Sometimes a frog in your throat is just a frog in your throat:
Gutturals as (sometimes) laughter-implicative

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1. Introduction

For my presentation at the IPrA Conference in Göteborg, July 8–13, 2007, I started out to prepare a talk giving an overview of my work on laughter. But, as sometimes happens, as I was pulling materials together things took off in another direction. What remains of the overview is this: My detailed transcription of laughter (which has provided for a range of possible orderliness) is based on Harvey Sacks' transcription of laughter. Specifically, prior to contact with Sacks' work, my transcripts did not show laughter in its particulars, but simply mentioned its occurrence.

2. From mentioning the occurrence of laughter to showing what it looks like

As an undergraduate at UCLA I occasionally did a bit of transcribing in my part-time work as a clerk typist at the UCLA Department of Public Health. For example, the following, done in 1963, from a sensitivity-training session for prison guards.

This material comes out of Kassebaum and Ward's (1963) project on Study of Correctional Effectiveness, part of which involved investigation of a program of group therapy for inmates at a prison facility, where the guards had been enlisted to act as group leaders and were being given training seminars as they went along.


((One of the participants has hesitantly expressed his feelings towards homosexuals.))

Short: Do the rest of you have these feelings, or are you not willing to talk about them, or what?

(Long pause)
Baines: → Well, I know myself I’ve never given it any thought, so I (laugh) don’t know how you can bring any subject into it unless you’ve given it some thought... special thought. Wonder thought. I’ve never even wondered about it.

On occasion, I’d offer such characterizations as ‘giggles’, ‘chuckles’, etc., e.g.:

(2) Jefferson Pre-Sacks Transcript, 1963

(Re attitudes toward inter-racial sex; here a “colored guy” with a “white girl”)

Arlett: What were your feelings toward the white girl?
Baines: I wouldn’t go out with her. I mean, after all, she’s been out with Negroes, so I wouldn’t...

( Somebody giggles, then a few others, becomes general laughter, to guffaws)

Arlett: I’d suffer by comparison -
Baines: I don’t think so... just the idea.

That was 1963.

In 1965 I happened to take a sociology course taught by Harvey Sacks. At one point he handed out a transcript he’d done; a segment of a group therapy session for teenagers. In that transcript Sacks didn’t simply mention the occurrence of laughter, he showed it: “heh”, “ha”, et cetera.

(3) Sacks GTS Transcript Fall, 1965

((The members of the group are talking about each other to a newcomer))

1 Henry He used to walk out on us, he thought he was above us.
2 Mel Yea. But now I’m now I’m below you.
3 Henry Yeah. I corrected I corrected that quality. I gave him
4 → an inferiority complex. ha.
5 Mel And I got him to shave.
6 Joe → heh.
7 Henry Yeah. I’m not grubby or nothin
8 Bob → No. hehh
9 Joe → hah. Hey this is the academic counselling center. It’s
10 → called the family, family circle.
11 Henry It’s not really an academic counselling center; it’s
12 → sort of a drive in nut house. ha ha.

Now, one of Sacks’ themes was a notion of “interactional machinery”; of assembling complex activities out of “standardized parts” (Sacks, 1995, vol. I, lecture 5:159). And he offered an image, that of a “culture as a warehouse” (Sacks, 1995, vol. I, lecture 21:425) where, then, to assemble this or that interactional machine, one would go through the warehouse picking up the various parts one needed.

As it happens, laughter was not something Sacks spoke of as one of those assembled machines. So, e.g., the reference to the ‘machinery’ occurs in a discussion of such ‘tying rules’ as ‘lister terms’ (“first of all”, “secondly”, etc.). The ‘warehouse’ reference occurs in a consideration of the systematic ways in which ‘discussion’ can lead to ‘argument’. And he certainly never spoke about how or why he transcribed laughter as he did; it was just something he did. But when I saw his transcripts, there it was: The laughter machine! Especially in that “ha”+ “ha”+ period (line 12 above).¹

What an image! Moving through the warehouse, picking up a “heh” here, a “ha” there. That transcript did it for me! Thereafter, in my own transcripts, I sought to capture the various ‘parts’ out of which some actually-occurring spate of laughter had been assembled.

¹ Here is a transcript of that fragment that I did a couple of years later (ca 1967):

Roger: → It’s not really a-an Academic // Counseling Service. It’s
     sort of a drive in nut house.
Al: Then yer father comes in here and we-
Jim: heh heh
Al: → ([hahahah hah]
Ken: [hehheheh
Al: hh hh hh hh hh
Most likely the laughter that Sacks transcribed as “ha ha.” is the chunk I’ve got as “hahahah hah!” (see arrow).
This pursuit sometimes resulted in such reader-unfriendly, downright daunting segments as:

(4a) [SBL:2:2:3:45] ca 1965

1 Claire: Maybe we oughta play across the room fr(hh)om ea(hh)ch
2 o(hh)th(hh)er
3 Zoe: Ahh hah hah // heh heh heh
4 Claire: Hehh heh hehh heh // hh hh hh hh
5 Zoe: Oh it was fun, wa'n it.
6 Claire: Yea:h

That’s bad enough, but look what happened in a later version (11 years on)!

(4b) [SBL:2:2:3:R:58] ca 1976

As it happened, this was very useful because several weeks earlier something had come up in one of the Watergate tapes I was transcribing. Most roughly, it seemed to me that speaker A produced talk with some gutturals included, and speaker B, hearing the possibility of laughter in those gutturals, laughed in response. But the crucial difference was that in the Watergate instance, speaker A produced no actual laughter. It was unsupported speculation that Speaker B was responding to a possible laughter-relevance to be found in speaker A’s gutturals. Now, with Fragment (4b), I had a bit of empirical evidence of a relationship between gutturals and laughter. It wasn’t until some subsequent going-through of this fragment that I noticed what happens at the end of the laughing-together (see the arrows beneath line 7):

I wrote a note to myself: “Oh look!: Parenthesizing! Mirroring Claire’s laughter-premonitory guttural, Zoe does a laughter-exiting guttural!” And it was at this point that I decided to abandon the overview of my work on laughter, and instead to talk about what had just emerged.

3. Sometimes a frog in your throat is just a frog in your throat

Actually, sounds which are not themselves laughter but are possibly laughter-relevant is something I’ve long been interested in. So, for example, in ca 1972, in an endnote to a consideration of ‘laugh tokens’, I suggested that someone might...
hear 'laughter' when what has been done is 'coughing', and might then 'join in' that laughter by himself laughing (Jefferson, 1972: 448–449).

At that time I had no recorded material to back up this suggestion. And it wasn’t until some 20 years later, in 1993, that at least a bit of empirical evidence showed up as I was transcribing some material for Anita Pomerantz, who was working with medical data.

(5) [HospSite: 5-14-93 (1:32) [1993]

("Tom, the intern, is describing to Jill, the senior physician, a problem the patient he’s just interviewed had reported; roughly, a kind of energy slump")

| Tom: | It’s not summing that happened -hh during or immediately following |
| Tom: | training but like two or three hours afterwards. when he’d kind of be -hh (-) |
| Tom: | back at (-) whatever he was doing baseline -hh hh Uh- |
| Jill: | ___ [Is there a relationship to mea]ls? |
| Tom: | -ch-hh He sa:ys th_ga: at uh_h m -t -hhuuuhh he-ukhh hu:m -pth-t-k He alw___ |
| Tom: | eats:: bef: hre. trai ning. -hhhhhh[hh |
| Jill: | ___ ["hheeh] Yhee h. |
| Tom: | [uk-ekhhe]h HUH::= |
| Jill: | ___ ="uhh!" |
| Tom: | [There’s a frog in my throat? -hhhhh |
| Jill: | ___ ‘Oh(h)’:: |
| Tom: | [He]always eats before train ing. |
| Tom: | So that- (-) it didn’t happen then. |
| Tom: | ___ (0.6) |
| Tom: | -hh Bu(gh)-mghh :m. |
| Tom: | ___ (0.4) |
| Tom: | -plch if he hasn’t eaten- |
| Tom: | ___ (0.2) |
| Jill: | Mm hm |
| Tom: | [in a little while. |
| Jill: | Mm hm |
| Tom: | [Then this can happen.]So: |
| Jill: | [Unh hunh, |

As I was transcribing it back in 1993, it seemed to me possible that Jill was hearing Ted’s breathy gutturalness as some sort of laughter/invitation to laugh, and responding, twice, with a slight laugh (lines 7 and 9). More recently I noticed that subsequent to Tom’s announcement, ‘not laughing, frog in throat’ (line 10), when he next produces a guttural (line 16), Jill does not follow it with a laugh-particle. And having noticed that, I went on to wonder if (at line 16), Tom might be working to keep this guttural from being heard as possibly-now-laughing by immediately clearing his throat rather than, as he did before, trying to talk through the obstruction.

At the very least—20 years after that endnote remark about laughing in response to a cough, I now had an actual recorded case of someone laughing to another’s possibly-laughter-relevant but non-laughter noises.

Then, a couple of months ago, along came that business I mentioned earlier in the Watergate materials I’ve been transcribing, where it had seemed to me that speaker A produced talk with some gutturals included, and speaker B, hearing the possibility of laughter in those gutturals, laughed in response, where, for that material the problem was that, unlike Fragment (4b), speaker A did not follow his gutturals with laughter. But now, with Fragment (4b), we’ve got the connection between gutturals and laughter, and thus at least a bit of support for the speculations I’ll now offer.
about the following fragment of a telephone call between President Nixon and Assistant Attorney General, Henry Petersen.


1    Peterson:    Well ah tillyih one thing Mistuh Pres’dent thet you oughta know.
2    Nixon:         pYah. =
3    Peterson:      =hhJ ‘adda caw:ll from Ron Austro ’n the ul- LA. Ti:mes. =
4    Nixon:         =Mmhm?
5         ( )
6    Peterson:      =h Whg:’s a decent ma:n en a(r) (0.7) reasonably good acquaint’ce. nce =
7    Peterson:      → =h ( )- I think: a rep’orter’v character if there are any, =hh=
8    Nixon:         → =shh: hah hah =
9    Peterson:      → [Uh::m -t-hhh uh::and the: said =h thet they hed rep’t ors outa
10   Petersen:     the White Hau::se thet (0.4) thet uh:: huhhh (- ) • Let me use hee:z
11   ↓wo::x:::ds. huhh uh (- ) thet uh:: ahvi: two er three people over-the White
12   House were gunnuh be thrown duh the wo::lves.
13         (0.3)
14    Nixon:         Hmp::
15    Peterson:      In his tuu- en:: (is) there anything to it ‘n I said there’s nodn anything I
16         → c’n tell you ’bgh out i:gh t.
17         →
18    Nixon:         → R\h\j:ght. h::huh
19    Peterson:      → [Uh:: I jis(-) tuh cain’t t say anything ↓abg’out i:gh t. q[ne way]=
20    Nixon:         → [Thet’s ]
21    Nixon:         → =r j gh t. I
22    Peterson:      [er anow] ther I don’ wunnuh c’nfirm in I don’ wunnuh denly it.
23    Nixon:         [ t
24    Nixon:         → So ther prab’ly write a story gb’un thb:at. {hunyuh}
25    Peterson:      [ Uh , hhhhh I don’t kn: g:w.
26         ( )
27    Peterson:      (uh) B’t l: mention it only becau:w :z it’s uh
28         (0.6)
29    Nixon:         tsuh dits:: beginning duh::
30         (0.3)
31    Nixon:         git out?=Yah. =
32    Peterson:      =It’s beginnin’ duh percolate

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2 While proof-reading a second draft of this article, I noticed something of possible interest in a segment of Petersen’s utterance, “en a(r) (0.7) reasonably good acquaint’nce:”. The transcript shows an incipient “r”, “a(r)”, followed by a substantial silence, and then an “r”-started word, “reasonably”. Most roughly, an ‘incipient sound’ occurs when a speaker’s mouth is, hearably, in position to make the sound, but has not yet made it. So, for example, in the following fragment, perhaps as an emphasizing device, Emma, talking about how terribly hot it was in Palm Springs (115°), produces an incipient ‘b’ prior to the word ‘burn’:

[NB:II:4:R:5]

Emma:  lh w’z[S0 HO]:T thethcu cgg:ll dn’ev’n putcher hand QU:lt=
Emma:  =s:DE the C:A R hhijz::b:hu:rn. EXYlittin w’z’j’s je:rible.
Nancy:  [ "A h:: : : : : : ]
Incipient sounds can also be heard in cases where a speaker, having produced just that much of a word, aborts and revises the utterance in progress, e.g., in the following fragment, Shelly, starting to say ‘…that’s not the point’, aborts and revises just after having produced an incipient ‘p’ for the word ‘point’:

[MeijiGakuin:DebShel:8:32-48]

Debby: -hh But don’t alienate me just because I’m friends with [a·y·
[mean it JUST really] s e e : m s like it,]
Shelly: [i’m not trying to] i know it seemed like
→ that but that’s not th[p]-that’s not it. I mean, if you know I ed-
shhh aa-
(0.5)
Shelly: ![QH NO](youDON’T HAVE TO explain (yih) Shelly)
And, e.g., in what may be a much more subtle instance, it’s possible that Ehrlichman, having started to say someone’s name, aborts and revises just after having produced an incipient ‘m’ for that name, and inserts a title, ‘Mister’. See below, “…we can’t call if off [now(m)] Mister Mitchell hez:…”


((Ehrlichman is relaying to President Nixon a report of a conversation between Watergate burglar Howard Hunt and fellow burglar, Gordon Liddy.))

Ehr: =h[Hunt says ‘this is a screwball: operation this Watergate thing—i deh-
I don’t think I woh-wanna go forward with it.] =Liddy. hh says well
→ How’d we had to we can’t call it off now(m) Mister Mitchell hez: uh-hass
hass specifically instructed that we do en we must go ahead.

In all the Watergate materials I’ve so far transcribed, Ehrlichman usually refers to John Mitchell by his last name; sometimes by his first name or full name, but not as ‘Mister Mitchell’. I have transcribed no talk by Liddy but in his autobiography, Will (Sphere Books Ltd., London, 1981), he refers to John Mitchell by both his full and his last name, and as far as I can see, not as ‘Mister Mitchell’.

What may be happening in the above fragment is that Ehrlichman almost uses a last-name-only reference, ‘Mitchell’, then aborts and revises to ‘Mister Mitchell’. In the particular context – someone speaking of a third party’s position on a matter – use of last-name-only reference might be associated with a certain lack of respect for the position-holder and thereby of the position itself. Ehrlichman’s report clearly has Liddy pressing for acceptance of the third party’s position, with ‘Howard, we have to, we can’t call it off now…’ and ‘…we must go ahead.’. The use of a title (well-fitted to the formulation “specifically instructed”) rather than last-name-only, would be an additional resource in Liddy’s reported pursuit. What I’m posing as a possible abort and revision, in “…we can’t call it off now(m) Mister Mitchell hez:…” would then be a matter of Ehrlichman’s – almost – seamlessly inserting that term of respect into an utterance in which it was not initially to be used.

Returning to Peterson’s utterance. ‘en a(r) (0.7) reasonably good acquaint’nce: ‘: As I was proof-reading my way through the fragment, it occurred to me that the incipient ‘r’ in ‘a(r)’ might be an aborted start on what he subsequently says, ‘a rep’orter’ character. That is, ‘en a(r)’, might have been a start on the assessment ‘and a reporter of character’ as part two of a two-part list (‘A decent man and a reporter of character’). Which is then aborted, and an r-begin clause providing grounds for both the prior assessment (‘a decent man’) and the, now, forthcoming assessment (‘a reporter of character’), is sought and found in ‘reasonably good acquaintance’. So: what may have started out as ‘a decent man and a reporter of character’ would then have been restructured to ‘a decent man and a reasonably good acquaintance; I think a reporter of character’.

3 The phrase ‘...if there are any’ significantly modifies the utterance Petersen had, up to that point, produced. Upon its occurrence, the utterance is now on track with President Nixon’s well-known loathing of reporters. I’m wondering if Petersen might not have specifically appended it, ‘just in time’. I’ve been collecting instances of ‘ appended modifications’. Some are easy to spot, in that an utterance comes to full-stop intonation and then the modification occurs, e.g., in the following fragment there is a possible touchiness in Emma’s telling her sister Lottie, to whom she’s talking on the telephone, about having invited someone else for a visit.

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[NB:IV:13:R:14]

Emma: Ah wanna see the ga:me Gladys’s ast iss over et one thirty th’r see
the game I had her over last night.-for a minute and -hihhh
Lottie: [How is she
doij’n’.

Emma: [Ohhe; fi:ne she heard I’m Bill: he arri:ye sa:fe:y(ah) t a:nd uh
Lottie: ‘Uh high,’

Emma: He’s doin’ fine, …
Round Two (lines 15–25): Nixon’s “R[h]ght.h” (line 18), may be picking up on a possible between-us scorn for the reporter Ron Ostrow, which Petersen is quoting himself as having expressed in the utterance, “I said there’s not anything I can tell you abgout ight.” (lines 15 and 16).

That utterance can be understood to be saying, e.g., ‘I have nothing that can be told to the likes of you’. We can note that the context set by the prior between-us skepticism of “…if there are any” may weight towards a hearing, now, of between-us scorn in “I said there’s not anything I can tell you about it.” And the utterance ends with a gutturalness that might be hearable as laughter-relevant.

When I first made that observation, I had nothing to back it up. The Pomerantz material that became Fragment (5) did have a bit of gutturalness in it, but it had many other possibly laugh-relevant noises. And guttural noises may be found to be doing a range of other work (see, e.g., nvi above, [NBIV:13.R:14], Emma’s “Ohgh; fi:::ne… etc.” in response to Lottie’s “How is she doin’?”) It was the SBL material, now Fragment (4b), that clearly showed (a) the possible laugh-relevance of, (b) specifically, guttural speech.

Now, similar to his response to Nixon’s laughter in Round One (lines 7–9), Petersen follows Nixon’s “R[h]ght.h” with a laughter-free “Uh::” (line 19), and continues speaking. But in contrast to whatever was going on in Round One (lines 7–9), here, something like a ‘misapprehension-clarification’ series seems to be underway.

Roughly, Petersen now produces a ‘revised recycle’ of the possibly between-us scornful “I said there’s not anything I can tell you abgout ight.” (lines 15 and 16). The revised recycle is clearly not a matter of material that Petersen will not transmit to ‘the likes of you’, but of Petersen’s own circumstances: “Uh:: I just can’t [say anything abgout ight].” one way or another=I don’t want to confirm and I don’t want to deny it.” (lines 19–22).

So far I’ve done as simplified an exposition as possible. But there is some especially nice detail here that I’d like to work through (lines 15–21):

In the course of that statement of his own circumstances, a couple of gutturals have occurred: “I just can’t [say anything abgout ight].” (line 19). We can notice that those gutturals occur in the very same words that gutturals appeared in the possibly scornful “there’s not anything I can tell you abgout ight.” (lines 15 and 16).

Nixon, having responded to the gutteralized, possibly scornful ‘nothing to say to the likes of you’ proposal with a laugh-tokened acknowledgement, “R[h]ght.” (line 18), now starts up just after the gutturals in Petersen’s revised ‘own circumstances’ recycle. And, as Petersen has produced a revised recycle of his statement, Nixon now produces a revised recycle of his acknowledgement of that statement.

Specifically, the acknowledgement which follows Petersen’s revised, but once-again-gutteralized recursive, is now free of laughter: ‘Thet’s right.’ (lines 20 and 21):

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And, e.g., in the following fragment of a telephone call, E.J. and Croft are having a bit of a dispute about electrical wiring:

[TCl[a]14:3-6:60]

EJ: Well hy-where where do you get your ground and your neutr::l.

(2.0)

Croff: W-e-ll.

EJ: Y[ou-]

Croff: → [The ground and the neutral are two separate subjects]-by the way

EJ: Well I know the gYeah I that’s true.

Or, where full-stop intonation is not produced, contextual features can illuminate the phenomenon, e.g., in the following fragment of a telephone call, the caller, Leslie’s, first utterance to Joyce, her friend and co-member of the Women’s Institute, is “…are you going to the meeting tonight.”. Several minutes into the call, having gotten onto an altogether different matter, Leslie returns to the initial business:

Holt:CS5:4:MSO:4-5

Leslie: ehh huh huh (0.8)

Joyce: → Oh:: g-Qh ’n I think Carol is going, t’the [meeting t’ni g h t . ]

Leslie: hh [ Y E : S ] that’s rjght

In addition to the context, there is a possible clue in the clear occurrence of two phrases, each one ‘comma’-intoned: “I think Carol is going,” and “t’the meeting tonight.”. It seems to me that Leslie had initially produced “Oh I think Carol is going,” as adequate reference to the meeting, and thereafter appends the specification which takes into account that the intervening talk might have made this allusive, ‘skip-tied’ reference problematic for her recipient.

Now, one of the candidate cases I’ve collected of ‘latched modification’ is virtually seamless. In this case, Timothy has phoned Michael to voice his concern about Michael’s wife, who is having back trouble. It seems to me that in his answer to Timothy’s question, Michael appends a clarification, “the house”, i.e., that she’s not “walking’ round” in general.

[Heritage:01:2-4:2]

Tomothy: =izh [is she] still flat[ on her back] on a [on the on] 

[Min.]

[Mah]: [Oh y e s] [n: N o ; 5]she’s: vuw-uren:

Michael: [Mh]: [We’re t’ni g walking rou:nd th[4 house-se].]

[A h y e s. ]

Although the ‘join’ between “…walking’ round” and “the house” is seamless, there is a similar sense of ‘doubling’ as in the prior fragment; here in the intonational contours of “walking’ rou:nd” and “th’ house-se.”. The utterance in effect finishes and then re-finishes, in contrast to, e.g., “walking” round the house.”. I’m wondering if Petersen’s “… a rep:ter v character if there are any,” might not be added to the collection, as perhaps a perfectly seamless instance of ‘latched modification’.
15-16 Peterson: → I said there's nothin anything I c'n tell you 'dgh out i_gh t.

17

(0.4)

18 Nixon: → R^n(h)ght h.-_huh

19 Peterson: → [Uh:: I jis(ˌ)uh cain't ʃ say anything ʃ ab_ghōut i_gh t. o[ne way]=

20 Nixon: → [Thet's ]

21 Nixon: → =r j g h t.

22 Peterson: → [er anowther]

It appears that (a) by producing a statement that clearly is not denigrating Ron Ostrow but setting forth Petersen's own circumstances, and producing that statement with some of the same words as the possibly degenerative statement, i.e., “…about it…” and producing those same words similarly to the way they had been produced in the possibly degenerative statement, i.e., including gutterals in both versions of “…ab_ghōut i_gh t…”, Petersen can be conveying to Nixon that degeneration of the reporter Ron Ostrow was not intended. And (b) by producing similar acknowledgments to both versions, but producing the version which follows Petersen's 'clarification' free of laughter, Nixon can be showing his understanding that Petersen's gutterals were not produced to be heard as laugh-relevant. ⁵

4. About context

Having touched on the working of context for hearing possibly laugh-relevant noises as laugh-relevant in the Nixon-Petersen material, I became aware of an interesting possibility in fragment (5), the interaction between the intern with a frog in his throat and the laughing senior physician.

Initially when working with Fragment (5), I noticed only the 'possibly laughter-relevant noises followed by laughter' phenomenon. Specifically, it didn't occur to me to try to motivate Jill, the senior physician's, laughter beyond that it was responsive to the noises Ted, the intern, was making.

But, with the contexting relevance of 'between-us skepticism/scorn' so blatantly present in fragment (6), when I went back to work with fragment (5), there it was!

Ted reports: "He says thshbath u_dah_m: t ʃhuhhh hē-uhkhh hū:m. pth t k He always eats:: befq:hrre. tra_jing." (lines 5 and 6).

What popped out as a possible issue here is that Jill may be hearing in Ted's report a between-us skepticism about what the patient "says" he "always" does—with, then, the collection of gutterals and breathinesses inviting her to affiliate with his skepticism by herself laughing. Where, then, her soft laugh plus acknowledgement token "hheehYhheh." (line 7), could be a sort of "Yeah sure, we know what patients 'say' they 'always' do."

If something like this is going on here, Jill, the senior physician, may have been responding as a sophisticated, knowledgeable expert to such 'cues' as "he says that…", plus "he always…", while the intern, Ted is simply accepting what the patient has said. (Note that when he recycles that segment of the report the doubt-invoking "he says" is no longer present. Now it’s, "He always eats before train ing." (line 12). Which, for the purposes of the report he is producing, sets aside whether or not the patient actually does eat before training as an issue, and sets up for some other causative factor than not-eating before training. And Jill may be holding off responding to this altered formulation until she see where the thing is now going. (See lines 12–20: apparently the problem, as Ted, the intern, sees it is that the patient doesn't always eat soon enough after training.)

As with a range of discrete sequences, it begins to look as if studying 'possibly laugh-relevant noise followed by laughter' can lead to somewhat broader sorts of considerations. That is, it may be that there are ways to context any such discrete occurrence as 'possibly laugh-relevant noises followed by laughter'.

⁵ In niv above, re fragment (4b), I pointed to the possible 'mirroring' in Chloe's gutturalized exit from a guttural-initiated laughing-together, i.e., her summary "Ohgh: it wz fu:n wun it.". Conceivably Nixon's gutturaled, 'serious' return to Petersen's gutturaled prefaced announcement of a reporter's statement, i.e., including gutterals in both versions of "…ab_ghōut i_gh t…", Petersen can be conveying to Nixon that degeneration of the reporter Ron Ostrow was not intended. And (b) by producing similar acknowledgments to both versions, but producing the version which follows Petersen's 'clarification' free of laughter, Nixon can be showing his understanding that Petersen's gutterals were not produced to be heard as laugh-relevant.

⁶ Indeed, Ted may have attempted a more subtle revision in his initial version (lines 5 and 6). Note that the transcript shows two discrete segments. The first (line 5), is incomplete (in standard orthography, noises omitted: 'He says that uh'm he-'), it is followed by further noises, the last of which ('huhm.') is shown as 'period-intoned': ‘tch hh He sa:ys thshbath u_dah_m: t ʃhuhhh hē-ukhh hū:m." The second segment (lines 5 and 6), is shown as a 'new start' (in standard orthography, 'He always eats before training."

Further, the detailed version, “tch hh He always eats:: befq:hrre. tra_jing." shows the second segment initiated with what strikes me as a similar sort of inbreath to the first’s “tch hh He…" now it’s “pth t k He..." It may be that the doubt-invoking 'He says that...' segment is to be heard as abandoned and replaced by the simply-conveying-what-was-said 'He always..." segment.

Oh, and lookee here. We may have another case of 'appended modification'. 'He always eats: befq:hrre." comes to full stop. It is immediately followed by a specification of what it is that the eating occurs 'before', i.e., "training." 'He always eats:: befq:hrre. tra_jing." the appended modification re-specifying the key activity, 'training', which had been mentioned just prior to the incursion of the business about the frog in Ted's throat (see line 1, "It's not somin that happened hh during or immediately f..." further). This resonates with Leslie's 'Oh’n I think Carol is going, the meeting tonight," where the appended modification re-specifies the key event and 'reason for the call', i.e., 'the meeting tonight', which had been followed by talk about an altogether different matter (see the introduction to, and consideration of [Holt: C85:4:MSO:4-5] niviiii, above).
As it happens, the contexting in each of the two cases I’ve so far noticed is of one sort; that in the utterance containing those noises, there is some possible conveying of a ‘between-us’ attitude, position, etc., toward what is being reported; for which, say, affiliation might then be seen as a relevant next action by the recipient.

This has got to be a fluke! It goes against the intuitive grain to suppose that there are not ranges of contexting issues. But then, that’s the point of observation. Sometimes the counter-intuitive turns out to be the facts of the matter. Whether there are other contexting issues, and what they might be, remains to be discovered.

5. Pushing the envelope

Perhaps a lot of this is ‘going too far’. But, as Sacks said when a student asked, re some remarks Sacks had made about Poetics in ordinary talk, “ Couldn’t that be carried too far?” Sacks responded: “The whole problem is that it’s nowhere in the first instance. The issue is to pull it out and raise the possibility of its operation.” [1995: 325]

I like the image that recurs in Tom Wolfe’s The Right Stuff: ‘pushing the envelope’. So, it’s possibly ‘going too far’. So, go ahead and push the envelope. Maybe the consideration you come up with won’t go into your final draft—maybe it won’t go anywhere in the first place. But to start off with, if it’s nowhere in the first place, what is there to lose? Get out there and Push The Envelope!

References


G. Jefferson (1938–2008) received her Ph.D. from UC Irvine in 1972. She has been part of ‘the first generation’ in conversation analysis. Her work on the sequential architecture of laughter in conversation is one of her major contributions to the development of the field.

7 Another salient fluke-like feature is that in each case the relationship between the two participants can be characterized as superordinate-subordinate, with the superordinate participant treating a subordinate’s (incidentally) gutturalized utterance as a (joking) allusion to ‘between-us’ scorn of some ‘them’, and appreciating it with laughter. My guess is that in each case the superordinate is (mis)apprehending the subordinate’s talk as an instance of a base-phenomenon, the most generalized characterization of which would be ‘sychophancy’, with these two instances belonging to a subset, call it (for want at this point of a better phrase), Buddying Up (with emphasis on the ‘Up’). Most roughly, a subordinate, ‘knowing’ a superordinate’s (whether categorial, in this case A Doctor’s or personal, in this case Richard Nixon’s) attitude toward, opinion of, etc., some ‘them’ (Patients and Reporters respectively), makes a little joke which involves proposing his superordinate’s position as his own—which the superordinate rewards with a little laugh. This ‘buddying up’ may be something that a superordinate becomes accustomed to receiving, and to rewarding. In these two cases we may be seeing a superordinate misapprehending a ‘straight’ bit of talk, incidentally gutturalized, as an instance of ‘buddying up’ produced as a between-us little joke, and mistakenly responding to it as such, rewarding it with a little laugh.