical with, standard CA conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (see Hutchby — Wooffitt, 1998, pp. vi–vii).

( )	non-linguistic information, e.g., pauses, speakers' gestures, actions, time intervals, anonymised identities
(10:20)	time markers, logged at twenty-second intervals
(laughs)	indicates laughter by one speaker
(all laugh)	indicates general laughter in multi-party interactions
(laugh)	specific speakers
(p)	piano
(pp)	pianissimo
(f)	forte
(ff)	fortissimo

Use of standard contractions, e.g., isn't, aren't, hasn't, haven't, hadn't, don't, doesn't, didn't, won't, shan't, shouldn't, wouldn't, couldn't, needn't, mustn't, yeah, 'til.

Use of non-standard contractions: gonna, dunno, wanna, ain't, 'cos, gotta.

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ABSTRAKT:
Článek vychází z analýzy dat shromážděných v rámci longitudinální studie realizované v jedné z hospodářských komor ve Velké Británii (2005–2006). Na jejím základě předkládá metodiku konverzační analýzy použité pro rozbor procesu rozhodování během vnitropodnikových jednání; objasňuje vhodnost využití této metodiky pro popis a interpretaci dynamiky konverzace pracovních týmů a k identifikaci klíčových momentů pracovních jednání. Podrobněji příspěvek rozebírá, jakým způsobem mohou základní principy konverzační analýzy, tzn. rozbor sekvenčního uspořádání jednotlivých příspěvků a vymezení konverzačních strategií, přispět k pochopení role diskurzu při utváření rozhodovacího procesu. V obecnější rovině je cílem navržené aplikované metodiky poskytnout konkrétní příklad využití analýzy konverzace pro řešení otázky, která je svou povahou interdisciplinární a která nachází stále širší zastoupení právě ve studiích profesního a institucionálního diskurzu.

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