Okay? Yeah? Right?: Negotiating understanding and agreement in master's supervision meetings with international students

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore communication between supervisors and international students in the context of master's supervision meetings. Nine meetings between three lecturers and seven students were audio recorded and analysed using Conversation Analysis. The focus of the study is the supervisors' use of *Yeah?*, *Okay?* and *Right?* after students' minimal responses and silence, usually following supervisors' informing and advising turns. The use of these tags in this position is distinctive, and throws some light on the practice of supervision and on the ways students and supervisors orient to their roles. The tags can be seen to function to underline the supervisors' actions of informing or advising, to mark transitions in the supervisors' talk, to express doubt about the students' understanding or agreement, and to invite students to speak. The sequences of which these tags are a part highlight both the asymmetrical relationship between supervisors and students and the negotiation of understanding and agreement that is a central issue in this setting, particularly when supervisors and students do not share the same linguistic or cultural background.

I conclude by outlining some implications for supervisors' practice, and also some specific suggestions which might be considered by teachers of English for academic purposes.

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Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The focus of my research is supervision meetings between university lecturers and international students. My interest in this area originates in my move from working in dedicated English language schools to working in a university, where I not only taught English for Academic purposes (EAP) to students from overseas (mostly Chinese), but also liaised with some of the lecturers in the business-related degree programmes to which most of these students progressed. For these lecturers, their students' proficiency in spoken English was something they did not analyse in detail (understandably), but it was often perceived as problematic. They would sometimes report conversations with particular students where communication was difficult and mutual understanding was negotiated laboriously. I would make sympathetic noises and think about how to help the students I was teaching to cope more successfully. But I was also aware that my professional training and experience enabled me to avoid some (though not all) of the most frustrating misunderstandings (and non-understandings) experienced by my colleagues. I therefore decided to research these interactions, not by interviewing both sides about their perceptions and experiences, but by listening to and analysing their conversations. Supervision meetings presented a site for these interactions, and three of my colleagues and their supervisees kindly agreed to record some of these meetings for me.

The approach to analysis that I decided to use was ethnomethodological conversation analysis (CA). This was a methodology I was not very familiar with,

but I was attracted by its attention to the details of sequential talk, its rigour, and its demand that analytical conclusions should be grounded in the participants' talk and actions. Reading about CA led me to think about the conversations I was recording as examples of a particular type of institutional interaction, and to broaden my scope from simply using supervision meetings as a site for talk between international students and academics to looking at how supervision meetings are 'talked into being' (Heritage, 1984a, p. 290), and how they represent a central, and little researched, academic genre. This broadening of my focus was reinforced by the practicalities of the recordings I managed to collect, with regard to the participants and to the types of meeting. The students involved, although all technically 'international' in not being UK home students, were diverse in their levels of proficiency in English and in the national cultures they represented. The meetings ranged from short classroom-based discussions about the students' dissertation proposals, to longer meetings held in the lecturers' offices when students were in the early and late stages of writing their dissertations.

Since starting this research project, my own job description has changed to include supervision of master's dissertations. The majority of students I supervise are international, again mostly Chinese. This area of research therefore has relevance not only to my roles as EAP teacher and advisor, but also to my role as subject lecturer.

The focus of my research was a particular interactional practice that I found to be pervasive in the supervision meetings I recorded. This was the use by supervisors

of *yeah?, okay?* or *right?* as the third turn in a sequence that usually began with an act of informing or advising by the supervisor, followed either by silence or by a minimal response from the student. Such a sequence is shown in Extract 1.1:

Extract 1.1: Weilin 1.31

```
1   Supervisor: =So hybrid just means (0.6) it's (.) part Western, part
2               Chinese.
3               (0.4)
4   Student:    Ah.
5   Supervisor: Yeah?
6   Student:    Yeah.
```

The supervisor's *yeah?* (line 5) appears to question the student's response (line 4) to the supervisor's informing turn (lines 1-2). I labelled *yeah?* a post-response tag. This is paralleled by a post-gap tag (*okay?*) in Extract 1.2:

Extract 1.2: Weilin 1.7

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1   Supervisor: Wha- what I would suggest that you do now,
2   Student:    Uh huh,
3   Supervisor: (.) is (.) refine the research question.
4               (0.6)
5               Okay?
6   Student:    Refine
```

Such post-gap or post-response tags (PG/R tags) became the focus of my research, as I sought to explore the following research questions:

1. Why do supervisors use PG/R tags? What are their functions?

2. How is their use related to supervision? What is institutional about them? How is their use related to supervisors' and students' roles and responsibilities?

3. How does their use relate to understanding, or the progress of intersubjectivity? Is their use related to the identities of the students as international?

3

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1   International students in English-medium universities

We have now entered an unprecedented era of internationalization in HE. Hatakenaka (2004) highlights a number of recent international trends including the rapid rise in student and staff mobility, the increase in 'trans-national education, defined as universities in one way or another setting up shop in overseas locations' (Hatakenaka, 2004, p. 3), and a substantial increase in international collaboration in research. The aspect of internationalization that is of principal relevance to my research area is student mobility. According to the OECD, in 2009 almost 3.7 million tertiary students were enrolled outside their home countries, a number that had increased by 77% since 2000. More than half of these students went to six countries: the USA, the UK, Australia, France, Germany and Canada. The countries with the highest levels of incoming student mobility, measured as the proportion of international students in their total tertiary enrolment, were Australia (21%) and the UK (15%). The largest numbers of international students were from China, India and Korea, with Asians accounting for 52% of all students studying abroad worldwide (OECD, 2011).

Most international students are studying professional subjects, such as business and IT, a consequence of the market-driven nature of internationalization. As Hatakenaka says,

> it appears that the rise in prices to close to the full costs of higher education is influencing students' choice of study. If it is free to study, they might choose any subject; when there are substantial costs associated with learning, they are more likely to think twice about pursuing subjects that would not directly enhance job prospects.
>
> (2004, p. 25)

Chang and Kanno also speculate that the popularity of some subjects may be to do with their 'lighter English demands' (2010, p. 690).

Many of these students are enrolled on taught master's degree programmes. According to House, fifty per cent of taught master's students in the UK are from overseas, 'with non-EU students dominating these numbers' (2010, p. 13).

Of course, not all 'international', 'foreign' or 'overseas' students in English-medium universities are non-native speakers of English. In addition, the distinction between native and non-native speakers is problematic, particularly with regard to English in all its global manifestations, and the label 'non-native speaker' conceals a vast range of linguistic and sociocultural competence. I have chosen to use the term 'international' as a convenient shorthand rather than one of the other terms (such as 'L2 users', 'speakers of English as an additional' or 'second language', or 'students from a non-English speaking background') that are sometimes used to avoid the inadequacy of the 'non-native speaker' label. I will return to the question of identities and labels in chapter 2.

Both students and academic staff on such courses may face problems in adjusting to this situation. House, for example, highlights a challenge for students who are used to more explicit teaching and guidance than is the norm in the UK HE:

> The UK's pedagogic approach tends to place greater emphasis on developing students' independent research skills than imparting knowledge from the front of a classroom. In practice, this can translate as less time in lectures and (in theory) more in the library, which can come as a surprise to those (especially international students) accustomed to a more teacher-led approach.
>
> (2010, p. 61)

At the same time, academics may not be well equipped to help international students whose linguistic, cultural and educational background may hamper their chances of academic success in this context and make communication problematic. For example, Flowerdew and Miller (1996) examined problems arising in lectures in English as a Second Language given by expatriate lecturers to Cantonese-speaking students in Hong Kong. When shown transcripts of their own lectures, 'lecturers expressed surprise at the level of vocabulary complexity' (1996, p. 131). Flowerdew and Miller observe that lecturers

> were very much aware of the linguistic problems of their students and of the need for linguistic simplification in their lectures. However, they were less successful in overcoming the problems.
>
> (1996, p. 130)

An even more serious problem is when students' linguistic and cultural differences are mistakenly attributed to a lack of academic aptitude. Ballard, writing in the Australian HE context, claims that '[f]ew lecturers have adequate cross-cultural experience through which to interpret the reasons for the apparent intellectual weaknesses of their foreign students' (1996, p. 164). In addition, she raises the issue of whether lecturers are even willing to address these problems:

> … even fewer would regard such intervention as their proper role, which they see as teaching and researching in their own field of expertise. Moreover most academic staff feel themselves under such pressure from large classes, falling standards and the need to publish that they are not likely to be prepared to vary their teaching practice to accommodate the handful of overseas students who lurk unhappily in their classes.
>
> (Ballard, 1996, p. 164)

More than a decade later, the 'lurking handful' have grown in number, and, in some courses, may be in the majority. Lecturers may therefore be obliged to 'accommodate' them, in whatever ways they are able. They need 'to acquire

multiple literacies that acknowledge cultural and linguistic differences' (Giroux, 1992, p. 225).

In the wider context of an increasingly diverse HE sector, these cultural and linguistic differences are not confined to international students, but also to students with no family history of HE participation, professionals seeking qualifications in new disciplinary areas, or students with disabilities. So although my starting point is international students, my interest is not confined to them. Indeed, as I have already mentioned, international students are by no means a homogeneous group, and, as I will discuss in more detail later in the next chapter, their linguistic and cultural status is not something that can be assumed. Having said that, I will now outline some of the research that has focused on the supervision of international students.

2.2 International students and supervision

Research into international postgraduate students' experiences in English-medium universities highlights the importance of supervision and the student-supervisor relationship. Belcher (1994), for example, emphasises the importance of close collaboration between supervisor and student, drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of legitimate peripheral participation. In her study of three non-native graduate students, she found that the most successful student (in terms of her ability to participate in her chosen 'community of practice') was the least linguistically proficient but had the most collaborative relationship with her supervisor. Myles and Cheng (2003) found that the international students they interviewed stated that they communicated well with their supervisors,

though for some students there was uncertainty about the degree of formality that is appropriate in face-to-face interaction with supervisors, a point also made by Paltridge and Starfield (2007). This aspect is central to Krase's (2007) case study of a Korean master's student's unhappy experience of supervision in a US university. The supervisor expected to have a relatively egalitarian relationship with the student, who, for her part, wanted more direction but did not have the confidence to ask for it. Krase concludes that the 'precise shape and feel of an effective relationship can vary considerably along a continuum from hierarchical to egalitarian so long as both student and advisor understand and accept the terms under which their work is proceeding' (Krase, 2007, p. 68).

Interview-based studies of international students' experiences usefully highlight the emotional challenges of studying and researching in a foreign culture. McClure's (2005) interviews of Chinese laboratory-based research students in Singapore, noted their 'anxiety concerning independent research work, distance from supervisors, learning roles, and communication with their supervisors' (2005, p. 8). Chang and Strauss (2010) interviewed Mandarin-speaking master's students in New Zealand, and they note the students' desire to be 'acknowledged as individuals and not just students' (2010, p. 425), and their mixed feelings of 'gratitude for the help' their supervisors gave them and 'embarrassment at their linguistic difficulties' (2010, p. 424).

Some studies have drawn on the perceptions of supervisors as well as students, and these often focus on issues of language and culture. Pilcher et al. (2006) interviewed 32 supervisors in a British university about their perceptions of

Chinese actuarial and computing master's students. Most believed that language was the students' 'greatest barrier', though whether this perception related solely to their writing rather than speaking is not clear. Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) interviewed four master's level supervisor-student pairs in New Zealand to elicit their perceptions of the difficulties of writing the discussion section of their theses. They found that the students tended to focus on sentence-level problems whereas the supervisors focused more on clarity at the level of the paragraph and the need to understand 'the rhetorical and organisational requirements of the genre' (2006, p. 13). Chang and Kanno (2010) also interviewed four supervisor-student pairs, this time at doctoral level in a US university. They argue that 'language competence as cultural capital does not have the same value across different disciplines and may not always be critical to NNES [non-native English speaking] students' academic success' (2010, p. 671). In addition, the students 'saw themselves as competent and legitimate members of the academic communities despite the extra linguistic and cultural barriers they encountered' and their supervisors did not think that they 'suffered marked disadvantages because of their NNES status' (2010, p. 689). This sense of confidence and competence may well be more prevalent at doctoral than at master's level.

Some of the supervisors in Anderson et al.'s (2006) study of a professional master's course in the UK noted that learning to critically evaluate existing research literature 'could be somewhat demanding for some individuals, particularly if they came from a culture where students were not accustomed to exercise this degree of independence of voice' (Anderson et al., 2006, p. 157).

Similarly, supervisors' efforts to encourage students to be less dependent on them and to 'take on a more active and powerful role within the supervisory relationship' were seen as being made more difficult when students 'possessed a different set of cultural norms' concerning supervisor-student relationships (Anderson et al., 2006, pp. 162–3). Chang and Strauss (2010), however, criticise this paper as an example of 'Western academics apparently view[ing] the ideal postgraduate student as a native speaker of English, familiar with (and apparently uncritical of) western academic discourse' (2010, p. 416). They found that students in their study expressed 'a good deal of indignation about the perception that Chinese students were not capable of critical thought' (2010, p. 422).

Finally, there is a strand of literature that attempts to pass on findings from studies such as these to supervisors themselves (Knight, 1999; Lee, 2012; e.g. Mullins & Kiley, 1998; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Ryan & Zuber-Skerritt, 1999; Smith, 1999; Wisker, 2004). Lee's (2012) book, for example, draws on interviews with academics and focus groups with students. She concludes that the needs of international students are common to all students, but highlights the need for supervisors to be aware of etiquette in other cultures and to discuss with students concepts such as 'supervision', 'referencing' and 'independent work and research' (2012, p. 67).

2.3 Studies of talk in supervision and related genres

While studies of perceptions of supervision are relatively commonplace, there is much less research focusing on talk in supervision, which is perhaps not

surprising given the privacy and delicacy of the supervisory relationship. Before describing what research has been done in this area, I will touch on studies of talk in related university genres. Small-group seminars or tutorials (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Benwell, 1996, 1999; Viechnicki, 1997; Waring, 2001, 2002a), have similarities with supervision meetings where the supervisor has previously asked the student to read or write something before the next meeting, and with 'later stage' supervision meetings where supervisors are feeding back on students' work. But their purpose/function is different in that seminars are either *retrospectively* oriented in focusing on what students have read or written, or oriented to the activity itself (e.g. by developing students' discussion skills, (Benwell, 1996, pp. 139, 142)), whereas supervision meetings are *prospectively* oriented to the goal of successful dissertation/thesis completion.

Closer to supervision are one-to-one meetings between students and institutional representatives, oriented to teaching/tutoring and advice giving. These include academic counselling/advising sessions, the focus of which is generally to help students choose their courses for the coming semester (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990; Guthrie, 1997; He, 1994, 1995, 1998; Shea, 1994), academic writing tutorials (Koshik, 2010; Thonus, 1999; Waring, 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Young & Miller, 2004), careers counselling (Vehviläinen, 2003) and office hour interactions between students and academics (Limberg, 2007) and teaching assistants (Chiang & Mi, 2008).

When it comes to talk in supervision, Cargill's (1997, 1998, 2000) study is the only one I know of that focuses on international students. She found that the two students

> seemed reluctant to take up turns at talk with their supervisors unless given very clear signals that they were expected to do so. They also did not intervene in the flow of the talk to address issues of miscommunication or non-understanding that went beyond the immediate propositional level.
>
> <div align="right">(2000, p. 36)</div>

Cargill suggests that this relates to the students' culturally-based perceptions of appropriate student and supervisor roles, leading to 'a conflict between taking steps to communicate clearly and remaining within the model of student role the students see as appropriate for them' (2000, p. 36). At the same time, she identifies supervisors' indirectness when giving suggestions as a source of misunderstanding:

> [S]tudents may have difficulty perceiving supervisor suggestions as such when they are made in very indirect ways as if to avoid giving offence to a colleague, and supervisors may be unable to tell whether the suggestions have been taken on board.
>
> <div align="right">(1997, p. 163)</div>

Vehviläinen (2009a, 2009b) uses CA to analyse talk in master's supervision meetings in Finland. She focuses on student-initiated advice sequences and on student resistance to critical feedback. Finally, Grant (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2008) also focuses on master's level supervision, theorising it from Foucauldian and Hegelian perspectives, and including some analysis of talk in supervision meetings, as well as analysis of related texts. I will discuss some of these studies in more detail below.

2.4 Variation within supervision

Supervision itself can vary according to academic level, disciplinary area and stage. Supervision takes place at undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels. As Anderson et al. point out, 'Masters dissertations have attracted far less scholarly attention than Ph.D. theses despite their distinctive character and the worldwide proliferation of taught masters programmes' (2008, p. 33). They are shorter and less intellectually demanding than doctoral theses, and they are usually undertaken at the end of a taught programme of study. While there will be much in common between master's and doctoral supervision, there will inevitably be differences, not least in the degree to which the student is expected to become part of the academic community. Most of the literature I refer to here relates to master's supervision, though writers do not always make the distinction explicit, an issue exacerbated by the fact that 'dissertation' and 'thesis' are used differently in different education systems.

Supervision may also be affected by the academic discipline in which it takes place. Egan et al. (2009) refer to a contrast between 'the individual student/supervisor model' (common in the humanities and social sciences) where 'the student and supervisor work together as a dyad, independent of others from the department', and 'research group or laboratory-based group supervision' (common in science and engineering), where 'groups of academics, research fellows and graduate students work together towards a common goal and support each other in the process', and where the supervisor 'provides leadership for the group' (2009, p. 339).

The stage of completion of the dissertation/thesis is another difference that will affect supervision. In the earlier stages, the purpose of the meetings appears to be predominantly to help the student to decide on their research question and approach, whilst later on they will involve the supervisor feeding back on what the student has written (Vehviläinen, 2009a). Throughout there will be an element of task setting on the part of the supervisor, and asking for advice on the part of the student (Vehviläinen, 2009b).

2.5 The improvisatory nature of supervision

At PhD level, Acker et al. (1994) relate perceptions to two models 'apparent in the literature of supervision. The technical rationality model gives priority to issues of procedure or technique, while the negotiated order model conceptualizes supervision as a process open to negotiation and change' (1994, p. 483). They conclude that a negotiated order model is a better description of what happens in practice. Grant suggests that both views fail to account for the 'messy complexity' of supervision – 'an unpredictable process that no amount of technique or experience can resolve in advance' (2005b, p. 15). She describes supervision as

> a messy and unpredictable pedagogy in which the academic and the personal come together in an unusual way. The significance of this understanding is that we cannot easily or meaningfully regulate or 'train' for supervision. Because of its implication in the production of original, independent academic work and the authorised academic subject, it must be as much a practice of improvisation as it is of regularity.
>
> (2005b, p. iii)

As Vehviläinen points out, 'much of what university teachers do is reacting, in a split second, to students' questions and other initiatives' (2009b, p. 187). Grant takes this further in a view of supervision as containing moments of jazz-like

improvisation where supervisor and student are listening and responding to each other in a creative way, though '[o]verarching such moments, the overall fragmented nature of the dialogue holds the seeds of misunderstanding (and a lapse into confusion and anxiety)' (2005b, p. 187).

2.6 Students, supervisors and the dissertation

While the supervision meeting is obviously oriented to the *product* of a successfully completed dissertation/thesis, there is also a *process* dimension inasmuch as the meeting is part of the larger research process. In other words (though this may not always be made explicit by supervisors), students are being trained/inducted in the skills of academic research. As Grant puts it:

> supervision differs from other forms of teaching and learning in higher education in its peculiarly intense and negotiated character, as well as in its requirements for a blend of pedagogical and personal relationship skills. These differences arise because supervision is not only concerned with the production of a good thesis, but also with the transformation of the student into an independent researcher.
>
> (Grant, 2003, p. 175)

Grant (2008), highlights the inherent difficulty of the student-supervisor relationship as 'a necessary relation of mutual struggle and dependence' (2008, p. 12). This may sit uneasily with 'much current discourse [which] wants to posit supervision as something ... more mutual and collegial like "mentoring"' (2008, p. 24). She describes 'silences ... arising from prohibitions founded on the supervisor's desire not to overly hurt or discourage the student, and the student's desire not to reveal herself but rather to "listen and improve"' (2008, p. 21). She also draws attention to 'the problematic centrality of the thesis' on which the supervisor can only work through the student:

[Supervisors] may invest considerable energy in ensuring that the student understands their recommendations for the thesis, even though a student who is too obedient is unsatisfactory. In contrast, the student works directly on the thesis but, frequently unsure of how to proceed, is bound to the supervisor's judgment of it.

(2008, p. 22)

2.6.1 Supervisor roles and responsibilities

Sayed et al. (1998) drew on interviews with ten MEd students in South Africa and on diaries kept by their supervisors in order to explore the reasons for students failing to complete their dissertations. Apart from a number of external factors, they discuss students' conceptions of supervisors as director or as guide.

In the case of the supervisor as director, the students seem to conceive of research rather narrowly as the execution of a task that has been pre-determined by the supervisor who provides the topic, theoretical framework and the methods and techniques of research. They seem to have enjoyed the security of the structured coursework component with its pre-defined objects, aims and requirements for successful completion. Supervisors' diaries reflect that they tend to be cast as the authority figure by these students. One effect of this is that students see themselves as producing work for the supervisor as an external authority, leading to a constant chain of missed deadlines, necessitating follow-up calls from the supervisor and affecting the quality of the supervision relationship.

In contrast, with those who perceive the supervisor as a guide and mentor there is a sense of taking ownership of the research project, of the project as an adventure and opportunity to explore. ... These students tend to see themselves as the authority in setting deadlines and goals, and cast the supervisor in the role of resource person who helps them to achieve their goals. For instance, such a student may frequently call the supervisor to discuss a specific issue on which s/he is stuck, or to ask for references.

(1998, p. 281)

In the context of a professional master's course Anderson et al. (2006) refer to a 'central duality of supporting and shaping students' efforts that framed supervisors' day-to-day practice.' (2006, p. 163). They describe supervisors as seeing themselves as having

a gatekeeper role and a commitment to align students' work with academic standards, which entailed the need to take actions to ensure that the dissertation was research worthy. At the same time supervisors experienced a personal commitment to students. This involved a responsibility to assist students to pursue a topic which excited their interest and to support their sense of agency.

(Anderson et al., 2006, p. 164)

They note that the balance between supporting and shaping shifted over the time frame of the dissertation study, with supervisors generally playing a more active shaping role in the early and final stages. In addition, supervisors talked of adjusting their approach to the needs of individual students, helping students to 'establish a clear focus' and construct 'an academically appropriate and realistically manageable research design' (2006, p. 159).

He (1998) makes a similar point with regard to the 'dual and difficult role' of academic counsellors, who are called on 'simultaneously to act as (a) the student's ally in seeking a solution to the student's problem, and (b) the university's representative to make sure that the university's rules and regulations are followed' (1998, p. 2). Writing from a CA perspective, Vehviläinen also highlights supervisors' 'need to support students' agency while controlling the quality and direction of their work' (2009b, p. 189).

2.6.2 Student roles and responsibilities

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, drawing on Kress and Fowler (1979), argue that students are expected to 'play a subordinate role and be polite, modest and unrebellious' while at the same time showing themselves to be 'worthy members of the intellectual community which demands that they demonstrate "independence of opinion"' (1990, p. 473). Anderson et al. link this to their model of supporting and shaping, in that they found that supervisors supported

students' autonomy/initiative while at the same time shaping students' activities to align them with 'the established values and practices of the research community' (2006, p. 165). Vehviläinen describes students as needing

> to demonstrate autonomy and independent effort while seeking help for problems they cannot overcome on their own. They also need to balance the aims of improving the work towards maximum quality with moving the work towards acceptable quality.
>
> <div align="right">(2009b, p. 189)</div>

These quotations appear to encompass two sets of contrasts with regard to student's roles: dependence / 'seeking help' versus independence / autonomy / initiative / agency, and compliance versus resistance. These are shown as separate continua in Figure 2.1:

| Dependence | ←——————→ | Independence |
| Compliance | ←——————→ | Resistance |
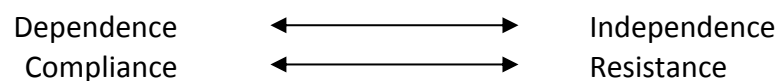
Figure 2.1: Student roles

There are similarities between the two terms at each end of the continua, but by separating them out, the tension that the authors above are referring to becomes clearer. While the two continua are related, they are also separate in that a student can at the same time display more or less compliance and more or less independence. In other words, they can be independent without necessarily being resistant.

Also, there are differences between the two dimensions. From the supervisors' point of view, student independence can be seen as a desirable *goal*. We can hypothesise the 'ideal' student as being one who becomes less and less dependent on the supervisor. At the same time, their independence will involve

understanding of academic (including disciplinary) norms, and their display of initiative will need to be ratified as competent by the supervisor if it is to 'count' as academically independent. The role of the supervisor can then be seen as leading the student from dependence to independence whilst avoiding or overcoming resistance.

However, as well as these institutional expectations, students clearly orient to their own face needs. Writing from a CA perspective, Waring, referring to her earlier work on seminar discussions, states that

> graduate students, despite their official 'apprentice' status, mobilize a range of practices to assert their intellectual competence. In other words, even for someone officially and knowingly aligned as a less competent party in a particular domain, his/her intellectual competence is still a commodity to preserve, to defend, and to enhance, and asymmetry is still a label to resist.
>
> (2007a, p. 110)

Waring (2007a) goes on to explore how two graduate students accept advice given by peer tutors in a writing centre. In a few cases one of the students does not simply acknowledge and accept the advice, but precedes her acceptance with a display of understanding that can take one of two forms: a) 'claiming that she herself knew, thought, or has at one point done what is being suggested' (2007a, p. 117), and b) 'detail[ing] her rationale for doing the advised-against often before officially accepting the advice' (2007a, p. 125). She thus 'constructs her identity, not as a passive advice recipient, but as a thoughtful and independent coparticipant' (2007a, p. 127).

Waring speculates that the reason only one of the two students uses these methods may be that she has 'more resources at her disposal' as a doctoral

student and a native speaker of English, in contrast to the other student who is at master's level and is a non-native speaker of English. Waring concedes that this is not something she can empirically establish in her study, but the issue of linguistic and broadly cultural resources is obviously relevant to my research.

Students' need to display competence is also discussed by Vehviläinen (2009b) in her study of the supervision of Finnish master's students. She found that students sometimes requested advice in a way that highlighted their lack of knowledge, usually using open-ended questions. However, they more often proposed potential solutions to their problems and asked the supervisor to authorize them, often with polar, *yes/no*, questions. This format 'offers authority to the teacher while also displaying the speaker's competence' (2009b, p. 178). Vehviläinen speculates that the first format, which she calls 'invoking incompetence' may be less frequent because her data relate to work in progress or 'towards the end of the thesis work' rather than from the initial 'planning-and-brainstorming stages' (2009b, p. 186).

The concept of student competence clearly overlaps with that of independence. However, it could be seen as a separate factor in students' orientation to supervision, as a student's (in)dependence is inherently relational (to the supervisor) in a way that (in)competence is not.

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed some of the literature on the experience of international students in English-medium universities and, in particular their experience of supervision. I have also looked at studies of supervisors'

perceptions, and at studies of talk in supervision and related genres. Finally, I have reviewed some research, including some written from a CA perspective, that discusses the roles and responsibilities of students and supervisors.

In the next chapter I will go on to describe my study and the methodological approach I adopted.

Chapter 3 Methodology

As I explained in Chapter 1, I began this project with a desire to explore problems of communication between academics and international students. My original research questions derived from two broad aims. My first aim was to investigate problems of understanding in the spoken interactions that international students undertake with university lecturers, in the context of master's supervisions. The associated research questions were:

1. What is the nature of communication problems between lecturers and students?
2. What are the causes of these problems?
3. How do students indicate problems of understanding?
4. How do supervisors indicate problems of understanding?

My second aim was to examine how lecturers and international students achieve mutual understanding in this context. The associated research questions were:

5. How do students attempt to pre-empt problems of understanding?
6. How do supervisors attempt to pre-empt problems of understanding?
7. How do students respond to problems of understanding?
8. How do supervisors respond to problems of understanding?

My original intention was to draw on a range of methodological approaches. There is a substantial amount of broadly sociolinguistic and pragmatic research which focuses on issues of non-understanding and misunderstanding, including Coupland et al.(1991), Markova et al. (1995), Bremer et al. (1996), Tzanne (2000), Codó Olsina (2002), House et al. (2003), Pitzl (2005), and Mauranen (2006). However, I eventually gravitated to a much greater reliance on CA than I had originally intended. This was for a three main reasons. Firstly, an initial perusal of my data did not uncover many examples of obvious problems of understanding.

It was clear that a much larger data set would be needed if I was to use an approach that involved categorisation and coding of understanding problems. By contrast, CA's approach to data is more bottom-up, as I will discuss below, and this seemed more appropriate for uncovering the subtle negotiation of understanding that interested me.

Secondly, as I became more familiar with CA, I realised that it was not only well suited to my topic, and philosophically congenial, but also that it required a fairly single-minded pursuit if I was to learn how to use it effectively and not merely as 'an underpowered, etic coding scheme' (Seedhouse, 2004, p. 51). At the same time, because of its insistence that evidence for any analytical conclusions should be grounded in participants' talk, and that speculation about their internal psychological states and motivations should be avoided, CA does not combine readily with other approaches to the microanalysis of talk.

Thirdly, the literature on institutional CA inspired me to extend the scope of my research to include master's supervision itself, rather than merely using supervision meetings as a way of investigating talk between academics and international students. Indeed, I realised that the supervisory context would inevitably need to become a central focus.

This shift in approach meant that my research questions also needed to be modified. Before listing these, I need to outline some of the principles and procedures of CA, and explain some of the procedures that I followed.

3.1 Conversation analysis

CA developed in the 1960s as the work of Harvey Sacks in collaboration with Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. Sacks drew on Erving Goffman's focus on face-to-face interaction as 'simultaneously its own institution and the foundation of everything else in society' (Sidnell, 2010a, p. 7), though Sacks was interested in looking at interaction in a much more detailed way than Goffman (Silverman, 1998). More influential was Harold Garfinkel's *ethnomethodology*, the study of 'how socially shared methods of practical reasoning are used to analyze, understand, and act in the commonsense world of everyday life' (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 10). Garfinkel was influenced by phenomenology, specifically Schutz's reorientation of 'Husserl's philosophical project away from structures of consciousness and toward the assumptions that people make in daily life' (Pascale, 2011, p. 109). For ethnomethodologists, 'the social order is not a pre-existing framework, but rather it is constructed in the minds of social actors as they engage with society' (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 3). Individuals make sense of their social world through 'selecting certain facts from a social situation that seem to conform to a pattern and then making sense of these facts in terms of the pattern', which, once established 'can be used as a framework for interpreting new facts which arise within the situation' (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 3). People thus create 'taken-for-granted' understandings of the social world, understandings which they display to each other in their actions.

As Pascale explains, ethnomethodology 'begins with the premise that all meaning is indexical', or context dependent, and that 'interactions are ... reflexive – they shape and are shaped by localized settings' (2011, p. 116). These properties enable

researchers to analyze interactions 'as *accounts* that organize and constitute that which they describe', so that rather than being 'concerned with what people say or don't say, how they describe events, and the relative truth of their statements', ethnomethodologists 'are concerned with responses that indicate how statements are interpreted, how claims are accepted or discredited, and the shared assumptions, or tacit knowledge, underlying the conversation' (2011, p. 117).

Pascale describes CA as 'a very specific and highly technical variation of ethnomethodology' (2011, p. 115), though according to ten Have, some ethnomethodological critics of CA,

> while not denying that CA was partly inspired by EM, maintain that it has since been developed in a way that is at odds with (at least some) ethnomethodological principles. As they see it, current CA aspires to be a 'science' in a sense that is not compatible with the phenomenological and/or Wittgensteinian inspirations in and of Ethnomethodology.
>
> (2007, p. 43)

Wagner and Gardner describe CA as having

> for a long time remained a minority interest located in the no-man's-land between a number of disciplines, but its influence has increased in recent years, as interest in cross-disciplinary study has grown ... [and] as the robustness of many of its findings have become evident, despite the apparent opacity of its methods to some and the lack of easy generalizability of many of its findings.
>
> (2004, p. 4)

Seedhouse describes two principal aims of CA as 'to characterize the organization of the interaction by abstracting from exemplars of specimens of interaction and to uncover the emic logic underlying the organization'; and 'to trace the development of intersubjectivity in an action sequence' (2004, p. 13). *Emic* here

refers to an insider's perspective, but in CA this is not achieved by interviewing participants, but by examining how they 'display in the interaction those terms of reference which they employ' (Seedhouse, 2005, p. 252). The focus on intersubjectivity, or shared understanding, is fundamental to my interest in how students and supervisors understand each other.

Following Seedhouse (2004), I will describe some generally-agreed principles of CA. Firstly, talk-in-interaction is systematically organized, not in terms of 'an overarching uniformity in conversational structure which is generalizable across conversations' but because 'participants themselves construct conversations in orderly ways' (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 6). This relates to the principle of *recipient design*, which means that 'participants in talk design their talk in such a way as to be understood by an interlocutor, in terms of the knowledge that participants assume they share' (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 6). As Wagner and Gardner put it,

> CA work is based on an assumption that the phenomenon studied will be found widely or even generally within the community of speakers, as practices of talk must be shared if conversationalists are to attain intersubjectivity – as they clearly do, for most of the time. There will be systematic ways in which parties in conversation do social actions.
>
> (2004, p. 5)

Secondly, contributions to interaction are *context-shaped* and *context-renewing*. In other words, 'what is said in the unfolding talk will be interpreted in the light of what has just been said ..., and will in turn provide the context for the interpretation of the next utterance' (Gardner, 2004, p. 269). Thirdly, any detail in the talk may therefore be relevant and should not be dismissed *a priori*. This explains the importance of detailed transcripts, although these are always

necessarily incomplete and selective. Finally, analysis must be bottom-up and data driven.

3.2 Procedures

In this section, I will outline some generally agreed procedures for conducting CA, drawing on Seedhouse (2004). I will at the same time describe the procedures I followed.

3.2.1 Recordings

The recordings were made in 2007-8. At the time, I was part of a university business school, whose programmes were the destination of most of the students to whom I was teaching English. I therefore sought the cooperation of colleagues in the business school to allow me to record supervision meetings. This was not straightforward, but in the end three supervisors agreed to allow me to audio-record their meetings with students after I had explained my project to the students and secured their agreement. To minimise the intrusion, I was not present, but left a digital recorder in the room.

All names have been changed to ones that are similar in terms of gender and nationality/ethnicity. To distinguish supervisors from students, the supervisors have all been given names beginning with 'S'. Scott and Saeed are both Scottish, while Sam is Dutch.

3.2.1.1 Scott

Two meetings were recorded. These took place towards the end of the taught part of the students' degree programme and were designed to help the students to write their dissertation proposals. So, while for convenience I refer to Scott as

a supervisor, he was not (yet) supervising these students' dissertations. At least three students were present at each meeting, which took the format of the discussions between Scott and individual students in the following order. For each student I have added their linguistic/cultural background and the length of the interaction:

- Aga, Polish, 15 minutes.
- Feng, Chinese, 22 minutes.
- Weilin, Chinese, 16 minutes.

The second meeting took place one week later:

- Riaz, Pakistani, 12 minutes.
- Weilin, Chinese, 18 minutes.
- Joana, Polish, 18 minutes.

Note that Weilin participated in both meetings.

3.2.1.2   Sam and Lee

This meeting took place at an early stage of the dissertation process, with the discussion revolving around the content and organisation of a chapter plan. Lee is a Chinese student. The recording lasted for 52 minutes, but the interaction itself is only 32 minutes, as Sam left Lee for 20 minutes to work on improving his plan.

3.2.1.3   Saeed and Hasan

These two meetings took place in the mid and latter stages of the dissertation process. In both meeting, which are separated by several weeks, Saeed begins by explaining his feedback on dissertation chapters Hasan has written. The first

meeting lasted 16 minutes and the second 25 minutes. Hasan is a Pakistani student.

This information about the participants is summarised in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: Participants and meetings

Supervisor & meeting	Student	Length
Scott (Scottish) 1	Aga (Polish)	15 minutes
	Feng (Chinese)	22
	Weilin (Chinese)	16
Scott 2	Riaz (Pakistani)	12
	Weilin	18
	Joana (Polish)	18
Sam (Dutch)	Lee (Chinese)	52-20=32
Saeed (Scottish) 1	Hasan (Pakistani)	25
Saeed 2	Hasan	16

This is not a large data set, but it proved sufficient to make some worthwhile generalisations, as the tags on which I focused occurred so frequently. It would also have been useful to have added visual information, but video recordings were deemed too intrusive.

3.2.2 Listening and transcription
Gardner makes the important point that transcription in CA is to be seen

> not as a means to capture the data for later analysis, but as a tool to become as closely familiar with the object of inquiry as possible, thereby turning the act of transcription into an act of analysis.
>
> (2004, p. 269)

Ten Have describes the laborious process of transcription as 'a major "noticing device"' (2007, p. 95), and he suggests transcribing in 'rounds', adding more detail each time. One of the consequences of this has been that my transcriptions have changed over the course of the project and are still a work in progress.

To do my transcription, I transferred the digital audio files to my computer and used *Transcriber,* a free software tool (now superseded by *TranscribeAG,* available from http://transag.sourceforge.net/) which was relatively simple to use and enabled me to easily repeat sections and measure pause lengths.

I have used the Jeffersonian transcription system that is common to CA with some simplifications and modifications. The organisation and wording of the conventions below draws on ten Have (2007), Liddicoat (2007), Richards and Seedhouse (2005), Schegloff (2007), Seedhouse (2004), and Wong and Waring (2010).

3.2.2.1   Temporal and sequential relationships

[ ]   Left and right brackets indicate where speakers' talk overlaps.
=   Equal signs indicate no break or gap.
(0.5)   Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, shown in tenths of a second.
(.)   A dot in parentheses represents a micropause of less than 0.2 seconds.

These symbols are all illustrated in Extract 3.1:

Extract 3.1

```
1   Scott:   The more focused (0.5) your research is (.) the better for
2            you (.) and the better (0.3) mark (.) you will get
3            (0.4)
4            Yeah=
```

```
5   Weilin: =U[m]
6   Scott:    [The] better performance
```

The decision to put the 0.4 second silence on a new line relates to the concept of a **turn constructional unit (TCU)**, 'the part of an utterance that might be a complete turn, after which another speaker might take over' (Have, 2007, p. 219). After the word *get* in line 2, Scott's turn has reached a point of possible (in this case, syntactic) completion, which is not the case before the other longer silences in lines 1 and 2.

The equals signs in lines 4 and 5 indicate that Scott's *yeah* is 'latched' to Weilin's *um*. There is no discernible silence between them such as there might normally be between two of their turns. Scott's subsequent *the* overlaps the end of Weilin's *um*.

3.2.2.2 Intonation, loudness and stress

Punctuation marks are not used grammatically, but to indicate intonation:

.	Falling, or final, intonation.
?	Rising intonation, not necessarily a question.
,	Slightly rising or flat intonation, which is hearably incomplete.
!	Emphatic intonation (high fall).
↑↓	Raised or lowered pitch on the subsequent word.
° °	Talk between the degree signs is noticeably quieter.
WORD	Capital letters indicate talk that is noticeably louder. I've used this very sparingly.
s<u>y</u>llable	Underlining represents a stressed syllable (see discussion below).

Most of these features can be seen in a more detailed transcription of the same extract:

Extract 3.2

```
1  Scott:   The more focused (0.5) your research is, (.) the better for
2           ↑you, (.) and the better (0.3) ↑mark (.) °you will get.°
3           (0.4)
4           °Yeah?°=
5  Weilin:  =U[m]
6  Scott:     [The] better per↑formance.
```

My transcription of word stress is slightly different to normal CA practice. This is usually shown by underlining some letters in the word, with longer underlining showing greater emphasis. I have not attempted to show this level of detail, but instead I have underlined the whole word, or the stressed syllable in multisyllabic words. This is particularly useful when words are stressed in an unorthodox way, as in Extract 3.3. This follows an explanation by Weilin of a change in her planned topic, twice pronouncing *Sheraton* with the stress on the second syllable:

Extract 3.3

```
1  Scott:   So you are no longer in the hotel sector,
2           (0.4)
3  Weilin:  Er I am still er focus on the Sheraton.
4           (0.6)
5  Scott:   Oh! Okay. Good.
```

That Scott has not recognised what she is referring to (despite their discussion of it the previous week) is shown by his question in line 1. His 'change of state' (Heritage, 1984b) marker *Oh* in line 5 displays his understanding.

3.2.2.3 Length and speed

-	A hyphen marks a cut-off word or sound.
:	A colon follows a lengthened sound. The more colons, the longer the sound.
<	A *less than* symbol on its own indicates a rushed start.
< >	Words spoken between a *less than* and a *more than* symbol are slower than surrounding speech.
> <	Words spoken between a *more than* and a *less than* symbol are faster than surrounding speech.

3.2.2.4 Other symbols

h	An *h* represents aspiration, with more *h*'s representing a longer outbreath.
w(h)ord	In parentheses, *h* usually represents laughter.
.h	One or more *h*'s preceded by a dot represents an inbreath.
☺word☺	These symbols (traditionally £ or $) represent a smiley voice.
( )	Empty parentheses represent the transcriber's inability to identify what was said. Words or sounds in parentheses represent best guesses.
((sigh))	Double parentheses enclose transcriber's comments.

Transcription is itself 'an act of interpretation and representation' (Bucholtz, 2000, p. 1463). Bucholtz discusses the problems entailed in deciding whether or not to use standard orthography or some kind of phonetic representation. She gives an example of a 'self-fulfilling' analysis, where one 'less effective' speaker's language is represented with phonological spellings, such as the reduction of *and*

to *'n'*, and the other 'more effective' speaker's talk is transcribed using 'only standard spelling, even in similar contexts' where such reductions are likely (2000, pp. 1459–60). She also points out that such transcriptions as *There wuz uh big bang* 'do not provide any phonetic information that the standard orthography would not supply' (2000, p. 1457). On the other hand, to use only standard spelling at all times can mask some important details, particularly when the speakers have different accents.

I have taken a minimalist approach to this, using non-standard spellings only occasionally, where the pronunciation of a word or phoneme is very noticeably different from what would normally be expected from the speaker of a particular accent. In other words, if a native speaker of English (with some linguistic knowledge or interest) listened to the speakers in my data, they could identify their accents as broadly Scottish, Dutch, Polish (or at least Slavic), Chinese or South Asian. I leave it to the reader to 'hear' these voices in their head while reading the transcripts rather than attempt to make their accents orthographically distinctive. However, sometimes the pronunciation of a word is distinctive or deviant in terms of a consonant (e.g. 'inwolved') or, less frequently, a vowel sound. The pronunciation of vowels is anyway quite variable across different accents of English (Giegerich, 1992), but sometimes mutual understanding can be affected. An example is Riaz's pronunciation of *employee* in Extract 3.4:

```
1    Scott:   what's your research question again. refresh my memory.
2             (1.0)
3    Riaz:    er emplayee motivation is: affected more by intrinsing or
4             extrinsing reward.
5             (3.2)
6    Scott:   what's the fird- first word?
7             (0.6)
8    Riaz:    emplayee motivation.
9             (0.9)
10   Scott:   uh uh [(pla)]
11   Riaz:         [em- ] emplayee emplayee.=
12   Scott:   =employee [sorry]
13   Riaz:              [emplayee]
14   Scott:   pardon me.
15            (0.4)
16            employee motivation,
```

Here Scott has obvious difficulties with understanding the word, shown by his two attempts to initiate repair in lines 6 and 10. Note also Riaz's pronunciation of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* in line 3.

Finally, I have chosen to restart line numbering for each extract included in the text.

3.2.3   Unmotivated looking

Although ten Have says that 'there are many ways in which one can approach data in a CA project' (2007, p. 124), they are all fundamentally inductive. One should therefore start from 'the data at hand, and not from any preconceived ideas about what the data "are" or "represent"' (Have, 2007, p. 121). That is not to say that the examination of the data should not be guided by 'the conceptual

apparatus [deriving from CA] that has been built up over the last 40 years or so' (Have, 2007, p. 121).

This 'unmotivated looking' aims to uncover interactional practices. Heritage identifies an interactional practice as 'any feature of the design of a turn in a sequence that (i) has a distinctive character, (ii) has specific locations within a turn or sequence, and (iii) is distinctive in its consequences for the nature or the meaning of the action that the turn implements' (2011, p. 212). He describes three stages in studying one of these practices: deciding that it is distinctive, locating it sequentially, and determining its distinctive role or meaning.

3.2.4 Building a collection of instances

Once a 'candidate phenomenon' has been identified, a search through the whole corpus of data may lead to a collection of 'parallel constructed instances on which the observations formulated on the basis of the first example can be systematically tested' (Wagner & Gardner, 2004, p. 7). It is this empirical approach that allows CA to work cumulatively and build on previous research. And once this process of analysis has been completed, and the phenomenon described, it can subsequently be recognized in other data.

The interactional practice that I identified in my data set was the use by supervisors of *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?*, particularly after a gap or a student response. These 'post-gap or post-response tags' (PG/R tags) were both frequent and distinctive, used by all three supervisors but not by any students. I therefore decided to focus on them as a means of exploring my areas of interest, and to revise my research questions to the following:

1. Why do supervisors use PG/R tags? What are their functions?

2. How do PG/R tag sequences relate to supervision? What is institutional about them? How do they relate to supervisors' and students' roles and responsibilities?

3. How do PG/R tag sequences relate to understanding, or the progress of intersubjectivity? How do they relate to the identities of the students as international?

3.3 Applied CA

Antaki (2011a) describes six kinds of CA, two of which are particularly appropriate to my research. One is *communicational*, 'where it offers complementary or alternative analyses of communication problems', and the other is *institutional*, 'where it illuminates the workings of society's institutions' (2011a, p. 1). While both can be referred to as 'applied CA', Antaki points out that with institutional CA

> the application is not usually to solving institutions' problems as such ... Usually the CA analyst goes in curious to see how the institution manages to carry off its work so smoothly and successfully. 'Application' here is more a redirection of the analyst's gaze – away from the ordinary conversation which made up the raw data of much of CA's early work, and towards the worlds of work and social institutions which impose their own imperatives on the exchange of talk.
>
> (2011a, p. 7)

There have been an increasing number of CA studies focusing on interaction in particular settings, represented in a number of edited collections (Antaki, 2011b; Arminen, 2005; Bowles & Seedhouse, 2007; Drew & Heritage, 1992a; Heritage & Clayman, 2010; McHoul & Rapley, 2001; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005).

Heritage and Clayman describe institutional CA as building on the 'basic findings about the institution *of* talk as a means to analyze the operations of other social institutions *in* talk' (2010, p. 16). Heritage and Greatbatch suggest that

institutional interaction tends to differ systematically from ordinary conversation. These differences involve

> specific *reductions* of the range of options and opportunities for action that are characteristic in conversation, and they often involve *specializations* and *respecifications* of the interactional functions of the activities that remain. The ensemble of these variations from conversational practice may contribute to a unique "fingerprint" for each institutional form of interaction – the "fingerprint" being comprised of a set of interactional practices differentiating each form both from other institutional forms and from the baseline of mundane conversational interaction itself.
>
> (1991, pp. 95–6)

However, Drew and Heritage emphasise that there is not necessarily a hard and fast distinction between ordinary conversation and institutional talk. They discuss a number of features that 'may contribute to family resemblances among cases of institutional talk' (1992b, p. 21). Institutional talk: is 'goal-oriented in institutionally relevant ways'; may often involve 'special and particular constraints on what one or both of the participants will treat as allowable contributions to the business at hand'; and 'may be associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts' (1992b, p. 22).

Heritage (1997) suggests analysing examples of institutional talk by looking for differences in features of turn-taking organization, overall structural organization, sequence organization, turn design, lexical choice and interactional asymmetries.

Richards (2005) discusses the different conceptions of 'application' in applied CA. He stresses that applied CA is not methodologically different from 'pure' CA. It is, as Benwell and Stokoe put it, 'equally committed to a bottom-up approach to the

data, avoiding assumptions that institutionality is a prior constraint that determines what can and cannot be said' (2006, p. 99).

3.4   Categorising speakers

I have already touched on the some practical problems associated with describing the students in my study as non-native speakers of English and my decision to use 'international' as a default term. This is a more fundamental issue in CA, where 'it is not relevant to invoke power, gender, race, or any other contextual factor unless and until there is evidence in the details of the interaction that the participants themselves are orienting to it' (Seedhouse, 2004, p. 15). This, of course, is a major difference between CA and a number of other approaches, such as critical discourse analysis, some of whose proponents see CA as reluctant 'to engage explicitly with sociological concepts such as power, gender, class and so on' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008, p. 209). However, as Hutchby and Wooffit argue, CA does not deny the existence of these factors, but it is 'resistant to *assuming* linkages between properties of talk and such features of society and culture' (2008, p. 217). CA therefore treats identities such as native and non-native 'not merely as linguistic states-of-knowledge, but rather as interactionally occasioned and negotiated identities' (Carroll, 2000, p. 71). As Richards puts it,

> CA sets aside participant roles such as teacher and student or expert and novice as *a priori* analytical resources and relies instead in a careful analysis of the ways in which the talk is designed – and the purposes and orientations revealed *through* this. What matters in CA is the extent to which identity is procedurally relevant for the participants themselves, and it may well be that the identities oriented to are not those normally associated with the activity taking place.
>
> (2005, p. 6)

He goes on to say that while CA recognizes native speaker and non-native speaker as 'descriptive terms', they are not used as 'analytic categories' (2005, p. 11).

Schegloff explains this in an interview:

> Well, one thing we could do to advance CA as a field is to do some work on native-nonnative talk. I wouldn't recommend that anybody take on a piece of work in those terms. If they have some reason to look at native-nonnative data, look at native-nonnative data. But don't look at it as 'native-nonnative' unless you have to – that is, unless something in the data requires you to because those are the terms in which the participants are conducting themselves. It's no more transparently relevant that the parties be characterized as 'native' or 'nonnative' than it is that they be characterized by gender, by race, age, etc. And it's not the case that once it's been made relevant at the beginning of an interaction, it's therefore relevant for the duration.
>
> (Wong & Olsher, 2000, p. 124)

Wagner and Gardner, in their introduction to a collection of studies on 'second language conversations' point out that several of these studies

> demonstrate that apparent linguistic deficits often are not interactionally significant to either the first- or second-language speaking participants, whose focus is on the successful prosecution and outcomes of their activities, using whatever means are available.
>
> (2004, pp. 2–3)

While conceding that second language speakers can easily be recognised as such 'due to accent and grammatical irregularities', these hallmarks of second language talk are not necessarily 'consequential for the course and the outcome of the interaction' (Wagner & Gardner, 2004, p. 3). In addition, the differences between second language and first language conversations seem to be explicable in terms of frequency:

Certain phenomena such as delay, reformulation or certain types of repair may be more common in second language talk, but such talk is not the only environment in which these phenomena are found.

(Wagner & Gardner, 2004, p. 4)

3.5   Issues of reliability, validity and ethics

3.5.1   Reliability

Peräkylä identifies the key aspects of reliability in CA as involving 'selection of what is recorded, the technical quality of recordings and the adequacy of transcripts' (1997, p. 206). In terms of selection, my database is not large (174 minutes), and this no doubt limited the range of phenomena that I was able to focus on. However, the phenomenon that became my focus (supervisors' use of *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?*, particularly after a gap or student response) did occur frequently in all the supervision meetings I recorded, which allowed me to build a reasonable collection of cases. The variety of recordings, in terms of dissertation stage, group and individual supervision, student background and number of supervisors, might be seen as a weakness. On the other hand, they all have the core similarity of being supervisions of (international) master's students from similar disciplines. The quality of the recordings was technically very good, and the transcripts are reasonably detailed and could be judged against the recordings themselves.

3.5.2   Validity

Seedhouse (2005) discusses three types of validity in relation to CA research. Internal validity is concerned with the soundness, integrity and credibility of findings. CA's emic perspective is central to this, in that it is concerned with how the participants 'document their social actions to each other in the details of the interaction' (2005, p. 255). This is explained by Sacks et al. as a 'proof procedure':

But while understandings of other turns' talk are displayed to co-participants, they are available as well to professional analysts, who are thereby afforded a proof criterion (and a search procedure) for the analysis of what a turn's talk is occupied with. Since it is the parties' understandings of prior turns' talk that is relevant to their construction of next turns, it is THEIR understandings that are wanted for analysis. The display of those understandings in the talk of subsequent turns affords both a resource for the analysis of prior turns and a proof procedure for professional analyses of prior turns-resources intrinsic to the data themselves.

(1974, p. 729)

External validity is concerned with generalizability. Here CA draws on the idea of the systematic organisation of talk in interaction. In other words, 'by analysing individual instances, the machinery that produced these individual instances is revealed' (Seedhouse, 2005, p. 256). This accounts for the cumulative nature of CA research, in both its pure and applied forms. My research uses CA findings about ordinary conversation but also draws on CA research on supervision (e.g. Vehviläinen, 2009b) and related genres (e.g. Waring, 2007b). It will itself, I hope, contribute to these bodies of research.

Ecological validity relates to applicability to everyday life. Seedhouse claims that this is an area where CA studies 'tend to be exceptionally strong' because of their 'authentic social setting' (2005, p. 257). However, I do not want to suggest that reading this study will provide supervisors or students with a ready proposal for action. Instead, I envisage that, as Richards (2005) suggests, it may inform rather than prescribe professional practice.

3.5.3 Quantification

CA studies are fundamentally concerned with describing 'a normative organization, rather than only a statistical regularity or an empirical generalization' (Raymond, 2003, p. 942). However, they often describe

phenomena in informal terms as occurring *typically, frequently, massively,* and so on. Quantification is not ruled out, but is not straightforward: 'Quantification is no substitution for analysis' (Schegloff, 1993, p. 114). There are CA studies which make more use of quantification (e.g. Guthrie, 1997), and I have included some figures to complement my analysis.

3.5.4 Ethics
My research was undertaken in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004), and was approved by the University of Stirling's Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee. All the participants were given an oral and written explanation of the research purpose and procedures and were given consent forms to sign. They were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time. All names have been changed.

3.6 Conclusion
In this chapter I have described the epistemology that informed my study and the research methodology I followed. I have described how my research questions changed and I have given a brief description of the setting and participants in my study.

In the next chapter, I will survey some of the literature on question tags in order to show how my analysis relates to previous work. In addition, I will give examples of the different types of tag that were used in the supervision meetings I recorded, together with some basic quantification. I will aim to show that PG/R tag sequences in particular are a pervasive feature of these meetings, and that the use by supervisors of PG/R tags is worth exploring further.

Chapter 4 Question tags

A feature of my data set is the frequent use by all the supervisors of the tags *Yeah?, Right?* and *Okay?.* In this chapter I will survey some of the literature on question tags in general and invariant tags, such as these, in particular. I will then briefly exemplify the use of these tags in my data, showing how their sequential positioning is relevant to how they are used and understood. Their most frequent use by the supervisors in my data is in a third turn, after a student's second-turn response (or a silence), and it is this use that I will focus on.

4.1 Canonical/clausal tag questions

Tag questions can be described in terms of syntax, turn-taking, and pragmatic function.

4.1.1 Syntax

English canonical, or clausal, tag questions consist of a declarative clause, followed by a tag, which is made up of an auxiliary or modal verb or the lexical verb *be* plus a subject pronoun agreeing with the subject of the declarative clause. They thus 'combine a declarative element with an interrogative element' (Hepburn & Potter, 2010, p. 83). The affirmative or negative polarity of the tag is usually the opposite of the main clause, as in *We're late, aren't we?* and *John didn't come, did he?,* but the polarity can be affirmative in both main clause and tag, as in *You're ready, are you?.*

4.1.2 Turn-taking

In their early and seminal paper on turn-taking, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson describe tag questions as a way in which a speaker can exit from a turn:

> The availability of the 'tag question' as affiliable to a turn's talk is of special importance, for it is the generally available 'exit technique' for a turn. That is, when a current speaker has constructed a turn's talk to a possible transition-relevance place without having selected a next, and he finds no other self-selecting to be next, he may, employing his option to continue, add a tag question, selecting another as next speaker upon the tag question's completion, and thereby exiting from the turn. In this regard, the tag question is one member of a class we may call 'recompleters', a class that supplies one major source of the talk done when rule 1c's option [current speaker may continue if no other self-selects] is exercised. The effectiveness of tag questions in this regard is that they invoke rule 1a [current speaker selects next], making the start of a particular next speaker's turn relevant on THEIR completion. It should be noted that such use of rule 1a via tag questions is sequentially quite different from the invocation of rule 1a via turns constructed from their starts to be, e.g., addressed questions: the former are instances where rule 1a is applied only when rule 1b [self-selection] has not been exercised. While turns that employ rule 1a's option from their starts thus project turn-transfer at first transition-relevance place, tag questions (i.e., what we might term '1c-1a's) come after an initial transition-relevance place. They thus operate in a second cycle of the rule-set's options.
>
> (Sacks et al., 1974)

Schegloff summarises this when he says that one of the jobs of the tag question is 'the decisive completion of the turn to which it is appended' (1996, pp. 91–2). Hepburn and Potter, in their analysis of interaction on a child-protection helpline, add the suggestion that the tag question can fill

> what might be (in the environment of distress) an empty transition space. So, in turn-taking terms, ... one possible additional function of the tag question is that it gives recipients more time to compose themselves and avoids the long silences characteristic of this kind of interactional environment.
>
> (Hepburn & Potter, 2010, p. 80)

Another observation related to the shape of a tag question as a particular interrogative format is made by Heritage and Raymond, who say that a tag question 'makes a "yes" or a "no" relevant as the first component of a response' so

that the second speaker can 'produce different actions by designing their responses to satisfy or defeat this expectation' (2005, p. 23). They give an example where someone replies to another's assessment of a particular fashion ('It's very cheap, isn't it') with 'It's very cheap yes' rather than 'Yes it is'. They describe this as a 'marked action':

> The placement of the agreement token ("Yes") after the partial repeat *separates* the action of agreeing from the action of "confirming" in a way that the normal ordering of responses to the question ("Yes it is") does not.
>
> (2005, p. 24)

By thus 'confirming the assertion' before 'responding to the question', the second speaker treats agreement with the first speaker's assessment as 'a matter of lower priority' than 'the assertion of her epistemic rights' relative to the first speaker. Similarly the response '*That's right, yes*' can be heard as taking an even more 'epistemically authoritative' stance (2005, p. 26). So tag questions make a 'specific set of resources ... available and relevant':

> An assessment with a tag question appended offers the recipient an opportunity to disentangle confirmation and agreement as distinct activities in a responding turn. Speakers can simply agree (e.g., "Yes" or "Yes, they are"). Alternatively, by inverting the order of a confirmation and an agreement token, speakers can treat answering and agreement as separable activities and can exploit their separation to assert their epistemic supremacy.
>
> (2005, p. 26)

4.1.3   Pragmatic function

Writing from a CA perspective, Heritage states that tag questions can function in two ways:

> (a) as a way of requesting information, normally confirmation of the assertion made in the declarative component of the utterance, or (b) as a method of mobilizing response ... in contexts where the speaker is looking for support for a point of view. What distinguishes these two uses of tag questions is the epistemic status of the speaker, relative to the recipient, of the talk.
>
> (2012, p. 14)

46

Sociolinguists have pursued the categorisation of tag question functions a little further. Holmes (1995) distinguishes four functions of canonical tags. *Epistemic modal* tags 'request information or confirmation of information of which the speaker is uncertain' (Cameron, McAlinden, & O'Leary, 1989, p. 82). They are *referential* and *speaker-oriented*, whereas the other three tags are *affective* and *addressee-oriented*: *challenging* tags 'may pressure a reluctant addressee to reply or aggressively boost the force of a negative speech act' (Holmes, 1995, p. 80), *facilitative* tags are 'positive politeness devices' which 'invite the addressee to contribute to the discourse' (1995, p. 81), and *softening* tags are 'negative politeness devices, used to attenuate the force of negatively affective utterances such as directives' (Holmes, 1995, p. 82).

Cameron et al. (1989) draw attention to the practical problems of applying such a framework. They give the example of *You were missing last week, weren't you?*:

> We eventually classified this as a modal tag, on the grounds that it called for confirmation of a fact the speaker was not sure of. But arguably it also has an element of the softener about it, since either the bald declarative
>
> > *You were missing last week*
>
> or the direct polar interrogative
>
> > *Were you missing last week*
>
> would tend to sound like accusations, and thus to threaten the addressee's face. The tag could be perceived as mitigating this face-threat.
>
> (1989, p. 84)

They often used intonation to help them to decide the tag's function: a rising tone on the tag 'all other things being equal, was taken to signal a genuine, that is modal, question' (1989, p. 84). But they found many examples where modal questions had a falling tone, and they conclude that tags are 'characterised by complex multifunctionality and diversity of meaning' (1989, p. 85).

Tottie and Hoffman (2006) conducted a large-scale corpus study of British and American English tag questions. Though large, the study is limited by lack of information about intonation. They classified the tags into six types. The first two, *informational* and *confirmatory* both fall into the 'macro category' of *epistemic modal* but differ in the speaker's degree of uncertainty. The other four types are *affective*: *attitudinal* ('emphasizes what the speaker says, does not expect involvement or reply' (2006, p. 300)), *facilitating* ('the speaker is sure of the truth of what s/he says but wants to involve the listener' (2006, p. 301)), *peremptory* and *aggressive.*

Of particular relevance to my study is the discussion by Cameron et al. (1989) of the use of tag questions in asymmetrical discourse. They note that questions are frequently asked by the 'powerful' institutional representatives (magistrates, doctors, teachers) and that the 'powerless' participants orient to the norm that 'it is their business to produce replies' (1989, p. 87). They also point out that some interrogatives are more constraining, or 'conducive', of a particular response than others:

> For instance, if a question contains a completed proposition, this takes more interactive work to challenge than it does to assent to; the consequence is that respondents tend to produce confirmations of the embedded proposition.
>
> (1989, p. 87)

They claim that 'tags are pre-eminent among conducive question forms', and that they are 'highly assertive strategies for coercing agreement' (1989, p. 87), not necessarily markers of tentativeness. In their study of asymmetrical interaction in different institutional settings, facilitative and softening tags were used only by speakers in the 'powerful' roles. This, they claim, is because facilitative tags can

be used to get other participants to speak, and softeners can be used to mitigate criticism, both actions more associated with those powerful roles. At the same time, modal tags tended to be used differently by the different participants: institutional representatives might use them to 'establish or summarise the facts of a case', while pupils in a classroom and callers to a medical advice phone-in used them 'to request reassurance' (1989, p. 90).

These findings are supported by the only two examples of canonical question tags in my data, shown in Extract 4.1 and Extract 4.2:

Extract 4.1: Weilin 1.8

```
1   Scott:   So what I mean by refine, (0.4) is (.) at the moment you
2            have, what is the stage of development (.) of HRM in China,=
3   Weilin: =Mhm
4   Scott:   (0.7) °So.° (0.6) That's more like a ti:tle, [isn't] it.
5   Weilin:                                               [Mm]
6   Scott:   [Yeah.]
7   Weilin: [Title.]
8            Mhm.
```

In this example, Scott is trying to explain what he means by his suggestion that Weilin needs to refine her research question. Note that what makes the tag particularly conducive of an affirmative response is that it is spoken with a falling tone. Weilin's initial continuer response, *mm*, is upgraded in response to the tag to a more definite acknowledgement, *yeah*, despite the fact that, Scott's statement (that her question is 'more like a title') does not, on the face of it, make a lot of sense. A similar issue arises with the tag in Extract 4.2:

```
1  Scott:   The the title (2.1) is really your question (1.4) turned into
2           a: (0.4) statement (.) of intent.
3           (0.5)
4  Weilin: Uh huh,
5  Scott:   Really, ↑isn't [it].
6  Weilin:              [Ye-] Yeah.
7  Scott:   Yeah. So (.) the title will be easier when you refine the
8           question.
```

This time, Scott's rather opaque statement is met with a half-second silence and then a continuer (*uh huh,*), suggesting that Weilin is waiting for a fuller explanation. Instead, Scott uses the delayed tag to elicit a stronger acknowledgement response (*yeah.*) from her. Again, the tone is falling, as shown by the full stop (note that the upward arrow shows that the tag *starts* at a high pitch).

4.2   Invariant question tags

Invariant, or fixed, tags include *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?*. They are far more numerous than canonical tags in my data. Biber et al. (1999) refer to them as *response elicitors*, and describe them as 'generalized question tags' which are often 'seeking a signal that the message has been understood and accepted' rather than 'inviting agreement or confirmation' (Biber et al., 1999, p. 1089). However, since they are not always followed by a response, I will use the term invariant tag. Both Biber et al. (1999) and Carter and McCarthy (2006) mention informality in relation to their use, and one strand of research has focused on particular tags and their use in different settings. Norrick (1995), for example, discusses '*hunh*-tags', which, he says, are common in the USA and parts of

Canada, *eh* being the counterpart of *hunh* in England, Australia and much of Canada. He discusses them as markers of evidentiality, signalling speakers' 'attitudes towards the truth, certainty or probability of individual utterances' (1995, p. 687). He claims that *hunh*-tags

> typically signal a perception of concurrence or difference in knowledge or attitude between the speaker and another participant in the conversation. In particular, they tend to mark an assumption: (1) that the speaker and hearer share a belief or attitude, (2) that the hearer knows better than the speaker does, or (3) that the speaker knows better than the hearer, and hence challenges the hearer's incorrect belief.
>
> (Norrick, 1995, p. 688).

Other studies of invariant tags include Meyerhoff (1994) on *eh* in New Zealand, Andersen (1998, 2001) on London teenage talk, and Torgerson and Gabrielatos (2009) on invariant tags (including *innit*, as well as *okay*, *right* and *yeah*) in London English. Columbus (2010) compared the frequency and use of a range of invariant tags in New Zealand, British and Indian English using large corpora of private conversations, and built up a classification of 17 functions, only some of which are questioning. As with the Tottie and Hoffman (2006) study of canonical tags, intonational information was lacking.

In addition to these studies of invariant tags in ordinary conversation, three studies have looked at their use in academic discourse, particularly lectures. With regard to *okay?* and *right?*, Schleef (using the MICASE corpus from the University of Michigan) found their use as facilitating tags (which he describes as 'question tags that express solidarity and encourage the addressee to respond') to be rare, but suggests that they are also used as 'progression checks' in lectures, that is, 'to check whether the audience is following without necessarily expecting

a verbal response' (2005, p. 178). Perez-Llantada (also using MICASE) looked at lecturers' use of *okay?*. She suggests that it is used not only as a response elicitor, when lecturers 'seek a signal that the message has been understood', but also as a 'discourse filler signaling a transition in the progress of the speech' (2005, p. 225), and as a way of reducing the power imbalance between lecturers and students by mitigating the formality and authority of the lecturers' speech.

Othman analysed the use of *okay?*, *right?* and *yeah?* in the lectures of four British lecturers. She found that *okay?* generally functions as a 'progression or confirmation check', (2010, p. 672), whereas *right?* sometimes 'marks the lecturer's assumption that the students are familiar with what he says' (2010, p. 674). She sees *yeah?* as operating more locally than *okay?*, relating only to the preceding sentence.

4.3   Invariant question tags in my data
All three supervisors make frequent use of *yeah?*, as well as *okay?*, *right?*. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the number of times each tag is used by each supervisor, and the average frequency of use of all three tags:

Table 4.1: Supervisors' use of *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?*

Supervisor	Student	*Yeah?*	*Okay?*	*Right?*	Total	Minutes	Frequency per minute
Scott	Aga	21	5	2	28	15	1.9
Scott	Feng	42	10	2	54	22	2.5
Scott	Weilin 1	22	9	1	32	16	2.0
Scott	Riaz	19	6	-	25	12	2.1
Scott	Weilin 2	27	3	10	40	18	2.2
Scott	Joana	20	2	1	23	18	1.3
Scott	**Total**	**151**	**35**	**16**	**202**	**101**	**2.0**
Sam	**Lee**	**55**	**21**	**19**	**95**	**32**	**3.0**
Saeed	Hasan 1	19	14	2	35	25	1.4
Saeed	Hasan 2	19	4	2	25	16	1.6
Saeed	**Total**	**38**	**18**	**4**	**60**	**41**	**1.5**
Totals (% out of 357)		244 (68%)	74 (21%)	39 (11%)			

The table shows that *yeah?* (together with its variants, *yeh?* and *yes?*) makes up 68 per cent of the total of 357 instances of these tags, whilst *okay?* (21%) and *right?* (11%) are used less frequently. Sam is the most frequent user (3 tags per minute), followed by Scott (2 tags per minute) and then Saeed (1.5 tags per minute). It is also possible to see differences in the frequency with which Scott uses the tags with different students: most frequently with Feng, and least with Joana.

I will approach the analysis of these tags by examining the sequential positions in which they appear. As Schegloff argues, in relation to how 'some apparently semantically unrelated talk gets heard as an answer',

> What is critical here is that the action which some talk is doing can be grounded in its *position*, not just its *composition* – not just the words that compose it, but its placement after a question.
>
> (2007, pp. 20–1)

Or, as Sidnell puts it:

> Turn design provides resources for understanding where we are in a sequence, just as sequential positioning provides resources for understanding what a particular turn is doing. As Schegloff and Sacks (1973, p. 299) put it, "a pervasively relevant issue (for participants) about utterances in conversation is 'why that now', a question whose analysis may also be relevant to finding what 'that' is".
>
> (2010b, pp. 39–40)

The tags are used in four sequential positions: turn-medially, turn-finally, in second position as a response token or continuer, and in third position after a response or gap. Except in the first two cases, they appear only in the supervisors' talk. Frequencies are shown in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2: Sequential positions of supervisors' *yeah?, okay?* and *right?*

Tag	Turn-medial	Turn-final	2nd position	Post-response	Post-gap
Yeah? (% of 244)	21 (9%)	74 (30%)	4 (2%)	84 (34%)	61 (25%)
Okay? (% of 74)	13 (18%)	7 (9%)	3 (4%)	33 (45%)	18 (24%)
Right? (% of 39)	6 (15%)	6 (15%)	2 (5%)	19 (49%)	6 (15%)
Total (% of 357)	40 (11%)	87 (24%)	9 (3%)	136 (38%)	85 (24%)

This is shown more graphically in Figure 4.1:
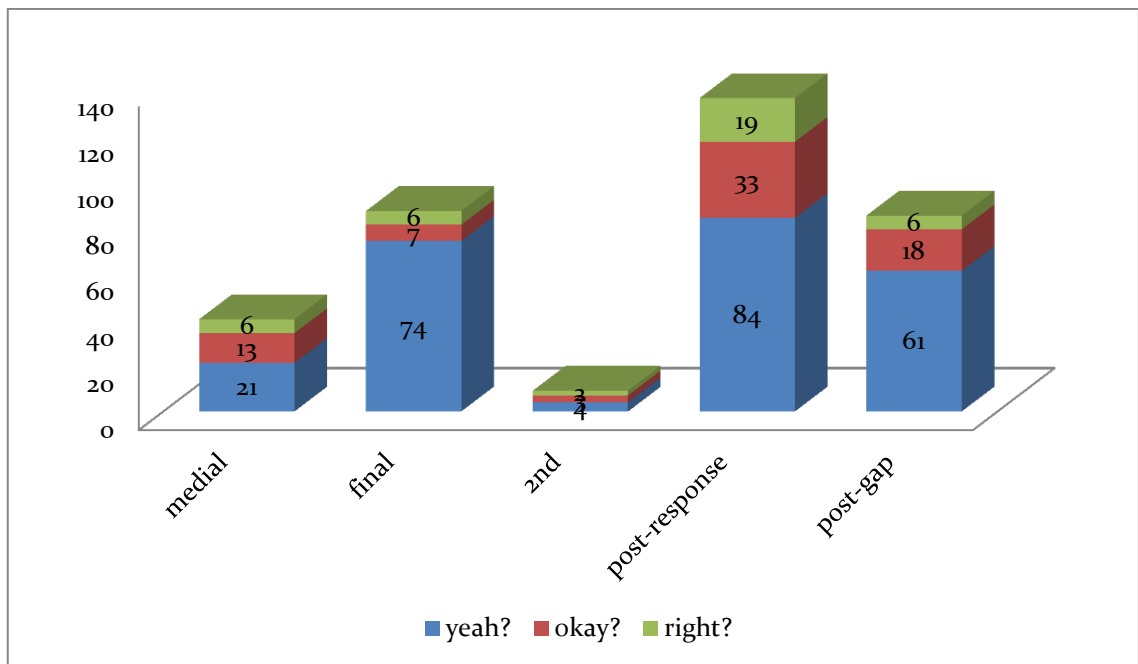
Figure 4.1: Sequential positions of supervisors' *yeah?, okay?* and *right?*

In the rest of this chapter I will briefly describe and exemplify the use of the tags in each of these positions, before going into more detail about the post-response and post-gap tags in the following chapters.

4.3.1 Turn-medial question tags

Tags are turn-medial when the speaker continues without waiting for a response. Their use by supervisors is sometimes associated with more extended turns, as in Extract 4.3:

```
1  Saeed:  =This chapter isn't about the objectives of the research.
2          It's about the analysis of the literature, and I made that
3          clear when we were we were taking down the note- which is
4          this is why I think it's important that you you're taking
5          down notes when we're dicussing what you've to do in the next
6          chapter and everything yeah? Now most of these things are
7          just grammatical. For example,
8  Hasan:  Yeah.
```

Saeed uses these turn-medial tags rather more frequently than the other two supervisors, possibly because for much of the meeting he is reporting back to Hasan the comments he has already written. This is certainly his orientation to both of his meetings, which therefore have more of a monologic, lecture-like feel to them (at least at the start) than Scott's and Sam's more improvisatory, negotiated encounters. His use of turn-medial tags therefore seems to punctuate his talk, marking the preceding utterance as important.

4.3.2 Turn-final question tags

In only 4 out of 74 cases of turn-final *yeah?* is it clearly used by supervisors to seek information or confirmation. An example of this epistemic modal or referential use is illustrated in Extract 4.4:

Extract 4.4: Aga 4

```
1  Scott:  (.) So y-you're comfortable with tha:t, yeah?
2  Aga:    Mhm,=
```

Here Scott is asking if Aga is 'comfortable' with the distinction between two types of sampling. Note that the tagged declarative is more conducive than the interrogative format 'Are you comfortable with that?', which would be

interactionally easier to answer in the negative. At the same time a canonical tag with negative polarity and falling intonation (*aren't you.*) would be even more conducive. The intonation always rises on invariant question tags, and this often seems to make them more similar to 'affirmative + affirmative' tag questions: 'You're comfortable with that, are you?'.

A very similar exchange is illustrated in Extract 4.5:

Extract 4.5: Joana 14, 15

```
1   Scott:  .h Now. (0.7) you have studied sampling techniques yeah,
2           (1.7)
3   Joana:  pt .hh ↑mm (  ) should s- concentrate more I- I- (.) I am
4           maybe
5   Scott:  .h probability and non-pro[babili]ty ↑sampling? Yeah,
6   Joana:                            [Mhm,]
7   Joana:  Yeah, we are (.)
8   Scott:  >You're [doing that at the moment.<]
9   Joana:          [mm we're having] that, ↑mhm,
```

The pause after Scott's first *yeah,* and the hesitant and unclear start to, and continuation of, Joana's response are evidence of the difficulty the question has given her. She begins with self-criticism (line 3: 'should s- concentrate more') and then, after Scott's elaboration of the question, manages to formulate a response that is positive without committing her to the knowledge his question presupposes.

A similar use can be seen in Extract 4.6, which follows Riaz's attempt to explain part of his proposed research methodology:

Extract 4.6: Riaz 1

```
1  Scott:  Th- this
2  Riaz:   [(developed)]
3  Scott:  [this] is your res- your research topic is is is that yeah?
4  Riaz:   Yeah. M- no my research topic is er that er which f- er f-
5          fa- factors of er affect the emplayees' motivation i-
6          intrinsing or extrinsing.
```

Riaz switches his initially affirmative response to Scott's *yeah?* to a negative one. His initial response provides further evidence of the constraining, conducive, property of tag-formatted questions.

The remaining examples of supervisors' *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?* can all be analysed as being in some way faciliative or softening, in Holmes's terms. In other words, they are seeking to elicit a response marking the student's understanding (as in Extract 4.7) or agreement (as in Extract 4.8):

Extract 4.7: Lee 23

```
1  Sam:    But that is ↑one step. Yeah?
2  Lee:    Yeah.
```

Extract 4.8: Feng 10

```
1  Scott:  Because when you come to do your research, (1.3) er (.) you
2          don't want to do: too many ↑things. Yeah?=
3  Feng:   =Mm:.
```

Before moving on to describe the other types of supervisor use of invariant question tags, it is worth noting that the turn-medial and turn-final uses are not exclusive to supervisors. One student, Hasan, uses *yeah?* quite frequently. The

examples in Extract 4.9 appear towards the end of a meeting, where Hasan is checking what he needs to do to the chapter they have been discussing:

Extract 4.9: Hasan 1

```
1   Hasan:   So I need to reword it yeah?=
2   Saeed:   =[Yes]
3   Hasan:    [I'll] I'll leave the first objective as it is because
4            that's just leadership by itself yeah?
5   Saeed:   (.) Go back to chapter one,
6   Hasan:   Right=
7   Saeed:   =Look at the objectives,
8   Hasan:   Right=
9   Saeed:   The objectives (.) from what you're telling me sound they're
10           okay.
```

Both cases are straightforward requests for confirmation or 'reassurance' (Cameron et al., 1989, p. 90). Incidentally, the use of *yeah?* seems to be a useful strategy for conversational fluency, exploited here by the student who appears to be the most proficient in English: the turn-final tag allows avoidance of the construction of a yes-no interrogative, and the use of *yeah?* avoids the syntactic processing of a clausal tag (e.g. 'I need to reword it, do I?'). *Yeah?* is also usefully vague: in Hasan's second turn (lines 3-4) it is not exactly clear which part of the preceding two-clause utterance *yeah?* is referring to.

Another way in which Hasan uses *yeah?* is to check Saeed's understanding of his ongoing turn, and thus to secure permission to continue. This can be seen in both examples in Extract 4.10:

```
1   Saeed:   Again, you know you need to fix this for later, cite
2            correctly,
3   Hasan:   .hh So you=
4   Saeed:   =[↑Mm.]
5   Hasan:    [w-] w- w- one thing [in] in er see (.) the one (0.4)
6   Saeed:                         [Mhm]
7   Hasan:   the writer you've just mentioned now yeah?
8   Saeed:   Yes.
9   Hasan:   If I were to say er Kilpatrick and Lock yeah,
10           so I [mean]
11  Saeed:        [Bra]cket the [date.]
12  Hasan:                  [Bracket.]
```

Both examples of *yeah?* comes at the end of the first component of a compound turn-constructional unit (TCU) (Lerner, 1996). The first (line 7) receives an acknowledging *yes* from Saeed, recognising that a further component is still to come, but after the second (line 9), Saeed anticipates Hasan's question and gives his answer, 'Bracket the date'. In fact, Hasan's overlapped 'so I mean' points to his difficulty in phrasing the question.

4.3.3   Second position question tags

In a few cases *yeah?, okay?* and *right?* are used as a response to a student's turn. In these cases they function as prompt, continuer or 'go ahead'. In both Extract 4.11 and Extract 4.12 the student is invited to continue after requesting the floor.

Extract 4.11: Aga 1

```
1   Aga:     Um, well, (1.3) I did think about (ours) and I've do:ne (.)
2            some stuff and I do have a question.
3   Scott:   Yeah?=
4   Aga:     =And I think tod(h)ay m- (.) ah this morning lecture?
5   Scott:   Mhm?=
```

```
6   Aga:    =(Nick's) lecture was kind of related to tha:t so (.)
7   Scott:  ↑Yeah, sure,=
```

Scott's *yeah* is a 'go-ahead' response to Aga's pre-pre. Extract 4.12 is similar:

Extract 4.12: Lee 2

```
1   Lee:    So so:: I want to er ex(  ) [explain] this for you,
2   Sam:                                [Mhm]
3   Sam:    Nn right?=
4   Lee:    =and er first of all,
```

Here Sam invites Lee to continue after Lee states his desire to explain his plan.

Extract 4.13 is similar, though here the student is distracted by the supervisor's apparent lack of attention:

Extract 4.13: Lee 68, 69

```
1   Lee:    Maybe er maybe I think er in there, i- (0.3)
2   Sam:    Yes? Jus'?
3           (0.4)
4           I'm just writing the date [on it] yeah? Okay?
5   Lee:                              [Huh huh] ((laugh))
```

Lee tails off at the end of line 1, presumably because Sam is writing rather than attending. Sam prompts Lee to continue then gives an account for his lack of attention (line 4).

It is noteworthy that, instead of the 'archetypical' continuers, *mhm* and *uh huh*, 'used to pass up the opportunity to take a more substantial turn at talk' (Gardner, 2001, p. 25), the supervisors in these examples are using 'stronger' tokens with clearly rising intonation. The actions of both participants index the asymmetrical

supervisory relationship in that the students are waiting for permission to continue with their turn, and supervisors are actively inviting them to speak.

4.3.4 Post-response tags

The most frequent position for supervisors' invariant question tags is as the third turn in a sequence. For ease of reading these are <mark>highlighted</mark>.

Examples from each of the three supervisors follow:

Extract 4.14: Weilin 1.31

```
1   Scott:   =So hybrid just means (0.6) it's (.) part Western, part
2            Chinese.
3            (0.4)
4   Weilin:  Ah.
5   Scott:   Yeah?
6   Weilin:  Yeah.
```

Extract 4.15: Lee 24

```
1    Sam:    .hh So. .h Then you got a thir:d (1.7) logis- that's also
2            third party lo[gis]↑tics,
3    Lee:          [Mm,]
4            (0.3)
5    Sam:     .hh that (1.5) optimises (1.3) trans↑port,
6    Lee:    °Mm,°
7            (0.7)
8    Sam:    across (1.4) all processes.
9            (1.6)
10   Lee:    Mmyah.
11   Sam:    Right?
12   Lee:    [Myah,]
```

```
1   Saeed:   WHAT I will do next time is give you back feedback on this.
2            (0.5)
3   Hasan:   Mhm,
4   Saeed:   Yeh? .hh A:nd we will talk about the questions for the: (0.7)
5            fo:r the fieldwork.
```

In all three examples, the supervisor's first turn receives a response from the student, and this is then followed by the supervisor's invariant question tag.

The only previous mention, as far as I can tell, of post-response tags is in Jefferson (1981a), where she describes such 'post-response pursuit of response' as 'prompting' (1981a, p. 59). She describes the responses that precede the prompting as very short and 'of a type which can qualify as Continuers; objects with which a recipient acknowledges what has been said so far, and indicates that he sees that a prior speaker has more to say, and invites him to go on with it (such objects as *Yeah, Right, Uh huh, Mm hm, Oh,* etc.)' (1981a, p. 60).

Jefferson describes the post-response tag in turn-taking terms as

> exhibiting that although the recipient may have taken it that prior speaker was not yet finished, he was indeed finished, and it is now recipient's turn to do some extended talk. That is, the Post-Response-Completion Response Solicitation can be characterized as re-relinquishing the floor; technically as being used as a Turn-Exit Device when turn-transfer has not been adequately accomplished.
>
> (1981a, p. 60)

In interactional terms, the response solicitation

> may be deployed to deal with the occurrence of mere acknowledgement when something else was sought and due; for example, some uptake of the point of the prior utterance. That is, the Response-Solicitation may work as a Prompting of some more elaborate response, not merely re-relinquishing the floor, but indicating to recipient the sort of talk he ought to be doing with the turn he had relinquished and is now being re-profferred.
>
> (1981a, p. 61)

Jefferson goes on to describe two possible functions of post-response tags as

> (1) marking that there is a point to be taken, and (2) offering the recipient a next opportunity to show that he has taken the point. And the recipient can show that he has taken the point by producing some appropriate talk in his next turn.
>
> (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 63)

These post-response tags are of interest not only because they are very frequent in my data, but also because they are only used by supervisors, not students. They bear a resemblance to lecturers' use of invariant tags, as mentioned above, but lectures are essentially monologic whereas supervision is dialogic.[1] What is particularly interesting about them is that they appear *after* a student's response. I will go on to explore them in more detail in the following chapters.

4.3.5   Tags after silence

There is one position for these tags that I have not yet described. That is when the tag follows silence, or, at least (in the absence of visual clues) no audible response on the part of the student. In Extract 4.17, there are four instances of *Yeah?*. The third (line 11) and fourth (line 15) are clear examples of a turn-final tag and a post-response tag respectively. However, the first two (lines 3 and 8) follow silences:

---

[1] They occasionally appear in transcripts of similar types of institutional interaction, for example in a consultation between a neurologist and a patient (Toerien, Shaw, Duncan, & Reuber, 2011, p. 313):

```
13 Neu:   uh If nothing has happened at this point I would discharge you
14        um and only see you again if there was a another another turn
15 Pat:   Right
16 Neu:   Yeah?
17 Pat:   Yeah (no problem)
```

Extract 4.17: Feng 8-11

```
1   Scott:   You must really focus o:n ↑one of those.
2            (0.5)
3   Scott:   Yeah?
4   Feng:    [phhhh] ((big sigh))
5   Scott:   [Well.] It [would be] better.
6   Feng:              [Mm:,]
7            (0.2)
8   Scott:   Yeah?=
9   Feng:    =Mm::,
10  Scott:   Because when you come to do your research, (1.3) er (.) you
11           don't want to do: too many ↑things. Yeah?=
12  Feng:    =Mm:.
13  Scott:   You give yourself a a much more difficult task.
14  Feng:    Okay.
15  Scott:   [Yeah?]
16  Feng:    [Yes.] Yes.
```

The question is whether the first two *Yeah?*s should be classified as delayed turn-final tags or as post-response tags or as neither. Jefferson, for example, draws a distinction between the 'Post-Response Completion Response Solicitation' and the 'Post-Gap Response Solicitation' where 'a prior speaker is soliciting a response which has so far been slow in coming' (1981a, p. 54). In fact, her use of the word 'gap' is principled and is explained in the turn-taking article by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, in which they describe talk as being continuous or discontinuous:

> It is continuous when, for a sequence of transition-relevance places, it continues (by another speaker, or by the same continuing) across a transition-relevance place, with a minimization of gap and overlap. Discontinuities occur when, at some transition-relevance place, a current speaker has stopped, no speaker starts (or continues), and the ensuing space of non-talk constitutes itself as more than a gap – not a gap, but a lapse …
>
> (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 714)

In addition to this distinction between inter-turn *gaps* and *lapses*, they also describe intra-turn *pauses*:

> ... parties' treatment of silence in conversation is contingent on its placement. To put it roughly: intra-turn silence (not at a transition-relevance place) is a 'pause', and initially not to be talked in by others; silence after a possible completion point is, initially, a gap, and to be minimized; extended silences at transition-relevance places may become lapses. But some silences are transformable. Thus, if a developing silence occurs at a transition-place, and is thus a (potential) gap, it may be ended by talk of the same party who was talking before it; so the 'gap' is transformed into a 'pause' (being now intra-turn). This is one way that 'gap' is minimized ...
>
> (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 715)

This is illustrated in Extract 4.18, where three silences are marked:

Extract 4.18: Weilin 1.7

1 Scott: So you would **(0.8)** <u>build</u> a questionnaire,
2 Weilin: Yeah.
3 Scott: from the re<u>search</u> <u>lit</u>erature,
4 Weilin: Yeah.
5 Scott: and ask the Chinese employees,
6 Weilin: Yeah.
7 Scott: how they respond to management ↑style,
8 Weilin: Yeah yeah, and how can I design the ☺questionnaire?☺
9 Scott: °Right.° **(0.5)** .hhh Your <u>first</u> step then, th- this is good,
10 Weilin: Mm
11 Scott: Wha- what I would suggest that you do now,
12 Weilin: Uh huh,
13 Scott: (.) is (.) refine the research question.
14   **(0.6)**
15   <mark>Okay?</mark>
16 Weilin: Re[fi:ne,]

The 0.8 second silence in line 1 is clearly an intra-turn pause. The 0.5 second silence in line 9 can initially be heard as a gap, one that is attributable to Scott because, while he has acknowledged Weilin's question, he has not yet begun to

answer it². When he continues, the gap is transformed into a pause. The case of the 0.6 second silence in line 14 is similar, although this time it is attributable to Weilin. Note that Weilin responds to the first clause of Scott's compound TCU (Lerner, 1996) in line 11 with a continuer *uh huh*, but she does not respond immediately after the turn is completed. It thus seems justifiable to regard the 0.6 second silence as being attributable to Weilin. This is an example of 'where someone has initiated an action or has given information and no uptake follows' (Have, 2007, p. 101). So while Scott's *Okay?* transforms the gap into a pause, it is pursuing a response that has not been forthcoming.

Such post-gap tags fall on a continuum between turn-final (or turn-medial) tags and post-response tags. With visual evidence it might be possible to deduce whether a pre-tag silence was a gap or a pause by following the supervisor's gaze. Failing this, the analysis must rely on the surrounding talk. Usually, I have classified post-gap tags with post-response tags. I will give more examples of these when I look in more detail at the student's pre-tag response in Chapter 6.

4.4 Conclusion

The discussion and examples are, I hope, sufficient to show both the ubiquity of these three tokens in my data and the importance of sequence in understanding how they are used. The following is a rough and ready summary of the different positions of these tags:

---

² And, in fact, he does *not* answer it directly at this point. This is an example of the supervisor treating the student's request for advice as irrelevant, as discussed by Vehviläinen (2009b)

- *Turn-medial tags, **yeah,** highlight the preceding utterance.*
- *Turn-final tags may solicit a response, **yeah?***
- *Only turn-medial and turn-final tags, **yeah,** are used by students, **yeah?***
- *Second position tags invite continuation, and er....*
  Yeah?
- *Post-response tags follow a student response.*
  Mhm.
  Right?
- *Post-gap tags follow a silence which is attributable to the student.*
  (0.6)
  Okay?

I have chosen to focus on post-gap and post-response tags (henceforth PG/R tags) because they are frequently used by supervisors in my data, and only by supervisors. They appear to be a distinctive interactional practice that form part of the 'fingerprint' of supervision meetings, and very little has been written about them. In order to explore their use, the next three chapters will each focus on one turn in the three-turn sequence. I have chosen to 'unpack' the whole PG/R tag sequence in this way in order not only to detail the different actions of supervisors and students in each turn, but to make some more general observations about the activities that are taking place in these meetings.

At the same time, each of the following three chapters will indirectly address the functions of PG/R tags. Chapter 5 will focus on the first turn in the sequence, the supervisor's action of informing or advising. It is this action which the PG/R tag underlines, and this chapter therefore highlights the first function of PG/R tags, namely to mark the importance of what has just been said. Chapter 6 looks at the student's minimal or delayed response, which the supervisor's subsequent tag appears to treat as in some way 'inadequate' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 75). The chapter therefore also draws attention to the fact that the PG/R tag questions or checks

the student's understanding or acceptance of the supervisor's first turn. Chapter 7 describes the third turn in the sequence, the PG/R tag itself, and what follows it. The chapter focuses on the PG/R tag's function as a boundary marker, either seeking tacit agreement to close one sequence and start another, or offering the student the floor. This also highlights the potential of the PG/R tag to work affiliatively, a theme which is further explored in a discussion of the specific functions of *okay?* and *right?*.

In Chapter 8 I will summarise the different functions of PG/R tags more directly, as well as highlighting their centrality to the negotiation of understanding and agreement, and to the institutional nature of supervision.

Chapter 5 The supervisor's first turn

The most distinctive position for instances of the tags *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?*, as used by supervisors, is after a student response or after a gap which is attributable to the student. In these cases, the tags can be analysed as appearing in the third turn of a sequence which consists of 1) a supervisor's turn, 2) a short student response or a gap, 3) a supervisor's invariant question tag. In the next three chapters I will examine each of these turns separately. In this chapter I will describe the first turn of the sequence, taken by the supervisor. As I hope to show, one of the functions of post-gap and post-response tags (PG/R tags) is to underline what the supervisor has just said, to point up the importance of the first turn. The actions that are being performed in these first turns not only provide the context for the tags, but are indicative of the supervisors' orientation to their roles and responsibilities.

Note that, to keep my line of argument clear, I will largely confine my discussion of the PG/R tag sequence in this chapter to the first turn. In other words, I will say little about the PG/R tag itself, which will be the focus of chapter 7.

The actions that these first turns perform include:

- informing;
- advising, persuading and instructing;
- assessing;
- questioning.

It is not unusual for a turn to be performing more than one action.

5.1 Informings

The supervisor's role as knower is frequently oriented to. Most of the supervisors'

first turns act to inform the student, even if that is not their only function.

5.1.1 Topic and process oriented informings

Many informings concern academic subject content or dissertation procedure.

They may be occasioned by a student's question, as in Extract 5.1. This follows

Scott recommending a book to Aga:

Extract 5.1: Aga 27

```
1   Aga:    [Is that] also like a ↑business research (or)=
2   Scott:  =Yeah.=
3   Aga:    =°Okay.°
4   Scott:  °Yeah.° (0.7) It's .hh it's very much seen as the:: major
5           textbook on qualitative (0.2) research approaches a::nd
6           techniques.
7   Aga:    Mhm,
8   Scott:  It's the leader, if you like.
9   Aga:    Mhm,
10  Scott:  Yeah?
11          (0.3)
12          One of the leaders.
```

Here Aga's question about the book in line 1 elicits an expansion from Scott of

the information he has just given.

In Extract 5.2 Scott's informing follows Aga's admission of difficulty with the

concept of sampling:

```
1  Scott:  =Mhm. .hh in your lectures have you: (.) approached the ideas
2          of (1.2) sampling,
3  Aga:    .h Yeah. Today lecture was all about sampling.
4  Scott:  [And]
5  Aga:    [But] it did sound quite complicate. For ↑me at lest.
6  Scott:  Well, (.) it's (.) e- e- you basically (1.6) y- you break it
7          down to probability and non-probability sampling.=
8  Aga:    =Mm:.=
9  Scott:  =[Right?]
```

Scott's use of *Right?* here may be associated with marking his informing as the beginning of an explanation. In other words, it is projecting that this is a step in a longer sequence, a point I will return to when I discuss differences between the three tags in Chapter 7.

Informings are often unsolicited or part of a longer informing sequence. In Extract 5.3, Scott has begun to talk about the advertising strategy of a large international company, and how its strategy in China may differ from its approach in the West:

Extract 5.3: Feng 37-8

```
1  Scott:  The approach in in the west is very (1.2) ts ironic,
2  Feng:   Mmm.=
3  Scott:  =Yes?
4  Feng:   Mm.
5          (0.5)
6  Scott:  °Erm .h the° approach is try to suggest (.) cost
7          leadersh[ip,]
8  Feng:           [Mm]m.
9          (0.9)
```

```
10   Scott:  °Erm° it's: it's cheap,
11           (0.4)
12           °yeah?°
13   Feng:   Yeah.
```

In line 1, Scott's 1.2 second pause and dental click 'ts' suggest difficulty in selecting the word 'ironic' to describe the company's approach to advertising, possibly because he senses this will be a linguistic or culturally difficult concept for Feng to grasp. And, indeed, she displays minimal uptake in her response to his '*yes?*'. His next attempt to describe the approach (line 6) refers to 'cost leadership', a term they have both used before in the interaction. He then simplifies further with 'it's cheap' (line 9) and receives a stronger acknowledgement after his quiet *yeah?*.

Both Scott and Sam engage in explanation sequences which are punctuated by PG/R tags. In Extract 5.4 Scott is explaining a model of HRM in China to Weilin:

Extract 5.4: Weilin 1.29, 30

```
1    Scott:  =Erm <this is er> (1.7) pure, (0.4) imported,
2            (0.4)
3            Okay?
4            0.3
5            .h [So] they have a typology this is a typology
6    Weilin:    [°Mm°]
7            (0.5)
8    Scott:  of (.) aitch ar em,
9    Weilin: ↑Oh.
10   Scott:  in China.
11   Weilin: Mm.
12   Scott:  Okay?
13   Weilin: [Mm.]
```

The pauses in Scott's talk are associated with something he is writing, presumably an explanatory diagram or list of the components of the typology. Extract 5.5 takes up the sequence some 33 lines later:

Extract 5.5: Weilin 1.31-33

```
1   Scott:   =So hybrid just means (0.6) it's (.) part Western, part
2            Chinese.
3            (0.4)
4   Weilin: Ah.
5   Scott:   Yeah?
6   Weilin: Yeah.
7   Scott:   And that would be
8   Weilin: More,
9   Scott:   more Western, less Chinese.
10  Weilin: Yeah.
11           (0.5)
12  Scott:   Complete [Western.]
13  Weilin:         [This is] uh the: (.) Chinese uh=
14  Scott:   =Traditional, i- iron ricebowl,
15  Weilin: Uh huh.
16  Scott:   Yeah?
17  Weilin: Traditional.
18  Scott:   Traditional Chinese [practices.]
19  Weilin:                     [Means er] no Western.
20  Scott:   No Western.
21  Weilin: Okay. [hih] ((slight laugh))
22  Scott:        [Yeah?]
23  Weilin: ☺Okay.☺
```

With these PG/R tags Scott orients to a need for Weilin to show her understanding of his ongoing explanation. She displays this particularly in her anticipatory 'more' (line 8), while her repetition of 'traditional' (line 17) suggests the word is problematic for her and that she is thereby initiating repair (a

technique she uses elsewhere). Scott does not immediately orient to 'traditional' as the trouble source, but Weilin then initiates a more specific repair with the candidate understanding (Heritage, 1984b) 'means er no Western' (line 19) and this is ratified by Scott.

Sam also engages in long explanatory sequences with Lee, again sometimes supporting his explanations with diagrams. Extract 5.6 begins at the end of one of these sequences and then continues with Sam comparing his explanation with what Lee has written:

Extract 5.6: Lee 29-34

```
1   Sam:    Or as you ↑see, (0.3) .h the forecasting (0.2) and
2           ↑scheduling, (1.8) are totally different.
3           (2.8) ((writing))
4   Lee:    Oh: m[m]
5   Sam:         [R]ight? .h Now I'm looking at ↑you:r ↓rationale. ↑I'm-
6           I am looking at this ((thump)) picture.
7   Lee:    [Mm]
8   Sam:    [And] arriving at this ((thump)) conclusion.
9   Lee:    °Mm.°
10  Sam:    .h Where is the rationale f- ((thump, thump)) for your (0.3)
11          .hh
12          (0.9)
13  Lee:    Oh::. Okay I:
14  Sam:    Right? That's that's ↓what I'm looking for.
15  Lee:    Mhm.=
16  Sam:    =I'm not looking fo:r, I I- ((sound of stapler))
17          b- because you understood it,
18  Lee:    Mm
19  Sam:    Yeah? You understood academic thinking.
20  Lee:    Yeah.
21  Sam:    Right?
```

```
22   Lee:   Yeah=
23   Sam:   =So I'm not worried about that. (.)
24   Lee:   Er=
25   Sam:   =I'm (.) worried about the ↑reasons. Why you're doing it now.
26   Lee:   mh[mh] ((laugh))
27   Sam:      [O]↑kay?
28   Sam:   If you have sufficient ground for your reasons.
29   Lee:   Oh:: yah.
30   Sam:   Yeah?
```

Here Sam moves from explanation of subject content (lines 1-2) to explanation of process, more specifically feedback on Lee's chapter plan and what he needs to improve. He then goes on to draw up a model of how he would plan a similar chapter. The frequency of PG/R tags in this sequence highlights Sam's attempt to be explicit about what exactly is wrong with Lee's plan. His explicitness, repetition and frequent PG/R tags all display a concern with Lee's understanding.

5.1.2   Advice-related informings

Sometimes a supervisor's informing is more related to advising than explaining, in that he is suggesting or explaining a possible course of action. This is particularly the case in Scott's two meetings, where the students are still deciding on their research topics, questions and methodology. Examples of these suggestions of what the students *may* or *might* do can be seen in the following extracts.

In Extract 5.7, Scott suggests that Aga may need to do non-probability sampling if she does a qualitative study:

Extract 5.7: Aga 11

```
1   Scott:   But the sa:mpling with a focus group.
2   Aga:     °Mhm°
3   Scott:   Might (.) require (0.9) >a different type of sampling
4            technique.<
5   Aga:     Yeah.
6   Scott:   In order to get them to↑gether.
7   Aga:     Yes. Yeah [that]'s er quality.
8   Scott:            [°Yeah°]
9   Scott:   Yeah.
10  Aga:     Aha=
11  Scott:   =So you may be you may be constrained to go ↑down the non-
12           probability ↑route.
13  Aga:     Mhm,
14  Scott:   Yeah?
15           (1.2)
16  Aga:     Mhm.
```

Scott's use of *might* in line 3 and *may* in line 11 enables him to present the choice of sampling technique as Aga's decision. Similarly, in Extract 5.8 Scott suggests that Weilin might supplement her questionnaire with interviews:

Extract 5.8: Weilin 1.18

```
1   Scott:   [How] many managers are there?
2   Weilin:  Maybe seven eight?
3   Scott:   Seven or eight,
4            (0.8)
5            so maybe you wi- might wish to do s- ↑interviews.
6            (0.7)
7   Weilin:  °Oh:.°
8            (0.9)
9            i-
10           (0.5)
11  Scott:   [°Yeah?°]
```

```
1   Weilin: [in]terv- er interview.
2   Scott:  °Right.°
```

In both these extracts, Scott's pre-PG/R tag suggestion is prefaced with *so*, which inferentially links it to the preceding talk. His *yeah?* in both cases marks the conclusion of a reasoning sequence. This is not the case with *right?* in Extract 5.9, where the preceding suggestion, is designed to project expansion rather than conclude a sequence:

Extract 5.9: Feng 35

```
1   Scott:  Th- the interesting thing might be to try an' (.) compare, if
2           the strategies are different,
3   Feng:   Mm
4   Scott:  Right?
5   Feng:   Yeah.
```

Although Scott has been talking about marketing strategies in China and the West, this is where he introduces the idea of comparison, which he develops in subsequent turns (cf. Extract 5.3). This use of *right?* to project continuing talk will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.

The above examples show Scott using *may* and *might* to put forward suggestions without actually telling or advising the student what to do, thus orienting to their independence. He also uses *if*-clauses to highlight the consequences or implications of possible actions. Extract 5.10 is from an earlier stage of his discussion with Feng:

```
1   Scott:   Now if it's ↑marketing strategy,
2   Feng:    Mhm
3   Scott:   It changes the whole focus [of] of who you are going to:
4   Feng:                               [Mm]
5   Scott:   (1.3) erm examine (.) who will be your subjects.
6            (0.2)
7            Yeah?
8   Feng:    Mm::
```

Here, Scott's informing makes explicit the implications of choosing to focus on marketing strategy.

Extract 5.11 follows Scott's enquiry about whether Feng will be able to find journal articles on consumer attitudes in China. Here Scott uses both an *if*-clause and *may*:

Extract 5.11: Feng 50

```
1   Scott:   If it is a difficult thing, then you may have to rethink
2            again.
3   Feng:    Okay=
4   Scott:   =Yeah?
```

Finally, Extract 5.12 illustrates a much more extended turn, where Scott is explaining a possible research procedure:

Extract 5.12: Joana 9

```
1   Scott:   So, what you could do is use Porter's model to identify, that
2            there is a gap in the market,
3   Joana:   Mhm?
4   Scott:   and then (1.1) go on to build a questionnaire,
5   Joana:   Mhm,
```

```
 6   Scott:    to prove that there's a d- a demand in the market.
 7             (0.5)
 8             And [that's what] you would do with consumers you would (.)
 9   Joana:        [Mhm,]
10   Scott:    you would do a questionnaire to consumers.
11             (0.9)
12             And (1.0) as long as you have the=
13   Joana:     [°Mhm°]
14   Scott:    =[a]ppropriate sampling techniques,
15   Joana:    Mhm,=
16   Scott:    =et cetera, (.) you will be able to pro:ve whether there's a
17             (.) gap in the market.
18             .h Porter's model might identify that there is, .h but it
19             can't prove it.
20             (0.4)
21   Joana:    [Mhm?]
22   Scott:    [You pro]ve it.
23             (0.3)
24   Joana:    [Mm?]
25   Scott:    [With a] questionnaire.
26             (0.7)
27             Yeah?
28   Joana:    Mhm? [Yeah,]
29   Scott:         [How] does that sound.
30             (0.5)
31   Joana:    ↑Yeah, sounds good.
```

It is interesting to contrast the single PG/R tag here with their frequent use in

Extract 5.4, Extract 5.5, and Extract 5.6. Scott is not orienting to potential

problems in understanding with Joana in the way that he is with Weilin and that

Sam is with Lee.

5.2 Advising, persuading, instructing

Whereas the examples in the previous section show the supervisor making suggestions that may inform the student's decision, the focus in this section is on advising, persuading or instructing the student to follow a course of action. How this is done, and what it is focused on, is affected partly by where the students are in the dissertation process. Scott is advising students at a very early stage, so his advice is often oriented to the student's choice of topic or methodology. The example in Extract 5.13 follows a description by Riaz of something he has been reading to the effect that employees' motivation changes with age:

Extract 5.13: Riaz 16

```
1   Riaz:    You can't say anything about that er the emplayees are going
2            to be motivated by this thing or this thing.
3   Scott:   [°°Yeah°°]
4   Riaz:    [.hh Be]cause they are keep on changing.
5   Scott:   Yeah.
6   Riaz:    °So:°
7   Scott:   .h t's almost like a moving tar[get.]
8   Riaz:                                   [Yeah,] i- it's like that.
9   Scott:   .hh So you what you need to do is be careful (.) .h that your
10           research, you don't- set yourself too difficult a task.
11           (0.7)
12           [Yeah?]
13  Riaz:    [Mm.]
```

As in some previous extracts, Scott prefaces his turn with *so*, which creates a logical link with what Riaz has been saying. His advice focuses on getting the student to limit his research project, a theme Scott returns to with other students too. A related orientation in Scott's interactions is the development of research

questions, as in Extract 5.14, and the need to use or develop a theoretical model, as in Extract 5.15:

Extract 5.14: Weilin 1.7

```
1   Scott:   Wha- what I would suggest that you do now,
2   Weilin: Uh huh,
3   Scott:   (.) is (.) refine the research question.
4            (0.6)
5            Okay?
```

This focus on 'refining the research question' becomes the central topic of much of this first meeting with Weilin. Their second meeting becomes centred on the concept of a research model, something that proves problematic in terms of mutual understanding. Extract 5.15 comes towards the end of the meeting:

Extract 5.15: Weilin 2.28-30

```
1    Scott:   .hh Wha- what I would suggest we do for next week is (.) e:m:
2             (1.3) tsk I- I would certainly suggest that you keep what you
3             had last week.
4             (1.6)
5             Don't try to do too much.
6    Weilin: Yeah.
7    Scott:   Right?
8    Weilin: Mhm.
9    Scott:   .h Bring along the book next week, (0.4) and (1.4) tell me
10            which model that you may prefer to use,=
11   Weilin: =Mhm.
12   Scott:   Yeah?
```

Scott begins this sequence in very much the same way as in Extract 5.14. 'Wha-what I would suggest' is a tentative formulation orienting to the face-threatening nature of advice giving (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, his use of

unmitigated imperative forms in lines 5 and 9 points to the understanding difficulties they have had. His instructions are designed to simplify Weilin's task and prevent her from over-complicating matters as she has earlier done. In fact, this sequence follows an earlier attempt by Scott to persuade Weilin not to change the proposal that she discussed in the first meeting (Extract 5.16):

Extract 5.16: Weilin 2.5,6

```
1   Scott:   You must think (0.7) about your↑self.
2            (0.6)
3            Don't (.) give yourself (.) too much work [to do].
4   (Weilin:                                     ([hh])
5            (0.4)
6   Scott:   Yeah?
7   Weilin:  (hh) (0.4) Yeah.
8   Scott:   Be nice to yourself.
9            (0.8)
10  (Weilin:([hh])
11  Scott:   [Yeah?]
12           .hhh °tha-° (0.2) your- your (.) your pro↑posal your initial
13           proposal last week sounded ↑good to me.
14           (0.6)
15           Yeah?
16           (0.5)
17           Because (0.2) <the rationale is already ↑there.>
```

Scott's repeated use of *yeah?* works to support his attempt to persuade her. A similar attempt to persuade can be seen in Extract 5.17, where Joana has proposed changing the topic of her dissertation to something that Scott believes will be more complicated:

1 Scott: **Stick to the kindergarten. Stay with consumer de↑mand.**

2 Joana: Mhm?

3 Scott: **Because you can <u>do</u> that.**

4 (0.6)

5 Joana: Yi(h)uh.

6 Scott: Yeah?

Here Scott orients to Joana's resistance to his advice by supporting it with an account in line 3 which 'highlight[s] the benefits that may be generated by the advice' (Waring, 2007b, p. 386).

Whereas Scott's interactions are with students who have yet to decide exactly what they are going to research, Saeed and Sam are advising students who have already begun their dissertations. There are therefore occasions when advice relates more specifically to fixed institutional requirements than to students' choices. An example of this can be seen in Extract 5.18, where Saeed is commenting on a chapter that Hasan has written:

Extract 5.18: Hasan 1.2

1 Saeed: Your introduction needs to be modified. Here you say in this

2 chapter we will be looking into our aims and objectives

3 (hence) giving detailed information about the goal of

4 leadership no we won't. In this chapter we will provide a

5 critical analysis of the literature in this area.

6 (0.5)

7 Okay?

Saeed makes no attempt to address Hasan's face needs, but simply contradicts what Hasan has written and replaces it with his alternative formulation. Face

issues appear to be minimised because Saeed is simply conforming to fixed expectations about how a dissertation should be structured. He is orienting to his right and responsibility to 'shaping' the student's work (Anderson et al., 2006) as university representative. (Having said that, the use of *okay?* can be heard as more affiliative than *right?* or *yeah?*, a point I will return to in chapter 7.)

A similar example can be seen in Extract 5.19:

Extract 5.19: Hasan 1.18

```
1   Saeed:   Ehh (0.7) this (0.3) heading should be changed to: how do
2            leaders lead.
3            (1.0)
4            Yeah?
```

Note that the use of the passive voice in both these extracts thematises the student's writing (*your introduction* in Extract 5.18, and *this heading* in Extract 5.19) rather than the student himself (as in 'you need to modify your introduction' and 'you should change this heading'). This focus contributes to mitigating face threat.

5.3 Assessments

As well as informing and advising, supervisors need to evaluate students' work and ideas. A number of first turns in PG/R tag sequences therefore function as assessments, 'turns which provide an evaluation' (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 118). In Extract 5.20, Scott gives a positive assessment of Joana's research model before moving on to raise a practical issue:

Extract 5.20: Joana 3

```
1    Scott:   hah I guess at this (.) .h I w- I'm alwa- I'm always quite
2             impre:ssed with (.) with the focus that you've go:t, (.)
3             because it's a very good model. And the model, and it has a
4             practical (.)
5    Joana:   M↑hm,
6    Scott:   em: (1.0) rationale,
7             (0.3)
8             Yeah?=
9    Joana:   Mm.
10   Scott:   .hhh So I guess the issue: that you're looking at now is
11            (0.8) I: (.) how difficult is this going to be to find the
12            infor[mation.]
```

Scott's 'I guess at this' (line 1) is taken up again in line 10. He was possibly going to say 'at this stage', restated as 'now' in line 10. The assessment is thus a parenthetical comment and his *yeah?* in line 8 marks a boundary before moving on. A similar boundary marking can be seen in Extract 5.21:

Extract 5.21: Hasan 2.22

```
1    Saeed:   This is what I liked about this chapter because I could
2             ea:sily .h apply: six or seven of those theories in different
3             ↑places.
4             (0.5)
5             Even in (.) more than one o↑ccasion.
6             (1.6)
7             Yeah?
8             (0.4)
9             So I said that to you befo:re that (.) you know (.) that (.)
10            we('re) no submitting until (0.8) it's up to scratch.
```

The post-gap *yeah?* here marks a shift in focus from the chapter to the dissertation submission.

Assessments can also form part of an account, as in Extract 5.22, which comes shortly after Extract 5.16, when Scott is trying to persuade Weilin not to change her proposed topic. They appear to be talking at cross purposes in this section, as in response to Scott's suggestion that she choose a Western model of HRM for comparison with the practices in a hotel in China, Weilin has asked 'A Western model or just American model'. Scott does not pick up on this distinction, which may explain his response in line 4:

Extract 5.22: Weilin 2.11

```
1   Weilin: I should uh say something about American: aitch ar.
2   Scott:  .h Yeh.
3           (0.8)
4           But you already ↑are.
5   Weilin: Hhuh ((laughs))
6   Scott:  Becau:se (.) you have a good rationale with the ↑Sheraton.
7           (0.8)
8           [Yeah?]
9   Weilin: [°Yeah.°]
```

Scott's positive assessment of Weilin's rationale is used to bolster his argument and to provide an account for his statement that she is already 'saying something about American HR'.

5.4 Questions

As the first turn in a PG/R tag sequence, questions are not as frequent in my data as informings, advice or assessments. This is perhaps unsurprising, as a question is already explicitly seeking a response. The PG/R tag thus points up an absent or inadequate response. Supervisors' questions in these positions can be formed interrogatively, declaratively or as tag questions.

5.4.1 Interrogatives

In Extract 5.23 the trouble seems to lie in the delivery or intonation of Joana's response:

Extract 5.23: Joana 10

```
1   Scott:   Your questionnaire will then prove, whether that is the case
2            or not.
3   Joana:   Mhm?
4   Scott:   What do you think,
5   Joana:   ↑Mhm? Yeah,
6   Scott:   [Yeah?]
7   Joana:   [S'pose]
```

Here Scott is arguing that Joana can use her questionnaire to establish whether there is a gap in the market for private kindergartens. His 'What do you think' (line 4) is itself pursuing a response, and it does indeed succeed in eliciting a slightly stronger response than the initial continuer *mhm?*. However, this response ('↑Mhm? Yeah,') is still marked with rising intonation, which makes it hearably unconvinced. Scott then pursues a further response with *yeah?*, which overlaps the remainder of Joana's equivocal response.

In fact, such rising intonation is not unusual in Joana's responses. A similar example is seen in Extract 5.24:

Extract 5.24: Joana 17

```
1   Scott:   So, if you wanted to do that you'd be doing probability
2            sampling.=
3   Joana:   =Mhm,=
4   Scott:   =And a quantitative a↑nalysis?
5            (0.4)
6            Are you [happy with] that?
```

```
7   Joana:        [Mhm,]
8             ↑Yeah,
9             (0.3)
10  Scott:    Yeah?
```

Here again, Joana's response in line 8 is marked by high pitch and rising intonation, suggesting that she may be unsure.

5.4.2 Declarative questions

Supervisors' questions are not only formed with interrogative syntax. In Extract 5.25, Saeed's declaratively formed sentence functions as a question because it concerns information about Hasan's state of mind that Saeed does not have:

Extract 5.25: Hasan 1.20

```
1   Saeed    So, you're reasonably satisfied then that you've addressed
2            the objectives in the literature review.
3            (0.4)
4            Yeah?
5   Hasan:   Yes.=
```

Saeed's statement refers to what Labov calls a 'B-event':

> Given two parties in a conversation, A and B, we can distinguish as 'A-events' the things that A knows about but B does not; as 'B-events' the things which B knows but A does not; and as 'AB-events' knowledge which is shared equally by A and B.
>
> (1972, p. 254)

Labov then describes a 'rule of interpretation' such that 'if A makes a statement about a B-event, it is heard as a request for confirmation' (1972, p. 254). These B-event statements, or 'Y/N declaratives' (Raymond, 2010), may be accompanied by 'inference markers' (Heritage, 2012, p. 9) such as *then* in line 1 of Extract 5.25.

These markers index the supervisor's lack of knowledge relative to the student.

Another example of this is *I take it* in Extract 5.26:

```
1   Scott:   and I take it you want to do probability sampling.
2            (1.0)
3            Yeah?=
4   Aga:     =Probability. But um what if I'm looking at er people of
5            certain ↑age?
```

Here, it is possible that Aga does not immediately pick up the questioning force of *I take it,* though Scott's *yeah?* then elicits an instant response.

A similar phenomenon to the declarative question is when supervisors review the current 'state of play' of the interaction – what has been jointly established so far. In Extract 5.27, Scott reviews what he and Weilin discussed the previous week, following his sense that they have been talking at cross purposes and that 'we must clarify exactly what you're going to do':

```
1    Scott:  Last week: we: discussed that you were doing (.) human
2            resource management in the hotel sector.
3    Weilin: Yeah.
4    Scott:  Case study.
5    Weilin: Yes questionn[aire.]
6    Scott:               [Ques]tionnaire.
7    Weilin: Yeah. It's the same.
8    Scott:  Sheraton, [ho]tel.
9    Weilin:          [Ye-] yeah.
10   Scott:  Okay?
11   Weilin: Yeah.
```

The post-response *okay?* here follows three statements by Scott (four if we include his repair in line 6), each of which is confirmed by Weilin. In other words, his statements are understood as recycling shared information (rather than introducing new information) requiring confirmation, not merely acknowledgement. His *okay?* seems to serve as a closing and more global check.

A similar check can be seen in Extract 5.28, which is part of a section when Scott is seeking to establish Feng's focus of interest. After establishing her interest in corporate strategy, Scott opens a new sequence with *so*:

Extract 5.28: Feng 6

```
1   Scott:   .h So: e:r (.) °right.° ↑Corporate strategy.
2            ((sniff)) (0.5)
3   Scott:   Yeah?
4   Feng:    S- er s- see ↑corporate, so, er because I the name is
5            corporate so - I (said) the marketing m:a- management, and er
6            [internati-]
```

This time Scott's *yeah?* is treated by Feng as setting up an expectation of a justification, explanation or account.

5.4.3   Turn-final tags

There are a number of examples where the first turn in the PG/R tag sequence is one that ends in *yeah?* or *yes?*. This turn is therefore a question, but one which is not designed as a question from the start of the turn (cf. Sacks et al. 1974). These turn-final tags can follow any of the actions that have so far been mentioned. Most follow an informing as in the following two extracts:

```
1  Scott:  =The MAI:N important thing is the the access issue. °Yeah,°
2  Feng:   Mm::.
3  Scott:  Yeah?
```

```
1  Scott:  [I- it s-] it slightly alters things yes?
2  Feng:   [Mm]
3          Mm:=
4  Scott:  =Yeah?
```

The PG/R tag in a number of these examples is *okay?,* as seen in the following

three extracts:

```
1  Scott:  [And] then it would be most (2.2) consumer preferences or
2          consumer (1.5) perspectives or (.) [yeah?]
3  Feng:                                      [Mm.]
4          (1.0)
5  Scott:  °Okay?°
```

```
1  Scott:  .hh And the idea is: (0.7) that you will be looking at (1.0)
2          the differences (0.7) that may occur (0.7) in management
3          practices, styles, employee practices, [yeah?]
4  Weilin:                                         [Yeah] yeah.
5  Scott:  Okay?
```

In Extract 5.33 the tag comes at the end of an advising turn:

Extract 5.33: Riaz 23, 24

```
1  Scott:  Y'must develop this model, .hh and that would push your (.)
2          research further
3  Riaz:   °Right.°
4  Scott:  e:m (.) on, yeah?
5          (1.3)
6          Okay?
```

The use of *okay?* in these examples suggests that Scott is avoiding the repetition of *yeah?*, which might be heard as more insistent and face-threatening. Alternatively (or in addition) it may be functioning more as a boundary marker, a point I will return to in chapter 7.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at some examples of supervisors' first turns in PG/R tag sequences. These examples illustrate the kinds of actions that supervisors are engaged in, predominantly informing and advising. These actions, in particular, index the supervisors' knowledgeable epistemic stance (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2012) and their deontic right to tell students what to do (Antaki, 2012). By drawing attention to, and underlining the importance of, these turns, the PG/R tags highlight the asymmetrical relationship between supervisors and students and further the institutional goals of supervision (Drew & Heritage, 1992b).

In the next chapter I will concentrate on what follows the supervisor's first turn – the student's response or lack of one. As a 'response prompt' (Bolden, Mandelbaum, & Wilkinson, 2012, p. 138), the supervisor's subsequent PG/R tag

frequently marks this second turn as in some way 'inadequate' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 75), and it thus functions to question the student's understanding or acceptance of the first turn.

Chapter 6 The student's response

In this chapter I will look in more detail at the gaps that precede post-gap tags and the responses that precede post-response tags. The focus therefore turns from supervisors' actions to students' actions. As in Chapter 5, I will limit my discussion of the tags themselves. At the same time, I will give examples not only of the gaps and responses that occur immediately preceding a tag, but also of others in a larger sequential context. In this way, I hope to shed some light on the students' orientations to the supervisors' talk and to their mutual roles and responsibilities. At the same time, this chapter is, of course, intended to add more detail to the picture that I have begun to sketch of the functioning of the PG/R tags. I will look first at silences after a supervisor's turn, and will consider whether they are 'attributable' to the student, with implications for the interpretation of the following tag. I will then discuss different types of student response.

6.1 Silence

The largest single group of second turns consist of silences, or, at least (in the absence of visual clues) no audible response on the part of the student. An example is illustrated in Extract 6.1:

Extract 6.1: Weilin 1.7

```
1   Scott:   Wha- what I would suggest that you do now,
2   Weilin:  Uh huh,
3   Scott:   (.) is (.) refine the research question.
4            (0.6)
5            Okay?
```

This example was previously discussed in section 4.3.5, where I argued that the 0.6 second gap after the completion of Scott's suggestion is noticeable and attributable to Weilin, particularly after her earlier continuer in line 2. Scott's *okay?* is therefore an example of when 'a prior speaker is soliciting a response which has so far been slow in coming' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 54).

Extract 6.2 contains four examples of inter-turn gaps, but only two of them are followed by post-gap tags:

Extract 6.2: Aga 7, 8

```
1   Scott:   So it's really your (.) choi:ce.
2   Aga:     Mhm=
3   Scott:   =Philosophical choice I suppo:se or methodological choice,
4            .hh initially, (0.3) to decide which, type of: sampling that
5            you'd [like to:] adr-=
6   Aga:           [°Mhm°]
7   Scott:   =and I th- I take it you wanna do probability sampling.
8            (1.0)
9            Yeh?=
10  Aga:     =Probability. .h But um, ↑what if I'm looking at (.) er
11           people of certain ↑age.
12           (0.4)
13  Scott:   Uh huh,=
14  Aga:     =Would that (0.4) be:: ↑choosing.
15           (0.5)
16  Scott:   .hh Yeah. That would be choosing,
17  Aga:     So that's non-probability.=
18  Scott:   =But even within tha' age, you would then (0.7) °er wou-°
19           tha' tha' age group would be: um (0.3) predetermined.
20           (0.5)
21           Right?=
22  Aga:     =°Mm°=
```

```
23   Scott:   =.h But then, (.) once you have that predetermined
24            [popula]tion, then you sample with↑in that.
25   Aga:     [°Mm°]
26   Aga:     Yes. And with that, that would be probability.
27   Scott:   Yeh.
28   Aga:     Uh huh.
```

Two of these gaps (lines 12 and 15) follow Aga's turns, and in both cases, Aga simply waits for Scott to respond. By contrast, the two silences following Scott's turns (lines 8 and 20) are both followed by post-gap tags, which pursue and receive a response of some sort. These are clear examples of the way in which students and supervisors orient to their respective roles in their treatment of inter-turn gaps. It is worth noting that Aga is not generally hesitant. At other transition relevance places she takes a turn (lines 14, 17 and 26) or at least offers a continuer (lines 2, 22 and 28) without any gap after Scott's turns. The two silences in lines 8 and 20 are therefore noticeable.

As discussed in chapter 5, Scott's turn in line 7 has the force of a question, and the subsequent silence is clearly attributable to Aga, and she is accountable for a response. That is not so clearly the case with the gap in line 20, which follows an informing, but the most likely interpretation is that Scott's post-gap *right?* in line 21 is addressed to the absence of immediate uptake by Aga. That Aga understands both post-gap tags in this way is seen in her latched responses (i.e. with no break between them and the prior talk) in lines 10 and 22.

Of course, not all gaps attributable to students are followed by a tag. A contrasting sequence can be seen in Extract 6.3. Here Scott is giving advice to Joana, who offers continuers at some but not all transition relevance places:

```
1   Scott:   So, what you could do is use Porter's model to identify, that
2            there is a gap in the market,
3   Joana:   Mhm?
4   Scott:   and then (1.1) go on to build a questionnaire,
5   Joana:   Mhm,
6   Scott:   to prove that there's a d- a demand in the market.
7            (0.5)
8            And [that's what] you would do with consumers you would (.)
9   Joana:       [Mhm,]
10  Scott:   you would do a questionnaire to consumers.
11           (0.9)
12           And (1.0) as long as you have the=
13  Joana:    [°Mhm°]
14  Scott:   =[a]ppropriate sampling techniques,
15  Joana:   Mhm,=
16  Scott:   =et cetera, (.) you will be able to pro:ve whether there's a
17           (.) gap in the market.
18           .h Porter's model might identify that there is, .h but it
19           can't prove it.
20           (0.4)
21  Joana:   [Mhm?]
22  Scott:   [You pro]ve it.
23           (0.3)
24  Joana:   [Mm?]
25  Scott:   [With a] questionnaire.
26           (0.7)
27           Yeah?
28  Joana:   Mhm? [Yeah,]
29  Scott:        [How] does that sound.
30           (0.5)
31  Joana:   ↑Yeah, sounds good.
```

This sequence differs from that in Extract 6.2 in that Scott engages in a number of extended turns. While Joana offers frequent continuers, they mostly come at

intonationally (and sometimes syntactically) incomplete transition relevance places (lines 3, 5 and 15). After the first two intonationally and syntactically complete turn-constructional units, Joana is silent (lines 7 and 11), despite the fact that these might be appropriate points for her to (at least) mark acknowledgement of his advice. At both points, Scott resumes with additional *and*-prefaced turns. The second of these ends in a series of short increments (lines 18-19, 22 and 25), the first two of which are again responded to by Joana with continuers, this time in overlap with Scott after short gaps. After another gap, Scott finally invites a response with *yeah?*.

What this sequence shows, then, is a supervisor engaged in an advice sequence, while the student shows 'passive recipiency' (Jefferson, 1983, p. 4) and appears to be waiting for the supervisor to call for a response. The tag in line 27 thus marks the preceding silence as an attributable gap, whereas the earlier silences are transformed into intra-turn pauses by the supervisor's continuing talk. At the same time, the use of the post-gap tag seems to mark the completion of the advice sequence more than it does any local problem of understanding.

A similar sequence can be seen in Extract 6.4. Here the supervisor is engaged in an extended explanation (or instructional sequence) supported by a diagram he is drawing as he talks:

Extract 6.4: Lee 48, 49

```
1   Sam:    =Er: (.) I c- I just call it number two okay?
2   Lee:    [Mm]
3   Sam:    [Because]=
4   Lee:    =Mm=
```

```
5    Sam:    =this is number ↑one, (0.5) ((writing)) this is number ↑two,
6    Lee:    °Mm°
7    Sam:    pt .hh then about for th- er:: (.) that is called (0.7) er:
8            logistic service providers level one.
9            (0.9) ((writing))
10           ↑Yeh?
11           (0.3)
12   Lee:    °Mhm.°
```

The silence in line 5 is treated as an intra-turn pause, allowing Sam time to write down his next point. This also seems to be true of the silence at line 9, and this would point to an analysis of Sam's *Yeh?* as a turn-final tag which is simply delayed by the speaker's own action. But it is similar to the post-gap tag in Extract 6.3 in that both tags mark the conclusion of a stage in the supervisor's extended advice or explanation sequence. The silences show the students orienting to these teaching sequences as monologic, to some extent. As in a lecture, they defer to the supervisors' organisation of the talk.

6.2   Response tokens

When it comes to response tokens, it is possible to trace particular actions that different response tokens perform. In the discussion that follows, I draw on previous studies of individual tokens and how they are used in English. At the same time, I will note patterns of individual variation between students, bearing in mind Gardner's proviso that while there may be differences between individual speakers, 'it is not that speakers are not systematic in their use of response tokens, but that they are systematic in different ways – at least to some degree' (2007, p. 337 n.8).

It is also necessary to entertain the possibility that students' use of response tokens may be influenced by their first language. For example, Clancy et al. (1996) found that Mandarin speakers tended to use continuers less frequently than English and Japanese speakers, and that they tended to wait until points of both grammatical and intonational completion ('complex transition relevance places'). English speakers used them at points of grammatical completion, with or without intonational completion, and Japanese speakers used them more frequently still. They speculate that 'Mandarin interactional style favors conversational participants not infringing on the other's 'turn space'. (1996, p. 382) Avoidance of response tokens can therefore be seen as showing 'an appropriate respect for the primary speakers' right to formulate and produce their talk undisturbed' (1996, p. 382). It is conceivable that the three Chinese students in my study may be orienting to this norm in their interaction with their supervisors and producing silence where the supervisor might expect a response. On the other hand, as seen in some of the examples above, silences are not confined to the Chinese students. And many of the silences in these meetings must surely be associated with the nature of supervision itself: silences do not necessarily need to be avoided as they might in ordinary conversation, as both parties are to some extent engaged in a problem-solving task that sometimes requires reflection.

6.2.1   Continuers: *Mhm, uh huh* (and *mm*)

The minimal response tokens *mhm*, *uh huh*, and *mm* can all be used as continuers when they are used 'to pass up the opportunity to take a more substantial turn at talk' (Gardner, 2001, p. 25). Listeners can thereby 'display their

understanding ... that an extended turn is underway' (Schegloff, 1982, p. 81). As Gardner explains, the production of a continuer displays the *absence* of any claim to problems of understanding or agreement. He bases the claim that *uh huh* and *mhm* are 'classic continuers' on 'three primary observations':

> First, they are overwhelmingly followed by continuation by another speaker; second, ... they occur overwhelmingly where the talk to which they are oriented is pragmatically and intonationally (and less frequently grammatically) incomplete; and third, their terminal intonation contour is overwhelmingly a rise, which has been shown to mark incompletion.
>
> (2001, p. 210)

Gardner goes on to describe *mm* as a continuer when it has fall-rise intonation, and he also includes an example of *mhm* being used with falling 'acknowledging' intonation. So these minimal, semantically empty, response tokens need to be analysed individually rather than automatically classified as either continuers or acknowledgements.

The use of a PG/R tag after what could be heard as a continuer suggests that the student has not understood that a stronger acknowledgment was called for. In Schegloff's words, 'a continuer produced to display an understanding that an extended unit is in progress and is not yet completed thereby displays a misunderstanding' (1982, p. 84).

An example of a PG/R tag following a continuer can be seen in Extract 6.5:

Extract 6.5: Weilin 1.17

```
1   Scott:   =Yeah. .h your question for your research (0.8) will change.
2            Is much more specific. You must ask yourself (0.5) <What
3            exactly (.) do I wish (.) to (0.3) find out.
4   Weilin: Mhm,
5   Scott:   Yeah?
6   Weilin: Mm.
```

Here the comma-intoned continuer, *mhm*, displays an understanding that Scott's talk is not complete. The PG/R tag challenges that understanding and elicits a falling-intoned acknowledgment, *mm*. Similarly, in Extract 6.6, Aga responds to Scott's turn with a 'continuing' *mhm*, before offering an 'acknowledging' *mhm* after Scott's *yeah?*:

Extract 6.6: Aga 11

```
1   Scott:   =So you may be you may be constrained to go ↑down the non-
2            probability ↑route.
3   Aga:     Mhm,
4   Scott:   Yeah?
5            (1.2)
6   Aga:     Mhm.
```

In both these examples, the students are initially displaying an understanding that the supervisor has more to say. Another way of looking at this is that they are requesting the supervisor to say more. In this way, students and supervisors jointly construct instructing and advising sequences. Extract 6.3, above, is a good example of this. In fact, Joana often responds to Scott's talk with rising-intoned continuers, as is further exemplified in Extract 6.7:

```
1   Scott:   Yeah.
2            That's [the diffi]culty with annual reports=
3   Joana:          [e:o]
4   Scott:   =[they're always]: em they're ts (1.3)
5   Joana:    [Mhm,]
6   Scott:   they're sanitised.
7   Joana:   Mhm, °yeah.°
8   Scott:   °Yeah,°
9   Joana:   °Mhm?°
10  Scott:   They look nice,
11           and everything'[s e]verything's nice and pretty:,=
12  Joana:                  [Yeah.]
```

Here Joana follows a 'continuing' *mhm* in line 7 with an 'acknowledging' quiet *yeah.* She then responds to Scott's PG/R tag with an upward-intoned *mhm*, and he then appropriately responds with an expansion or clarification of 'sanitised'.

By withholding a clear acknowledgement, then, it is possible for a student to elicit more talk from the supervisor. Or, to put it another way, when students display passive recipiency through the use of silences and continuers, they are helping to sustain the supervisors' extended informing and advising turns.

6.2.2   Acknowledgements: *Mm, Yeah* (and *Mhm*)

When used with a falling intonation contour, *mm* and *yeah* in particular, but also *mhm* and *uh huh,* function as acknowledgements. Like continuers, says Gardner, they are 'claiming "no problem" in understanding or agreement', but, in contrast to continuers, 'they are not, primarily, in the business of handing the floor back to the prior speaker, but of making a claim to adequate receipt of the prior turn'. (2001, p. 34).

In their archetypical use as acknowledgements, Gardner describes *yeah* and *mm*

as

> more retrospective than prospective, acknowledging the talk to which they are responding. *Mm* is normally a weaker, less involved token than *Yeah*. It occurs more frequently as the only talk in its turn than *Yeah* does, and it shows less speakership incipiency.
>
> (Gardner, 2007, pp. 321–322)

Feng is a student who makes frequent use of *mm*. Some examples can be seen in

Extract 6.8:

Extract 6.8: Feng 28

```
1   Scott:   What- you should (0.3) really (.) try to do: what is easier
2            for you.
3            (0.7)
4            >If [you have]< say a questionnaire.
5   Feng:        [°Mm°]
6   Feng:    Mm:.=
7   Scott:   =For cu- Chinese customers=
8   Feng:    =Mm.
9            (0.9)
10  Scott:   who have (0.9) who uh::m have (1.1) been customers of ike:a.
11  Feng:    Mm.=
12  Scott:   =Yeah?
13  Feng:    Mm.
```

The lack of variety in response tokens is noticeable here. Schegloff suggests that

> Use in four of five consecutive slots of the same token may ... be used to hint incipient disinterest, while varying the tokens across the series, whatever tokens are employed, may mark a baseline of interest.
>
> (1982, p. 85)

In the institutional environment of the supervision meeting, it is unlikely that

such lack of variety will be heard as expressing lack of interest as it might in

ordinary conversation, but it might suggest limited understanding. A different, stronger acknowledging response at line 11 would display a recognition of the completion of Scott's turn-constructional unit. That is not to say that Scott's PG/R tag is necessarily orienting to an 'inadequate' response, as can be seen in Extract 6.9, where Feng follows a drawn-out *mm* after Scott's trail-off in line 2, with *yeah* after his continuation in line 4:

Extract 6.9: Feng 40

```
1   Scott:  And (.) it all depends on what you wanna do, whe- whether you
2           wanna do interviews or (0.8)
3   Feng:   M[m::. .hh]
4   Scott:   [Er: que]stionnaire,
5   Feng:   Yeah:.
6   Scott:  Yeah?
7   Feng:   Yeah.
```

This example shows *yeah* being used as a stronger acknowledgement than *mm*.

Weilin is a student who often uses *yeah* as a simple free-standing acknowledgement, without moving out of passive recipiency, as in Extract 6.10:

Extract 6.10: Weilin 1.14, 15

```
1   Scott:  ((writing)) And (0.3) so that your research question is very
2           important for the research yeah?
3   Weilin: Mhm. [Yeah.]
4   Scott:       [As] we discussed earlier.
5   Weilin: Yeh
6   Scott:  Yeah?
```

However, in Extract 6.11 she also uses *yeah* as a preface to a turn (i.e. showing 'speaker incipiency'):

Extract 6.11: Weilin 1.6

```
1   Scott:   .hh And the idea is: (0.7) that you will be looking at (1.0)
2            the differences (0.7) that may occur (0.7) in management
3            practices, styles, employee practices, [yeah?]
4   Weilin:                                         [Yeah] yeah.
5   Scott:   Okay?
6   Weilin:  Yeah. And er there er
7            >Do we need to compare with European sty(le)?<
```

Here Weilin initiates a turn after her *yeah* in line 6. As Guthrie puts it,

> by producing a *yeah*, the recipient displays an understanding that he/she considers the others speaker's turn either to be complete or to be coming to completion, and that the *yeah* producer is ready to take the floor for a turn, to shift from the role of recipient-so-far to the role of speaker.

(1997, p. 401)

6.2.3 *Okay* and *Right*

Beach describes 'free-standing' *okay* as 'a short-hand display marking (a) acknowledgment and/or understanding (e.g., confirmation) of, (b) affiliation/alignment (e.g., agreement) with, what prior speaker's utterance was taken to be projecting' (1993, p. 329).

An example of this affiliative use can be seen in Extract 6.12:

Extract 6.12: Weilin 2.3

```
1   Scott:   .h Well. (0.5) .hh ↑I think, (1.3) ↓°em° (.) we must step
2            back, (0.6)
3   Weilin:  °Uh°
4   Scott:   to- last week.
5   Weilin:  Okay.=
6   Scott:   =Yeah?
```

Here Weilin shows acceptance of Scott's proposal.

In Extract 6.13, Scott tries to persuade Feng to make her choice of 'corporate strategy' more focused:

Extract 6.13: Feng 4-7

```
1   Scott:   .h So: e:r (.) °right.° ↑Corporate strategy.
2            ((sniff)) (0.5)
3   Scott:   Yeah?
4   Feng:    S- er s- see ↑corporate, so, er because I the name is
5            corporate so - I (said) the marketing m:a- management, and er
6            [internati-]
7   Scott:   [Is it ↑mar]keting strategy.
8   Feng:    Mmmm, (.) yes it both er I- I write marketing and er
9            management.
10  Scott:   >Right.<
11  Feng:    Um huh-huh-huh
12  Scott:   Choose,
13  Feng:    O↑k(h)ay [hhuh]
14  Scott:            [Yeah?]
15  Scott:   You [don't want] to be doing (0.4) ehm (1.2) too much.
16  Feng:        [Yeah::,]
17  Feng:        Okay.
```

Feng's first *okay* (line 13) accepts Scott's instruction to 'choose'. The 'laugh particle' or 'interpolated particle of aspiration' (Potter & Hepburn, 2010) and accompanying laugh perhaps mark the difficulty that having to choose represents. The second *okay* (line 17) marks acceptance of Scott's advice. There are several similar examples in Scott's meeting with Feng, the last of which can be seen in Extract 6.14:

Extract 6.14: Feng 54

```
1   Scott:   So I don't (know the) do much on that so I: I'm relying on
2            you to (0.4) find that out.
3   Feng:    Okay:.
4   Scott:   Okay?
5   Feng:    Yes.
```

Here again, Feng's *okay* seems to convey not simply understanding (as a simple *yeah* might do), but also agreement.

As well as displaying agreement, *okay* can also function as what Gardner calls a 'change-of-activity' token (2001, p. 52). Heritage and Clayman include *right,* as well as *okay,* as tokens which are 'shift-implicative' (Beach, 1993, p. 341) in that

> they are associated with, and communicate, a preparedness to shift to a new topic or to a new primary speaker. In contrast to the continuative acknowledgments such as "mm hm", the shift-implicativeness of "okay" and "right" embody an analysis that the previous speaker could be complete and ready for such a shift.
>
> (2010, p. 113)

In Guthrie's academic advising data, 'the participants demonstrate an orientation to the use of *mmhmm* as a continuer and *okay* as an acknowledgement token. That is, the *mmhmm*s come in the "less-complete" slots, and the *okay*s come in the "more-complete" slots' (Guthrie, 1997, p. 407). An example of this can be seen in Extract 6.15:

Extract 6.15: Aga 8-9

```
1   Scott:   =But even within tha' age, you would then (0.7) °er wou-°
2            tha' tha' age group would be: um (0.3) predetermined.
3            (0.5)
4            Right?=
5   Aga:     =°Mm°=
```

```
 6   Scott:   =.h But then, (.) once you have that predetermined
 7            [popula]tion, then you sample with↑in that.
 8   Aga:     [°Mm°]
 9   Aga:     Yes. And with that, that would be probability.
10   Scott:   Yeh.
11   Aga:     Uh huh.
12   Scott:   Then [you have to] (.) yeah.
13   Aga:          [(°I see°)]
14            Okay.
15   Scott:   Okay?
16   Aga:     ↑Hm.
17   Scott:   You could also samp- ther- you know, with th- there are non-
18            probability sampling techniques,
```

This shows Aga using *okay* at a point of completion. Note also her *mm*s in lines 5 and 8 – the first is a response to Scott's post-gap *right?*, and the second is placed after the first part of a compound turn-constructional unit. Her *yes* in line 9 shows 'a preparedness to shift from recipiency to speakership' (Jefferson, 1983, p. 4), as it is followed by a question. *Uh huh* in (line 11) is a third position receipt of Scott's reply to her question, expanded with her quiet 'I see' in line 13. Scott's *yeah* in line 12 confirms the earlier *yeh* after a self-repair, and Aga marks the closure of this sequence with *okay* in line 14.

Aga's 'I see' (line 13) seems to have a similar function to one that Gardner identifies for *right*. This use is one that Gardner says is much more common in British and Australian English than in American English. He calls it an 'idea connector' or 'epistemic dependency marker', which

is not only acknowledging a turn but is also claiming that its producer understands the relevance of this utterance in relation to something prior. This makes *Right* different from classic continuers such as *Mm hm* or *Uh huh*, which are neutral

beyond asking for more from the other speaker, and from acknowledgment tokens such as *Yeah* or *Mm*, which are marking receipt of the previous turn (and no others) in various ways.

<div align="right">(Gardner, 2007, p. 336)</div>

In Gardner's analysis, *right* can be used to link two or more ideas in adjacent turns or longer stretches of talk. Two examples of this use of *right* may be seen in Extract 6.16:

Extract 6.16: Riaz 5

```
1   Scott:   .h So this section of your proposal, (2.2) really should-
2            (0.5) em (1.7) be:: (1.0) .h th- (0.6)
3            .h The literature review: (0.5) section, (0.5) should be:
4            (1.7) <illustrative>, (0.9) o:f (0.2) the concept of
5            motivation.
6            In management and organisation theory.
7   Riaz:    Right.
8   Scott:   .h And also, purposeful.
9            Because then it it moves in the direction of what you're
10           particularly wanting to look at.
11           (0.6)
12  Riaz:    Right.
13  Scott:   Yeah?
```

Here, Riaz's first *right* (line 7) can be seen to be 'mark the connectedness' between 'the concept of motivation' and 'management and organisation theory'. The second *right* may be recognising the link between this section of the proposal being 'purposeful' and the justification for that (lines 9-10), and also the link between the two attributes: 'puposeful' and 'illustrative of the concept of motivation'.

Another example of *right* can be seen in Extract 6.17:

Extract 6.17: Hasan 35

```
1  Saeed:   Another thing is can you bring the aims and objec- the first
2           chapter with you.
3  Hasan:   [Yes.]
4  Saeed:   [Because] I might want to look at it, .h as I'm sitting with
5           you making the questions.
6  Hasan:   Right.
7  Saeed:   O↑kay then,
8  Hasan:   Okay.
```

This conception of *right* as an idea connector makes it particularly appropriate as an acknowledgement in informing and advising sequences. Gardner claims that such *right*s 'are found in environments in which connections between ideas ... can be traced, and the connections that are being traced can be compounded to a whole series of interconnected ideas' (2001, p. 51). However, only two students, Hasan and Riaz, regularly use *right* as an acknowledgement token. It may be relevant that they are both Pakistani, and that the Chinese and Polish students in my dataset may be less familiar with this use of *right* and/or may associate *right* more with the 'that's correct' use which would only be appropriate in situations where their epistemic status was higher than the supervisor's. The use of *right* by Hasan and Riaz may therefore contribute to them being heard as more confident and more independent.

6.2.4 *Oh* and *Ah*

In his discussion of *oh* in response to informings, Heritage says that 'in proposing a change of state with the production of "oh", recipients can confirm that, although they were previously uninformed on the matter at hand, they are now informed' (1984b, p. 304). He contrasts *oh* with

... receipt objects such as 'yes' and 'mm hm' [which] avoid or defer treating prior talk as informative. Thus 'yes' is regularly, and in contrast to 'oh', associated with additional turn components that assert prior knowledge of just delivered information.

(Heritage, 1984b, p. 305)

Heritage found free-standing *oh* receipts of prior informings to be 'comparatively rare in the conversational data to hand' (1984b, p. 302). More often, *oh* was followed by an assessment of the news that had been given, or by a request or invitation for the informant to continue. However, in my data, free-standing *oh* receipts are not uncommon, though they are restricted to the Feng and Weilin. An example can be seen in Extract 6.18:

Extract 6.18: Weilin 1.18

```
1   Scott:   [How] many managers are there?
2   Weilin:  Maybe seven eight?
3   Scott:   Seven or eight, (0.8) so maybe you wi- might wish to do s-
4            ↑interviews.
5            (0.7)
6   Weilin:  °Oh:.°
7            (0.9)
8            i-
9            (0.5)
10  Scott:   [°Yeah?°]
11  Weilin:  [in]terv- er interview.
12  Scott:   °Right.°
```

Weilin's *oh* in line 6 marks her orientation to the idea of doing interviews as 'news'. Her repetition of 'interview' in line 11, after Scott's quiet *yeah?* is similar to the examples of 'delayed next turn repair initiation' that Wong (2000) noticed in conversations between Mandarin speakers of English and native speakers of English. Although her *oh* does not overtly display a problem with Scott's previous

turn, it marks it as new in a way that a different acknowledgement token, such as *yeah* or *okay*, would not. This may be why Scott waits for an expansion of her turn and, when it is not forthcoming, adds the quiet *yeah?*.

If free-standing *oh* is comparatively rare in ordinary conversation, then *ah* is presumably even more so. However, it is used a number of times by one student, Feng, in a use that appears to be subtly different from *oh*. The only previous discussion of *ah* that I have found comes from Aijmer, writing from a corpus linguistics perspective. She draws the following contrast between *oh* and *ah*:

> *Oh* expresses a reaction to an unexpected piece of information the significance of which need not at the moment be apparent to the speaker. *Ah* on the other hand implies that the speaker now (at last) sees the significance of something which has eluded him before.
>
> (1987, p. 65)

My interpretation is similar. Where Heritage describes free-standing *oh* as indicating that its producer has been informed, I suggest that *ah* can be used to indicate something more, namely that the 'new' information corrects a misapprehension or contradicts a previously held piece of information.

There is an example of such a use by a supervisor in Extract 6.19. Up to this point in the conversation, Scott has been assuming that Joana was going to research private kindergartens (he makes this assumption explicit a little later):

```
1   Joana:   And- yeah- there is one aspect I- ts because I wanted to
2            concentrate on this private kindergartens, nur- nursery
3            schools in Poland, but I cannot find much information on
4            that, so I think I will m will maybe move to my- maybe bank
5            sector or airline sector, but it's still the matter of
6            looking for materials.
7   Scott:   Ah:.
```

Scott's *ah* signals that his assumption has been challenged, that his expectation has been changed. A little later he makes this explicit when he says 'I thought you were doing it on the private kindergarten'.

Some of Feng's *ah* responses seem to be used in a similar way. Extract 6.20 shows her responding to Scott's correction of her proposal title:

Extract 6.20: Feng 3

```
1    Scott:   But let's let's [stay with] the title,
2    Feng:                    [Aha,]
3    Scott:   [first of] all,
4    Feng:    [Okay]
5    Scott:   and [let's] let's cla[rify] that
6    Feng:        [Yeah]           [Okay]
7    Scott:   [complete]ly at the moment.
8    Feng:    [Uh huh]
9             (1.2)
10   Scott:   Corporate strategy across ↑cultures.
11   Feng:    Ah:=
12   Scott:   =Yeah?=
13   Feng:    =k(h)ay [hh]
14   Scott:           [So let's] let's (.) go for the ↑plu[ral there.]
```

Feng's *ah* (line 11) registers Scott's correction of the word *culture* in her original title to *cultures.* This is not simply new information but a correction of existing information.

A similar reorientation takes place in Extract 6.21 in response to Feng's question about what she should research:

Extract 6.21: Feng 13

```
1   Feng:   [So] (.) I don't need to see the entry: stratgy:. There is er
2           (.) I- (such- like) er I can u- er (inchurers? by/buy) the
3           (.) fraz- fr- franchise.
4   Scott:  Mhm=
5   Feng:   =Franchise or er (during winter) it's the: initial. And then
6           (extent of/extend to f-) er fran- franchise. Mm I don't you
7           say that,
8   Scott:  No.
9   Feng:   No:? [O]kay?
10  Scott:       [Y-] You may discuss those things, but they are not
11          central to what you're interested in.
12  Feng:   A[h:]::.
13  Scott:   [Yeah?]
14  Feng:   Y[eah.]
```

Here Feng asks if she needs to mention particular topics, and receives a straightforward negative response (line 8), which she then checks. Scott then provides a more nuanced explanation, to which Feng responds with a drawn-out *ah.* This seems to index a shift in her understanding, a *replacement* of the simple negative proposition with the idea that the topics are not central but may be discussed.

However, Feng's use of *ah* is not always so distinguishable from *oh*. In Extract 6.22, for example, there is no reason to analyse the first *ah* (line 3) as doing any more than registering Scott's statement as new information (despite his preface of 'as I said before'):

Extract 6.22: Feng 39

```
1   Scott:   as I said before, (.) one of my students did em (.8) walmart,
2            asda,
3   Feng:    Ah,
4   Scott:   and then he wanted to speak with employees,=
5   Feng:    =I have seen that d- dissertation [in] in- library.
6   Scott:                                     [Mm.]
7   Feng:    Yeah. Yeah.
8   Scott:   It was a good dissertation, but he lost access,
9   Feng:    Ah:.
10  Scott:   You will have control of this.
11  Feng:    Ah::::.
12  Scott:   Yeah?
13           (0.3)
14           All you need to do, is think about your sampling technique,
15  Feng:    Mm.
```

However, the second, longer, *ah* (line 9) does seem to follow a shift in Feng's understanding. First she expresses her recognition of the dissertation mentioned (lines 5 and 7), and then Scott expresses a positive assessment of it, only to contrast that with the negative 'he lost access' (line 8). Feng's *ah* response is thus matched to this contrast. Finally, Scott expresses a stronger, double, contrast: 'you' (not 'he'), 'will have control' (instead of losing access). Feng responds to this with an even longer *ah*.

Although not all *oh* and *ah* responses are followed by a PG/R tag, a number of them are. Heritage mentions two aspects of *oh* receipts that may be relevant. One is that they are used 'to respond to prior talk as significant and, by picking it out for such treatment, to mark it as information to be "foregrounded" from the surrounding talk' (1984b, p. 306). In the supervision meeting, this foregrounding may draw the supervisor's attention to the student's reception of the supervisor's prior turn in a way that a continuer or acknowledgement will not. In other words, the student may be highlighting as potentially problematic something that the supervisor may otherwise have assumed was straightforward. This contrasts with the potential of other response tokens to be used as part of a 'let it pass' strategy, where a hearer, 'when faced with problems in understanding the speaker's utterance ... lets the unknown or unclear action, word or utterance "pass" on the (common-sense) assumption that it will either become clear or redundant as talk progresses' (Firth, 1996, p. 243).

Secondly, although the student is claiming to have been informed, she is not elaborating on how she has been informed. As Heritage puts it, 'whereas "oh" may propose a change of state in response to an informing, it is entirely opaque as to the quality or character of the change of state proposedly undergone by its producer' (1984b, p. 325). He goes on to say that 'an informant/ "oh" recipient may withhold from further talk with a view to permitting/inviting the "oh" producer to elaborate what lay behind the production of the particle' (1984b, pp. 325–6). This does seem to be case in Extract 6.18, where Scott appears to wait for

Weilin to elaborate after her *oh*, but in the other examples this does not happen. The PG/R tag may be doing the same job in this setting.

Jefferson gives just such an example of an *oh* response being pursued:

Janet:	Guess why I'm calling.
Larry:	I: know cause I didn't do my math,
Janet:	Well- how would I know. I wasn't at the <u>school</u> today.
	(0.7)
Larry:	<u>Oh</u>:.
	(0.4)
Janet:	Ri:ght?
Larry:	<u>Ri</u>:ght.=
Janet:	= .hhh But I <u>am</u> calling about math.

(1981b, p. 24)

She comments that Larry's initial *oh* 'certainly looks adequate' as a response, and might therefore not warrant Janet's subsequent *right?*. But she argues that in this case, 'how would I know' 'points to something that the <u>recipient</u> ought to know, and is complaining/reminding in terms of recipient's responsibility for that knowledge'.

> When, subsequent to the 'reminder', recipient produces an information receipt, '<u>Oh</u>:', in contrast to, say, a 'recognition display' ('<u>Oh</u>, that's <u>ri</u>:ght'), prior speaker (a) provides an opportunity for recipient to supply the appropriate response (i.e., maintains silence), and when no recognition display occurs, (b) engages in prompting.

(1981b, pp. 24–5)

6.3 Knowledge displays

Jefferson's distinction between information receipts and recognition displays is relevant to Lee's use of *oh* receipts. These are mostly not free-standing and appear to be working to claim prior knowledge. Two examples can be seen in

Extract 6.23, which comes towards the end of a sequence in which Sam has been explaining his own logistics diagram, as a contrast to what Lee has done:

Extract 6.23: Lee 29, 30

```
1   Sam:     Or as you ↑see, (0.3) .h the forecasting (0.2) and
2            ↑scheduling, (1.8) are totally different.
3            (2.8) ((writing))
4   Lee:     Oh: m[m]
5   Sam:          [R]ight? .h Now I'm looking at ↑you:r ↓rationale. ↑I'm-
6            I am looking at this ((thump)) picture.
7   Lee:     [Mm]
8   Sam:     [And] arriving at this ((thump)) conclusion.
9   Lee:     °Mm.°
10  Sam:     .h Where is the rationale f- ((thump, thump)) for your (0.3)
11           .hh (0.9)
12  Lee:     Oh::. Okay I:
13  Sam:     Right? That's that's ↓what I'm looking for.
14  Lee:     Mhm.
```

In lines 4 and 12 Lee seems to orient to a need to do more than simply register Sam's point. By adding to his *oh* receipts, he is displaying a greater level of understanding. In both cases it is possible that he is beginning to develop a lengthier response but is cut off by Sam, who does not surrender the floor. However, Sam does seem to take Lee's response in line 12 as an indication of at least a partial understanding of the point he has been making, and specifically of the question in line 10. Instead of reiterating, expanding or rephrasing the question, he simply emphasises it in line 13.

Extract 6.24 contains two more examples of recognition displays. Here Sam is criticising Lee's plan for being too much like what could be found in a textbook,

like some other students' reports that Lee has been persuaded to return to the library:

Extract 6.24: Lee 65, 66

```
1   Sam:     But if I would take a textbook, (0.4) I would find similar
2            headings.
3   Lee:     Ah: yuh.=
4   Sam:     =°A' righ'?°
5            (0.9)
6            So there's nothing n- d- (°there   °)
7            When you look at your report there's nothing different from a
8            textbook.
9            (0.4)
10           .h Now some of the (0.4) reports that you: read, (0.2) and
11           that you pu- gave back today to the (.) library, are nothing
12           more than the textbook.
13           (0.5)
14           nhh=
15  Lee:     =Oh: yeah. I [know you] mean.
16  Sam:                  [°Yeah.°]
17  Sam:     °↑Yeah?°
```

In contrast to the free-standing *oh*, Lee's responses in lines 3 and 14 display 'recognition of familiar information' (Schiffrin, 1988, p. 91). Lee modifies the '*oh*-carried proposal that [he] was previously uninformed ... by additional turn components'. (Heritage, 1984b, p. 338). As Heritage explains, '*oh*-prefacing in the context of agreements is a practice that embodies the second speaker's claim to have a perspective and opinion that is epistemically independent of the first' (2002, p. 214).

This epistemically independent stance is made explicit in line 15, with the addition of 'I know you mean'. Another example of this use of *I know* can be seen in Extract 6.25, where Sam is instructing Lee to revise his diagram 'now, here':

Extract 6.25: Lee 75-6

```
1   Sam:    [.h] and I want you to be BACK, (0.5) with this,
2   Lee:    Mhm,
3   Sam:    with a nicer one,
4           (0.2)
5   Lee:    M[hm]
6   Sam:     [Eher]:: (.) tomorrow or Friday.
7           (0.2)
8   Lee:    Ah yeah.
9   Sam:    ↑Yeah? Because THIS is essential.
10          (0.6)
11  Lee:    Yah. (.) I kn- I know.
12  Sam:    °Right?°
13          (2.0
14  Lee:    So, so ↑now now I can now (we are) [er]
15  Sam:                                      [Now are y-] now you ↑make
16          it,
```

Lee's *I know* displays both epistemic independence and compliance with Sam's agenda. A similar tension can be seen in Weilin's *I know* in Extract 6.26:

Extract 6.26: Weilin 2.12, 13

```
1   Scott:   Well, what you could do similar to the discussion, the
2            literature review, right?
3            So the section of the proposal, that is the literature
4            review, is one thousand words. A[gain.]
5   Weilin:                                  [Yeah] I know.
6   Scott:   Right?
7   Weilin: Yeah.
```

A variation on this display of knowledge is seen in Extract 6.27:

Extract 6.27: Hasan 1.16

```
1  Saeed:  [Bra]cket the [date]
2  Hasan:            [Bracket]
3          (0.8)
4  Saeed:  The date in the bracket that's it.
5          (1.1)
6  Hasan:  °Understand yeah.°
7  Saeed:  Yeah?
```

Saeed's 'that's it' in line 4 appears to confirm that Hasan has understood and is implementing his instruction to put the date in brackets. Hasan's 'understand yeah' is more affiliative and compliant than *I know* would be. *I understand,* like *I see*, conveys that the speaker has just now been informed, rather than that they had prior knowledge. In the context of the supervision meeting, Hasan's response here arguably displays more sociocultural competence than *I know,* which could be heard as expressing resistance to advice. The use of *I know* by Lee and Weilin (both in the examples given and in other places) does seem to contribute to the impression of them as the students who are least confident in their use of English.

6.4 Conclusion

This survey of students' responses to supervisors' largely informing and advising turns adds to our understanding of these supervision meetings in general and of PG/R tags in particular. The use of silence and continuers may point to trouble in understanding and agreement, but it may sometimes just mark the passive recipiency that supports the supervisors' extended turns. This is also true of 'weak' acknowledgements, such as *mm,* falling-intoned *mhm,* and even *yeah*

when delivered with low volume and pitch. All these responses allow for the possibility that students are deferring initiating repair of trouble, and are 'letting it pass', and an orientation to this possibility may be a reason for the deployment of some PG/R tags. In other words, the supervisor is expressing doubt about the student's understanding or acceptance of the first turn (or sometimes of a longer stretch of talk), and is orienting to the possibility that the student is not able or willing to express their own uncertainty. At the same time, many of the examples point to the PG/R tags being used not to pursue an 'inadequate' response, but simply to mark a boundary in the supervisors' talk. This seems to be particularly the case after stronger acknowledgements such as *yeah, okay* and *right.*

In contrast, the news receipts *oh* and *ah* draw attention to the student's reception of the supervisor's previous turn by treating it as in some way unexpected. The student is thereby marking their epistemic status as having been upgraded by the supervisor. In these cases, the PG/R tag may display a questioning orientation to this change in the student's knowledge state: roughly, that the student's claim that they have just been informed may indicate that their understanding or acceptance may be limited and may need to be pursued.

Finally, students (less linguistically proficient ones) sometimes claim *prior* knowledge with responses such as '*oh yeah'* or '*I know',* thereby marking the first turn in the PG/R tag sequence as uninformative.

This chapter has therefore highlighted the central role of PG/R tag sequences in the progress of intersubjectivity between supervisors and students. In the next chapter I will move on to look at the third turn in the PG/R tag sequence, and at

what follows it. I will also discuss some differences in the uses of the tags *okay?*

and *right?*

Chapter 7 The PG/R tag and beyond

Having traced some of the preceding contexts for PG/R tags, in this chapter I will focus on the action of the PG/R tag itself. This inevitably entails examining the actions that follow, because it is in those actions that students and supervisors show how they understand what the PG/R tag is doing. The first part of this chapter will therefore focus on immediate responses to PG/R tags before moving on to examine subsequent turns. Finally, I will discuss the specific uses of *okay?* and *right?*.

7.1 Responses to the PG/R tag

When the PG/R tag does indeed function as a response elicitor (or response solicitation, or 'response prompt' (Bolden et al., 2012, p. 138), this is marked by a response from the student or by a gap that is attributable to the student. However, some PG/R tags are followed immediately by continuing supervisor talk, while others are followed by the student initiating the first pair part of a new sequence without prefacing this with a response (see below). In these two cases, the participants are not treating a response as due. It follows that we can't assume that silence after a PG/R tag is necessarily an accountable gap, especially in the absence of visual data.

One way of looking at students' post-PG/R tag responses is to compare them with their initial Turn 2 (pre-PG/R tag) responses. After the PG/R tag, the students can modify their initial response by showing more or less 'informedness', or they can recycle their earlier (lack of) response.

7.1.1 Student upgrades their previous response

The most frequent type of turn to follow a PG/R tag is when the student produces a response which can be understood as more 'adequate', in Jefferson's terms. This might involve the production of some kind of audible response after a previous gap, as in Extract 7.1 and Extract 7.2:

Extract 7.1: Aga 8

```
1   Scott:   =But even within tha' age, you would then (0.7) °er wou-°
2            tha' tha' age group would be: um (0.3) predetermined.
3            (0.5)
4            Right?=
5   Aga:     =°Mm°=
```

Extract 7.2: Weilin 1.20

```
1   Scott:   The research question .h is like a hypothesis,
2   Weilin:  Yeah.
3   Scott:   But it's a much more simple (.) idea,
4            (0.4)
5            Yeah?=
6   Weilin:  =Yeah.
```

Other 'upgraded' responses include producing a downtoned acknowledgement in place of an uptoned continuer, as in Extract 7.3, or a more explicit acknowledgement, as in Extract 7.4:

Extract 7.3: Weilin1.17

```
1   Scott:   =Yeah. .h your question for your research (0.8) will change.
2            Is much more specific. You must ask yourself (0.5) <What
3            exactly (.) do I wish (.) to (0.3) find out.
4   Weilin:  Mhm,
5   Scott:   Yeah?
6   Weilin:  Mm.
```

Extract 7.4: Riaz 2

```
1  Scott:  .h So, >I mean,< in terms of the first question, (0.5) .hh
2          (0.5) part of your proposal, (0.4) will be:, a literature
3          review, on the concept of motivation. Generally speaking.
4  Riaz:   Mhm.
5  Scott:  Yeah?
6  Riaz:   Right.
```

A third type of upgraded response is suggested by Jefferson:

> A coparticipant who wishes to be seen as having been informed by the Post-Response-Completion Response Solicitation can produce a second acknowledgment token which is observably not the same as; i.e. not a possible recycle of, the earlier acknowledgment token. Further, he can produce it so that it is equally observably the same as; i.e. is specifically locating, the immediately prior Response Solicitation.
>
> (1981a, p. 72)

This is illustrated in Extract 7.5, where Riaz produces a post-PG/R tag response (*Yeah.*) which is 'observably the same as' Scott's PG/R tag (*Yeah?*), and which does not recycle his first response (*Right.*):

Extract 7.5: Riaz 5

```
1  Scott:  And also, purposeful. Because then it it moves in the
2          direction of what you're particularly wanting to look at.
3          (0.6)
4  Riaz:   Right.
5  Scott:  Yeah?
6  Riaz:   Yeah.
```

Jefferson cites only two examples of a response solicitation eliciting a changed response, rather than a mere recycling of the first response. Following the response solicitation *Right?*, the initial responses (*Oh* and *Yeah*) are changed to *Right.* In both these cases, then, the response solicitation achieves 'recognizable Informed Uptake' (1981a, p. 73). However, in both cases, 'the participants can be

characterized in terms of a Superordinate/Subordinate relationship' (1981a, p. 73), specifically teacher/student. She admits that this may be 'a mere curio', an artefact of her corpus, but she does suggest that this may explain the apparent success of the response solicitation in these cases. It may simply be that the 'recipient is specifically invoking that relationship as the account of his behavior; i.e. is recognizably saying what he sees that his superordinate wishes him to say, and no more than that' (1981a, p. 73). The fact that this type of upgraded response is the most frequent in my data suggests that her finding may not be 'a mere curio'. Her explanation is a reminder of the 'conducive' nature of question tags (Cameron et al., 1989, p. 87), especially in an institutional setting such as this, and of the preference for acceptance of advice that Waring (2007b) refers to in her discussion of advice giving in graduate peer tutoring sessions. The danger for supervisors in taking the upgraded response at face value is that they may make unjustified assumptions about students' understanding or acceptance of what they have said.

7.1.2 Student recycles their earlier (lack of) response

Jefferson gives examples of the same token being used after the response solicitation as before, as in Extract 7.6:

Extract 7.6: (Jefferson, 1981a, 2007)

Caller:	It was a good thing, it was a very great thing. it w- in fact the greatest thing the world has ever known, at its time.
BC:	Mm hm?
Caller:	Right?
BC:	Mm hm

The repeated *mm hm* shows, says Jefferson, that

the prior speaker was trying to get his recipient to acknowledge that a point has been made, and failing. That is, the repeated response proposes that the initial response was perfectly adequate, that the utterance it responded to had been (and remains) inadequate to a different order of response.

<div align="right">(Jefferson, 2007, p. 449)</div>

Evidence of this can be seen in Extract 7.7, after Scott repeats a statement he made a few turns earlier, but which he wasn't able to pursue because of a separate question from Feng:

Extract 7.7: Feng 22-3

```
1   Scott:   First of all you must (.) establish (.) what the marketing
2            strategy ↑is.
3            (0.9)
4            Y[eah?]
5   Feng:     [Oh]::. Y[es. Yes.]
6   Scott:             [So that would be your] first thing.
    ((18 lines omitted: Feng asks about an earlier point.))
7   Scott:   First you must establish (.)
8            what the marketing strategy i[s.]
9   Feng:                                  [M]m::.
10  Scott:   Yeah?
11  Feng:    Mm.
```

Here Scott recycles his earlier point (line 1) in lines 7-8. Whereas her response to the first version was initially silence, followed by a news receipt *oh* and then a repeated acknowledgment *yes* (line 5), her response to the second version is an *mm* acknowledgment which overlaps with the end of Scott's turn (lines 8-9). This orients to the fact that Scott's turn is a recycling of already given information. Her recycled *mm* (line 11) after his *yeah?* would indeed, therefore, seem to propose that her initial response was 'perfectly adequate'.

A number of PG/R tags are both preceded and followed by silence, and in some of these cases the student seems similarly to be withholding a response after the PG/R tag. An example of this can be seen in Extract 7.8, which comes after Weilin has proposed changing the topic of her dissertation. Scott is here trying to persuade her to stick to her original plan:

Extract 7.8: Weilin 2.7

```
1   Scott:   .hhh °tha-° (0.2) your- your (.) your pro↑posal your initial
2            proposal last week sounded ↑good to me.
3            (0.6)
4            Yeah?
5            (0.5)
6            Because (0.2) <the rationale is already ↑there.>
7            .h=
8   Weilin:  [Yeah.]
9   Scott:   =[To-] to look a:t (0.4) aitch ar em, in the Sheraton Hotel,
10           in China.
11  Weilin: Yeah.
```

The continued lack of response after the PG/R tag appears to be treated as problematic by Scott, as he then adds an account for his previous statement, and this is then responded to with acknowledgements in lines 8 and 11.

Sometimes it seems that the lack of an upgraded response after a PG/R tag is a mark of the student's continuing orientation to the supervisor's talk as unfinished. In other words, the student continues to display passive recipiency. An example can be seen in Extract 7.9, where Aga's continuer responses continue after Scott's PG/R tag :

Extract 7.9: Aga 6

```
1  Scott:   There are different techniques of sampling, but the idea with
2           probability sampling is that you can draw some statistical
3           inferences from it.
4  Aga:     Mhm,
5  Scott:   And you can generalise from it.
6  Aga:     Mhm,
7  Scott:   Yeah?
8  Aga:     M[hm,]
9  Scott:    [For the] whole popula[tion.]
10 Aga:                            [↑Mhm] mhm?
11 Scott:   .h There are obviously: (.) philosophical issues (.) behind
12           (1.0) er: that.
13           (0.4)
14 Aga:     M[hm,]
15 Scott:    [But with] non-probability there is a: (0.8) theoretical or
16           conceptual or (0.4) y'know otherwise (0.6) em: (0.8) ts
17           rationale,=
18 Aga:     =Mhm,=
19 Scott:   =for the choice that you make.
20 Aga:     Mhm.
```

After the PG/R tag in line 7, Aga continues to respond with flat or upwardly-intoned *mhm*s in lines 8, 10, 14 and 18, and it is only in line 20 that her intonation falls slightly and shows completion. By resisting the PG/R tag's call to upgrade her response, Aga is proposing that Scott's explanation is not yet finished, and that he has not yet offered the new information that would warrant a fuller acknowledgement and/or a move to a new topic. As mentioned in chapter 6, by deploying continuers in a supervisor's extended turn, the student is able to elicit continuing talk from the supervisor.

Another way of looking at recycled responses is that they are orienting to PG/R tags as not so much pursuing a stronger response as highlighting a point and marking a boundary in an extended informing or advising sequence. An example of this can be seen in Extract 7.10, where Sam is explaining a model while writing. The extended silences are all filled with the sound of writing:

Extract 7.10: Lee 24

```
1    Sam:    .hh So. .h Then you got a thir:d (1.7) logis- that's also
2            third party lo[gis]↑tics,
3    Lee:                  [°Mm, °]
4            (0.3)
5    Sam:     .hh that (1.5) optimises (1.3) trans↑port,
6    Lee:    °Mm,°
7            (0.7)
8    Sam:    across (1.4) all processes.
9            (1.6)
10   Lee:    °Mmyah.°
11   Sam:    Right?
12   Lee:    [°Myah,°]
13   Sam:    [.hh] So (.) it doesn't do it for ↑one step,
14           (0.2)
15   Lee:    [°Mm°]
16   Sam:    [it does] it for all these steps.
```

Lee's responses are all quiet and have flat intonation, though his response in line 10 has a slightly falling tone, recognising the point of syntactic, intonational and pragmatic completion reached at the end of line 8, in contrast to lines 1 and 5. His response after Sam's *right?* is another quiet *myah* (line 12), but in this case it is hard to see the PG/R tag as pursuing a stronger response because Lee's recycled response is overlapped by Sam's inbreath (line 13) as he continues with

his turn. On the surface this looks very similar to the PG/R tag sequence in Extract 7.9, but there the supervisor, Scott, has taken less control over the turn-taking. He is responding to Aga's question about sampling some turns earlier, and she continues to question him some turns later. His PG/R tag can therefore be seen as offering her the opportunity to take the floor, which she declines. However, in Extract 7.10, Sam's PG/R tag clearly does not invite Lee to do more than acknowledge the point he has just made.

7.1.3 Student downgrades their previous response

Only about ten per cent of the PG/R tags are followed by a downgraded response, in other words a response that is 'weaker' than the one before the PG/R tag. In most of these cases, the PG/R tag marks a transition in the supervisor's talk or in the interaction, as in Extract 7.11, which includes the end of Scott's comments about probability and non-probability sampling:

Extract 7.11: Aga 10

```
1   Scott:  For others, (0.7) for a qualitative .hh er orientated stu↑dy,
2   Eva:    Mhm
3   Scott:  ↓that is: the only way to go,
4   Eva:    Mhm=
5   Scott:  =because you're looking for deep meaning,
6           .hh ALL DEPENDS on (.) [what you're] trying to achieve.
7   Aga:                          [Mhm.]
8           (0.2)
9   Aga:    Mh[m.]
10  Scott:    [°Y]eah?°
11          (1.5)
12          And er (0.2) ↑did you say you were going to do a case study.
```

Aga does not treat Scott's quiet *yeah?* as requiring any addition to (or repeat of) the acknowledgment she has already given. Nor does Scott, who proceeds to move on to a new topic after a 1.5 second silence.

7.2 What happens after the PG/R tag (and its response)

I will now move on to describe the range of actions that follow PG/R tags. One way of classifying these is in terms of whether the PG/R tag marks a point of transition in the interaction, after which the student may take a turn, or whether the supervisor holds the floor. I will organise this section by starting with examples where the supervisor retains the floor after the PG/R tag.

7.2.1 Supervisor holds the floor

After most of the PG/R tags the supervisor holds the floor. In most of these cases, the PG/R tag is followed immediately by a response or by a gap, but there are a number of cases where the supervisor does not wait for a response before continuing.

7.2.1.1 *Supervisor continues without waiting for a response*

A substantial number of the PG/R tags in my data are not followed by any response by the student. Instead, the supervisor continues without waiting for a response. These PG/R tags are therefore similar to the invariant question tags used by teachers and lecturers in situations where a group is being addressed without members of the group being expected to respond. The PG/R tag marks the preceding talk as being important in some way, but it does not orient to any difficulty of understanding or agreement.

After the PG/R tag, the supervisor either elaborates on the previous point or moves on to a new topic or action.

An example of supervisor elaboration can be seen in Extract 7.12:

Extract 7.12: Lee 30

```
1   Sam:    .h Where is the rationale f- ((thump, thump)) for your: (0.3)
2           .hh
3           (0.9)
4   Lee:    Oh::. Okay I:
5   Sam:    Right? That's that's ↓what I'm looking for.
```

Sam's *right?* follows Lee's delayed recognition of the point Sam has been making, a recognition marked by his lengthened *oh* and his *okay* acknowledgement. As discussed in chapter 6, the use of a PG/R tag after *oh* may display doubt about the extent of the student's understanding. The elaboration serves to emphasise Sam's point.

In Extract 7.13, Sam's elaboration follows Lee's knowledge display:

Extract 7.13: Lee 86

```
1   Sam:    [But the] big thing is what you have to do with it. That's
2           the step. The big step is, .h where the issues, are to be
3           found in this model.
4   Lee:    Oh yeah. The [the mai]::n [issues.]
5   Sam:                 [Yeah?] The  [MAIN] issues.
6           And [what] do they concern.
```

Here, the PG/R tag follows Lee's recognitional *oh yeah* and overlaps with Lee's elaboration of Sam's 'the issues' to 'the main issues'. This knowledge display is affiliatively echoed and elaborated by Sam.

Another example of supervisor elaboration can be seen in Extract 7.14. Sam has instructed Lee to draw a diagram that they can discuss, but Lee has shown resistance to the idea of drawing the diagram immediately:

Extract 7.14: Lee 72-3

```
1   Sam:    You (1.1) make (0.3) your drawing,
2   Lee:    Yeah
3           (1.3)
4   Sam:    not a perfect drawing, huhuh.
5           (0.2)
6           a kind of drawing,
7           (0.5)
8           now. H-h-. Here.
9   Lee:    Ah: yeah, ([all] I am er)
10  Sam:              [Yeah?]
11          Okay? .hh You think about that,
```

Sam here speaks emphatically with frequent pauses marking his orientation to Lee's resistance to the task. He follows Lee's acknowledgment in line 9 with *yeah?*, which overlaps an attempt by Lee to start a turn. Sam does not allow him to continue, deploying another tag, *okay?*, and continuing to elaborate his instructions.

One more example of a PG/R tag prefacing a supervisor's elaboration of the previous turn can be seen in Extract 7.15:

```
1  Scott:   =Mhm. Yeah. This is- this is the key to to a successful um
2           (0.9) project.
3  Aga:     °Okay°
4  Scott:   Yeah? .h When you do all this hard work at the moment,
5  Aga:     °Mm°
6  Scott:   .hh looking at philosophical and methodological issues,
7  Aga:     [Mhm]
8  Scott:   [it] will bear fruit (.) later.
```

As with the previous examples of elaboration, the PG/R tag allows the supervisor to respond to the student's response token before continuing. In this way, it can be heard as affiliative.

As well as these examples of PG/R tags prefacing elaborations, there are also a number of examples of PG/R tags prefacing continuations with the topic or introductions of a new topic. Two such examples can be seen in Extract 7.16, which follows Scott's advice that Weilin should compare the HRM practices of the Sheraton hotel in China with a Western model of HRM:

Extract 7.16: Weilin 2.9-10

```
1   Weilin: A: Western model or just American model
2   Scott:  American model. Yeah?
3   Weilin: [Um]
4   Scott:  [If] you prefer. As you know there are a number of different
5           models available.
6   Weilin: Er:: [because I s-]
7   Scott:       [Harvard,]
8   Weilin: Yeah=
9   Scott:  =Michigan, New York, Rutgers,
10          (0.7)
11          Yeah?
```

```
12          .h And now (.) from, I th- I believe it's Rutgers University,
13          New York, they talk about high performance work systems.
14          (0.9)
15          Right?
16          .h So you can select any of those, (.) use this model, and
17          compare (.) the practices (.) to: (.) your case study. And
18          that's enough.
```

In this sequence, Scott twice overrides Weilin's attempts to speak, first after his turn-final *Yeah?* in line 2, and then in line 6. Whereas she treats the completion of his turn constructional unit (TCU) in lines 4-5 as an appropriate moment to speak, Scott has in fact projected a multi-unit turn (Schegloff, 1982, p. 75) with his reference to 'a number of different models', which he begins to list. Weilin responds to his overlapping mention of Harvard with an acknowledgement and then remains silent as he continues. She does not provide any audible response when he pauses at lines 10 and 14. Scott begins his talk after each gap with a PG/R tag, after which he continues after an inbreath.

Extract 7.17 includes two examples of *Okay?* being followed by supervisor talk. Here Scott is explaining a typology to Weilin, and his talk is marked with pauses as he writes:

Extract 7.17: Weilin 1.29-30

```
1   Weilin: Hy↑brid? °What's tha,°
2   Scott:  Er:m, an [I'll] >just finish,<=
3   Weilin:          [(  )]
4           =Okay.=
5   Scott:  =Erm <this is er> (1.7) pure, (0.4) imported, (0.4)
6           Okay?
7           0.3
8           .h [So] they have a typology this is a typology
```

```
9   Weilin:    [°Mm°]
10  Scott:  (0.5) of (.) aitch ar em,
11  Weilin: ↑Oh.
12  Scott:  in China.
13  Weilin: Mm.
14  Scott:  Okay?
15  Weilin: [Mm.]
16  Scott:  [.h] And what they say is,
17          (0.5)
18          we can characterize organizations,
19          .h by having a traditional Chinese approach,
```

Weilin does provide a minimal response to both *Okay?* tokens, but Scott does not wait for a response. In both cases he begins his subsequent talk in overlap with Weilin's acknowledgments.

7.2.1.2 *Supervisor solicits response but holds the floor*

These sequences differ from the previous group in that the supervisor gives the student the opportunity to respond to the PG/R tag. Therefore, although, the supervisor continues to hold the floor, he pauses to check the student's understanding or agreement before elaborating or continuing.

An example of supervisor elaboration can be seen in Extract 7.18:

1 Saeed: Your introduction needs to be modified. Here you say in this
2   chapter we will be looking into our aims and objectives
3   (hence) giving detailed information about the goal of
4   leadership no we won't. In this chapter we will provide a
5   critical analysis of the literature in this area.
6   (0.5)
7   <mark>Okay?</mark>
8 Hasan: Right=
9 Saeed: **=This chapter isn't about the objectives of the research.**

In Extract 7.19, Scott is attempting to persuade Weilin to limit what she attempts:

Extract 7.19: Weilin 2.5

1 Scott: You must think (0.7) about your↑<u>self</u>.
2   (0.6)
3   Don't (.) give yourself (.) too much <u>work</u> [to do].
4 (Weilin):   ([hh])
5   (0.4)
6 Scott: <mark>Yeah?</mark>
7 Weilin: (hh) (0.4) Yeah.
8 Scott: **Be <u>nice</u> to yourself.**

The PG/R tag here follows two persuasive turn-constructional units which meet with no audible response from Weilin (possibly a sigh after the second, line 4). Although she does respond positively to his PG/R tag, she does so after a pause, and Scott's produces a third version of his advice.

More often than elaborating, the supervisor continues with the type of action they were engaged in before or moves on to a related action. In Extract 7.20, for example, Scott continues with his explanation, prefacing it with *But then*:

```
1   Scott:   =But even within tha' age, you would then (0.7) °er wou-°
2            tha' tha' age group would be: um (0.3) predetermined.
3            (0.5)
4            Right?=
5   Aga:     =°Mm°=
6   Scott:   =.h But then, (.) once you have that predetermined
7            [popula]tion, then you sample with↑in that.
```

Such PG/R tags are not always followed by a response, particularly in cases where the supervisor is writing. An example of this can be seen in Extract 7.21, where Sam is explaining a diagram he is making of types of logistic service providers:

Extract 7.21: Lee 17-18

```
1    Sam:    So four types, yeah?
2            (2.1)
3            One is the (0.4) traditional (2.3) transportation.
4    Lee:    Mhm.
5    Sam:    Right?
6            (1.4)
7            A customer calls,
8            (1.0)
9            says I want goods to be transported from A to ↑B,
10   Lee:    Mhm.
```

Although Lee has the opportunity to respond after the PG/R tag, he does not take it and Sam does not pursue it.

Most PG/R tags, then, expect only a minimal response or no response at all. In that respect they are very similar to turn-medial tags, and when they are followed by elaboration of the previous turn, they function as 'pivots', 'working retrospectively-prospectively; i.e., marking that a prior component was point

laden, and prefacing a component which brings home the point' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 61). When the supervisor continues with their informing or advising sequence, the PG/R tag again underlines the point that has been made and marks a transition in the talk. However, although the supervisor holds the floor, the rising intonation of the PG/R tag orients to a norm of interactivity. By that I mean that the student is treated as if their understanding or agreement is consequential; that the supervisor requires it in order to proceed. This is not unlike the lecturer's use of these tags, in contrast to the reading aloud of a paper or speech.

7.2.2 Supervisor pursues response

In a few cases, the supervisor pursues a further response after the initial response to the PG/R tag. Unlike in the previous examples, where the student's understanding or agreement is treated as unproblematic, here the supervisor clearly orients to trouble. In Extract 7.22, for example, Scott is trying to explain the importance of devising a research question:

Extract 7.22: Weilin 1.20-3

```
1   Scott:   You must think of the question, the question's quite
2            difficult to think up but (0.3) it's a natural pa:rt (.) of
3            developing your work.
4   Weilin:  Yeah
5   Scott:   The research question .h is like a hypothesis,
6   Weilin:  Yeah.
7   Scott:   But it's a much more simple (.) idea,
8            (0.4)
9            Yeah?=
10  Weilin:  =Yeah.
11  Scott:   So you make (.) you make your work (0.6) um: (0.7) clear.
12           (0.9)
13           An[d e]verything comes from your research question.
```

```
14   Weilin:   [Uh]
15            (1.1)
16   Scott:   Yeah?
17   Weilin: Yeah=
18   Scott:   =You understand?
19   Weilin: Yeah.
20   Scott:   You sure?
21   Weilin: And what's the link er between the title and the research m?
```

Despite Weilin's positive, upgraded response to his second *yeah?*, Scott does not treat that as displaying sufficient understanding, probably because she has shown minimal uptake of his attempt to explain the importance of the research question. Her repeated use of the same acknowledgement token, *yeah*, in lines 4, 6 and 10 might, as suggested in chapter 6, display problems with understanding, as might her silences in lines 8, 12 and 15. Scott follows Weilin's response in line 17 by twice explicitly questioning her understanding (lines 18 and 20). This pursuit of a more 'adequate' response (in Jefferson's terms) is set in train by the PG/R tag, which here shows that the student's response is not a mere *pro forma*, as some of the previous examples might have suggested.

However, Scott's pursuit of a fuller response is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, a question such as *you understand?* lacks specificity. Its referent is not a word or phrase but a number of preceding turns. To answer 'No' would entail backtracking with further questions along the lines of 'What exactly don't you understand?'. Of course, this is even more true of the PG/R tag, which is presumably why Scott does not pursue response with a repeat of *yeah?*. Secondly, an admission of non-understanding is face-threatening and may be avoided by students (possibly following a 'let it pass' strategy). But having once claimed

understanding (as Weilin does in line 17 after *yeah?*), the student will surely not find the face threat of admitting non-understanding to be diminished. Instead it is likely to increase with every claim to understanding that they make. So Weilin's string of acknowledging *yeah*s in lines 4, 6, 10 and 17 make it harder for her not to continue with affirmative responses after lines 18 and 20. Weilin appears to get out of this trap by avoiding a response to the last question, *You sure?*, and instead initiating her own request for related information.

In a similar sequence in Extract 7.23, Scott and Aga both behave differently. Here Scott is embarking on an explanation of sampling, an explanation that has been requested by Aga:

Extract 7.23: Aga 3-5

```
1   Scott:  Well, (.) it's (.) e- e- you basically (1.6) y- you break it
2           down to probability and non-probability sampling.=
3   Aga:    =Mhm.=[Mm:]:.
4   Scott:       =[Right?]
5           (0.3)
6   Scott:  So y-you're comfortable with tha:t, yeah?
7   Aga:    Mhm:.=
8   Scott:  =Yeah?
9           (0.3)
10  Aga:    Uh huh, (.) well I know the difference.=°I mean°=
11  Scott:  =Yeah,
12          (1.5)
13          Tell me the difference °(in muh)°
```

Scott again pursues a more explicit expression of understanding with his question in line 6, which is designed with a preference for an affirmative response. Aga's equivocal response prompts Scott's follow-up *Yeah?*, which is

then followed by Aga's more explicit statement of *limited* understanding (line 10). She is thus downgrading her epistemic stance (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2012) from *being comfortable* with the distinction between probability and non-probability sampling, to *knowing the difference* between them. This is not only a more specific answer than a simple acknowledgement, but it also marks a more confident stance than Weilin's in Extract 7.22. Scott's next turn (line 13) is also more productive than his pursuit of Weilin's understanding. By asking Aga to explain the difference between the two types of sampling, he is able to get a clearer picture of her understanding on which he can then base his explanation.

7.2.3   Supervisor invites the student to speak or asks for permission to continue

In the examples in this group, the PG/R tag marks the end of a sequence and is used by the supervisor to invite the student to take a turn. Sometimes the student does so, but if they pass up the opportunity then the supervisor may begin a new action or the meeting may come to a close.

7.2.3.1   Student initiates new action

Sometimes the student takes the opportunity provided by the PG/R tag to initiate a new action. This may be prefaced by a response token but is not always.

In those cases where the student does respond with some sort of acknowledgement, it is nearly always upgraded, and the subsequent turn itself can represent an extended response or the initiation of a new action.

In Extract 7.24, Feng takes the opportunity to follow Scott's PG/R tag with a question:

```
1   Scott:   Because you're doing too much there.
2            (0.6)
3   Feng:    Oh:. Mm.
4   Scott:   Yeah?=
5   Feng:    ='kay.
6            .h But (.) the (.) and the the ↑culture part is: still keep=
```

Most of the other examples like this have *okay?* as the PG/R tag. In Extract 7.25,

Weilin responds and then requests advice:

Extract 7.25: Weilin 1.5-6

```
1   Scott:   .hh And the idea is: (0.7) that you will be looking at (1.0)
2            the differences (0.7) that may occur (0.7) in management
3            practices, styles, employee practices, [yeah?]
4   Weilin:                                          [Yeah] yeah.
5   Scott:   Okay?
6   Weilin:  Yeah. And er there er
7            >Do we need to compare with European sty(le)?<
```

Here Weilin treats Scott's *Okay?* as marking a transition and allowing her to

initiate a next action. The fact that it is preceded by the *yeah?-yeah* sequence in

lines 3-4 marks it more clearly as transitional and not simply in pursuit of a

stronger response.

A similar example can be seen in Extract 7.26:

```
1  Scott:    (.) .h Because this one (.) needs to be more ↑narrow, (.)
2            more specific.
3            (0.7)
4            To your interests (.) of (0.6) examining (0.5) the Sheraton
5            Ho↑tel, (0.2) ↓and managers and employees.
6            (1.6)
7            Okay?=
8  Weilin:  =Yeah. So. Do you think I need to interview the manager?
```

Here the *Okay?* follows clear signs that Scott has reached the end of an extended advice-giving turn: pauses, a fall in pitch, and then a longer pause of 1.6 seconds.

In Extract 7.27 Feng takes the opportunity offered by the *Okay?* to follow up her response with an immediate request for clarification (apparently):

Extract 7.27: Feng 54

```
1  Scott:   So I don't (know the) do much on that so I: I'm relying on
2           you to (0.4) find that out.
3  Feng:    Okay:.
4  Scott:   Okay?
5  Feng:    Yes. See umm (.) the dz- er Chi- it is it is (.) mmm um you
6           said th- the journal article or some THEory about the: (.) s-
```

This comes very near the end of their meeting, perhaps giving an urgency to Feng's request. Similarly, in Extract 7.28, Hasan uses Saeed's *Okay?* to launch a pre-question. Up until this point in the interaction, Saeed has been informing and instructing, while Hasan has simply been giving minimal responses:

```
1   Saeed:   .hhh er:: (2.9) also (.) never have a comma after the.
2            (1.1)
3            we can say that leadership is the attributes, it flows
4            automatically, you don't need the comma after the.
5            (0.4)
6            Okay?
7   Hasan:   °Mhm.° One thing I need [to ask] you just now,
```

Hasan here uses the opportunity provided by the PG/R tag to take the turn-taking initiative and to change the pattern of interaction from Saeed informing to Saeed responding to Hasan's questions.

It is interesting to contrast these successful speaker transitions with examples in Sam's meeting with Lee, where Lee's attempt to speak is overruled. In Extract 7.29, Sam is bemoaning the lack of a clear rationale in Lee's dissertation plan:

Extract 7.29: Lee 33-4

```
1   Sam:   =I'm (.) worried about the ↑reasons. Why you're doing it now.
2   Lee:   mh[mh] ((laugh))
3   Sam:      [O]↑kay?
4   Sam:   If you have sufficient ground for your reasons.
5   Lee:   Oh:: yah.
6   Sam:   Yeah?
7   Lee:   And [the]
8   Sam:       [So] ↑my: hh hh ((laugh))(0.3) .hh (0.9) how would my
9          chapter look like.
```

Lee begins a turn at line 7 but is interrupted by Sam, who is not yet ready to relinquish his role as explainer.

There are also examples of students responding directly to a PG/R tag with a request for advice or information, as in Extract 7.30:

Extract 7.30: Hasan 1.21

```
1   Saeed:   =OK, that's fine. But what I do recommend that you do is you
2            reword and restructure some of this stuff.
3   Hasan:   Right
4   Saeed:   Yeah?
5   Hasan:   But what (I was gonna think) that [do I] have to=
6   Saeed:                                     [Mm]
7   Hasan:   =take off the first objective what [constitutes]
8   Saeed:                                      [No no no] no no. No no
9            leave it leave it. Everything's fine.
```

Students may also follow a PG/R tag (particularly *Okay?*) by initiating repair of something the supervisor has just said. In Extract 7.31, Aga checks the spelling of an author's name:

Extract 7.31: Aga 24

```
1   Scott:   there are better books and one that I would recommend to you=
2   Aga:     =Mm
3   Scott:   is Miles and Huberman,
4            (1.3)
5   Aga:     Okay
6   Scott:   O[kay?]
7   Aga:      [Miles] like M-I-L-E-S?=
8   Scott:   =Yes.
```

Aga may well be making a note of the names in the 1.3 second silence after Scott's turn. Scott's *Okay?* may be registering her receipt of the information and checking that he can proceed.

In Extract 7.32, Weilin responds to Scott's PG/R tag with a partial repeat of Scott's prior turn:

Extract 7.32: Weilin 1.7

```
1   Scott:  Wha- what I would suggest that you do now,
2   Weilin: Uh huh,
3   Scott:  (.) is (.) refine the research question.
4           (0.6)
5           Okay?
6           (0.9)
7   Weilin: Re[fi:ne,]
8   Scott:     [Research] question.
9   Weilin: Mhm
10  Scott:  ((writing))(0.9) Refine. So what I mean by refine, (0.4) is
```

7.2.3.2   Minimal response/pause, then supervisor initiates new action

Many of the PG/R tags in section 7.2.3.1, particularly *okay?*, mark the completion of a supervisor's informing or advising sequence, and they are oriented to by both parties as transitional. After such transitional PG/R tags, the student may not initiate any action after giving a minimal response. In Scott's meetings, the student's response is sometimes followed by the supervisor initiating a new activity or topic, as in Extract 7.33:

Extract 7.33: Riaz 15

```
1   Scott:  .h So really (.) the best thing to do, would be to treat the
2           proposal as a: m:icrocosm.
3   Riaz:   Mhm.
4   Scott:  Of your actual research. So that all all you will then have
5           to do, when you come to do the research, is expa:nd (.) on
6           the on the on this literature review section.
7   Riaz:   Right.
```

```
8   Scott:   Okay?
9            (1.4)
10  Riaz:    °°Mm.°°
11           (2.0)
12  Scott:   So, have you found much research?
```

In this case it is clear that Scott's *Okay?* marks the end of a topic, as he waits for two seconds after Riaz's acknowledgement before re-starting with an unrelated question. In other cases, such as Extract 7.34, there is not such a clear gap, but there is still a shift in topic or activity:

Extract 7.34: Feng 10-11

```
1   Scott:   Because when you come to do your research, (1.3) er (.) you
2            don't want to do: too many ↑things. Yeah?=
3   Feng:    =Mmm.
4   Scott:   You give yourself a a much more difficult task.
5   Feng:    Okay.
6   Scott:   [Yeah?]
7   Feng:    [Yes.] Yes.
8   Scott:   So, (.) what what is your major interest.
```

The shift in activity that follows Scott's second *Yeah?* (line 6) suggests that it is signalling the end of his turn in a way that the first *Yeah?* (line 2) does not.

The PG/R tag *Okay?* seems to function in a similar way in Extract 7.35, even though Scott does not move on to a new topic:

Extract 7.35: Aga 9

```
1   Scott:   =.h But then, (.) once you have that predetermined
2            [popula]tion, then you sample with↑in that.
3   Aga:     [°Mm°]
4   Aga:     Yes. And with that, that would be probability.
5   Scott:   Yeh.
```

```
6   Aga:    Uh huh.
7           [(            )]
8   Scott:  [Then you have to] yeah.
9   Aga:    Okay.
10  Scott:  Okay?
11  Aga:    ↑Hm.
12  Scott:  You could also samp- ther- you know, with th- there are non-
13          probability sampling techniques,
```

In line 7, Aga says something (unclear) which Scott hears as obviating the need to complete the turn he has begun in overlap, and he responds to this with *yeah.* Aga's subsequent *Okay* (line 9) therefore functions as a sequence-closing third (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 154) which proposes sequence closure. Scott's *Okay?* then functions as first pair part, inviting Aga to talk. She passes up the opportunity, and Scott initiates another informing.

These cases of transitional PG/R tags being followed by a student response and then the initiation of a new sequence by the supervisor seem to be exclusive to Scott's meetings. This relates to the different dynamics or agendas of the meetings. Saeed and Sam are both commenting on their student's work, and it is this that drives the interactions, with the supervisors moving down their own agendas. Scott's meetings, on the other hand, are oriented to the students' agendas, in that he is responding to the questions and problems they present. This means that, when one topic has been discussed, the next agenda item may come from the student. If it does not, Scott will raise another topic, continuing in this way until a suitable time has elapsed. This accounts for his *so*-prefaced questions in Extract 7.33 and Extract 7.34.

7.2.3.3 Minimal response/pause, then supervisor responds minimally (leading to close)

The PG/R tag (particularly *Okay?*) here forms the first pair part of a pre-closing sequence, in which 'each party declines at least one opportunity to continue talking' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 214). Liddicoat (2007, p. 257) describes this as usually taking the form of 'a short turn such as *okay*, *alright* or *right* with falling intonation'. What is distinctive in the supervision meetings is the rising intonation. This shows the supervisor orienting to their control over the agenda, in that they are actively offering the floor to the student.

They often follow the student's receipt of a prior turn-final or post-response tag, as in Extract 7.36:

Extract 7.36: Feng 60, 61

```
1   Scott:  So it's, I would- don't be concerned.
2   Feng:   Uh huh=
3   Scott:  =The main thing is to: (.) focus on something that you want
4           to do.
5   Feng:   Ok(h)ay ((sigh)) yes. M[hm.]
6   Scott:                         [So] it's worth[while]
7   Feng:                                         [Uh/Ah]
8           Uh huh.
9   Scott:  looking (at/it) round and (.) making sure.
10  Feng:   Mm:.
11  Scott:  Yeah?
12  Feng:   Yes.
13  Scott:  O[kay?]
14  Feng:    [Kay] Thanks.
15  Scott:  Pleasure.
```

Here the meeting is brought to an agreed close, with Feng's final *Thanks* displaying her understanding of the pre-closing function of *Okay?* and initiating the terminal sequence. Note that this is very different from the examples of pursuit of response in section 7.2.2. Rather than pursuing a stronger response after Feng's *yes* in line 12, Scott's *okay?* invites Feng to start a new sequence or to move to a close.

In Extract 7.37, Scott has to work a little harder to bring the meeting to a close:

Extract 7.37: Weilin 2.42-4

```
1   Scott:   In your methodology you'll be talking about research
2            phi↑losophy,
3            (0.6)
4   Weilin: (°°mhm?°°)[°°(philosophy)°°]
5   Scott:              [Research] (.) ap↑proach, research strategy, (.)
6            and (.) methods and techniques.
7            (1.0)
8            Yeah?
9            (3.6)
10           Okay?=
11  Weilin: =°Yeah.°
12           (0.6)
13           °Yes.°
14  Scott:   Happy?
15  Weilin: Happy, hnh [hnh] ((laughs))
16  Scott:              [Good.] °Good.°
```

This comes at the end of an interaction which has been dogged by problems of mutual understanding. Weilin has admitted confusion and Scott has deferred the resolution of her difficulties to their next meeting. This is reflected in Weilin's very quiet response in line 4, the gaps before and after Scott's *Yeah?* in line 8, and

her quiet receipt of *Okay?* in line 11. Scott waits until after another quiet acknowledgement, and then pursues a fuller response with *Happy?* This functions in a similar way to *Okay?* but is more affiliative in this context, avoiding the face-threatening insistence of repeating *Okay?.* This time he receives a response that allows him to close the meeting with *Good,* an earlier deployment of which (after line 11 or 13) would also have been less affiliative.

A version of *Okay?* that is used by Saeed in closing both his meeting with Hasan is *Okay then?,* as in Extract 7.38:

Extract 7.38: Hasan 1.35-6

```
1   Saeed:   Another thing is can you bring the aims and objec- the first
2            chapter with you
3   Hasan:   [Yes]
4   Saeed:   [because] I might want to look at it, as I'm sitting with you
5            making the questions.
6   Hasan:   Right.
7   Saeed:   Okay then?
8   Hasan:   Okay.
9   Saeed:   No problem.
10  Hasan:   All right then I'll [see you next (   )]
11  Saeed:                       [Thanks very much] yeah?=
12  Hasan:   =Okay=
13  Saeed:   =Okay.
```

The addition of *then* seems to make the question more final, more global, relating to the whole interaction and not just the preceding sequence.

Pre-closing sequences do not always lead immediately to the close of the meeting. In Extract 7.39, Scott initiates a new sequence after the close of the first:

```
1  Scott:   .h Bring along the book next week, (0.4) and (1.4) tell me
2           which model that you may prefer to use,=
3  Weilin: =Mhm.
4  Scott:   Yeah?
5           (1.1)
6           Okay?
7  Weilin:  Yeah.
8           (0.7)
9  Scott:   Alternatively, (1.3) you can construct a model, out of the
10          issues that you find important.
```

Scott's turn in lines 9-10 opens up talk that was coming to a close after the two

PG/R tags and no indication that Weilin has more to say.

7.3 Different uses of *okay?* and *right?*

By far the most common invariant question tag in my dataset is *yeah?* (and

variants such as *yes?* and *yeh?*). Its ubiquity means that it is difficult to identify

any specialised meanings or functions for it, but *okay?* and *right?* do seem to be

used in particular sequential environments and to carry particular meanings.

7.3.1 *Okay?*

As mentioned in chapter 6, *okay*, when used as response token, can display an

affiliative stance and can also mark a change of activity. Gardner describes a

major function of *okay* as being 'the marking of junctures in the talk' and the

proposing of 'a move from one topic, activity or phase to another' (2001, p. 54).

These aspects are also associated with the supervisors' use of *okay?* as a tag. As

we have just seen in section 7.2.3, *okay?* is often used at activity or topic

boundaries. Scott's brings all his interactions to a close with the use of *okay?*,

except for his first meeting with Weilin, which is ended abruptly with a knock on

the door. Saeed uses *Okay then?* to propose the closure of both of his meetings with Hasan. In these cases, *okay?* functions as a pre-closing signal, as mentioned above, often following another PG/R tag sequence (as in Extract 7.36 and Extract 7.37). As Wong and Waring point out, such signals 'are rarely taught explicitly in second language instruction, and learners are often left to fend for themselves' (2010, p. 191). That some students may not always pick up these signals can be seen in Extract 7.37.

Okay? is also used to mark transition points in supervisors' own talk, as we have seen in some of the examples in 7.2.1, such as Extract 7.17. In addition, the occurrence of *okay?* as a second PG/R tag after *yeah?* (as in the pre-closing examples in section 7.2.3.3) marks it as having a more global scope than *yeah?* (a point also noted by Othman (2010) in her study of lectures).

There is also an affiliative element to the use of *okay?* as a PG/R tag, as it often invites the student to take the floor rather than to simply acknowledge receipt of the supervisor's turn. Alternatively, it can be heard as seeking the student's permission to proceed, as in Extract 7.33. It also seems to be used to mitigate interactional difficulty. An example can be seen above in Extract 7.14, where Sam uses *okay?* to soften his imposition of a task Lee is reluctant to do. In Extract 7.29, Sam's *okay?* follows his expression of what he is worried about and can be heard as mitigating this negative statement. In Extract 7.32, Scott's use of *okay?* follows his introduction of a suggestion ('refine the research question') that may present Weilin with difficulty.

An example which seems to combine elements of completion and affiliativeness can be seen in Extract 7.40, where Scott reviews his understanding of Weilin's previously planned topic:

Extract 7.40: Weilin 2.19

```
1   Scott:   Last week: we: discussed that you were doing (.) human
2            resource management in the hotel sector.
3   Weilin: Yeah.
4   Scott:   Case study.
5   Weilin: Yes questionn[aire]
6   Scott:              [Ques]tionnaire.
7   Weilin: Yeah. It's the same.
8   Scott:   Sheraton, [ho]tel.
9   Weilin:          [Ye-] yeah.
10  Scott:   Okay?
11  Weilin: Yeah.
```

The *okay?* comes at the end of Scott's listing of the components of Weilin's plan. It can also be heard as affiliative in that this review is designed to deal with a misunderstanding that has arisen.

It is perhaps illuminating to include Sam's use of 'Is that okay?' in Extract 7.41:

Extract 7.41: Lee 99

```
1   Sam:     Yes. Yeah. Tomorrow. Yeah? Is that okay?
2   Lee:     Tomorrow. (.) (Tomorrow) is okay=
3   Sam:     Elev- eleven o'clock.
```

Although not all examples of *okay?* can be expanded in this way, this example does illustrate the use of *okay?* to check (or enquire about) the acceptability of an action. It thus has a non-coercive cast.

7.3.2 Right?

Othman (2010, p. 674) describes a particular lecturer's use of tag-positioned

right? as marking 'a sense of shared general knowledge' and an 'assumption that

the students are familiar with what he says'. This seems applicable to some of the

examples in my data. In Extract 7.42, Scott begins his explanation of sampling

with a distinction that he assumes Aga is 'comfortable with':

Extract 7.42: Aga 3-4

```
1   Scott:   Well, (.) it's (.) e- e- you basically (1.6) y- you break it
2            down to probability and non-probability sampling.=
3   Aga:     =Mhm.=[Mm:]:.
4   Scott:        =[Right?]
5            (0.3)
6   Scott:   So y-you're comfortable with tha:t, yeah?
7   Aga:     Mhm:.=
```

Here Scott uses *right?* to establish what Aga knows before he moves on to explain

what might be new to her. In other words, *right?* follows 'given' information and

precedes 'new' information. Another clear example of this can be seen in Extract

7.43, where Scott is attempting to explain the concept of a theoretical model with

the help of an analogy:

```
1   Scott:   A house painter needs (.) paintbrushes,
2   Weilin:  Yeah
3   Scott:   And paint, and ladders,
4            (0.5)
5            [right?]
6   Weilin:  [Uh huh]
7   Scott:   That's what he needs to do to paint.
8            (0.6)
9            .h You need a conceptual framework,
10  Weilin:  Yeah.
11           [(    )]
12  Scott:   [A model.]
13           (0.9)
14           That's your tools.
```

Right? is here positioned after the first part of Scott's analogy (a painter's tools, which he is offering as given, shared knowledge), and before he introduces the abstract 'conceptual framework' and 'model'.

This checking of shared, given knowledge is associated with the use of *right?* as a transition marker in non-final stages of explanation and advice sequences. In other words, *right?* often projects a continuation in contrast to *okay?*'s movement to closure. Further examples of this can be seen in Extract 7.16 and Extract 7.21, where *right?* is preceded and followed by stages in an explanation.

This aspect of *right?* is also seen in Extract 7.44, where Saeed and Hasan are talking about boosting the word count of Hasan's dissertation. Saeed places *right?* at a point where his turn-constructional unit is clearly incomplete:

```
1   Saeed:  No no no no no no. (.) If you: take out information from
2           there,
3   Hasan:  Mm.
4   Saeed:  Right?
5   Hasan:  Mm.=
6   Saeed:  =If you actually take out information from there and you
7           reference it from the [books],
8   Hasan:                        [Yeah]
9   Saeed:  (0.4) you know, (.) .h then yes, it will boost it (.) by a a
10          a considerable number of ↑words.
```

Right? is here placed after an *if*-clause, which projects further talk.

However, the 'given' – *right?* – 'new' sequence is not invariant. In Extract 7.45, Sam starts with advice (new) which he supports with an account (given):

Extract 7.45: Lee 11

```
1   Sam:    (So/Sorry) y- y- d- you don't have to use ↑my model,
2   Lee:    [(  ) okay]
3   Sam:    [because that is] you're you're an academic thinker right?
```

Here Sam is orienting to Lee's role as 'an academic thinker', presumably referring to something they discussed in a previous meeting. Note that although the given (line 3) comes after the new (line 1), *right?* still follows the 'given' information. This example also shows the conducive/constraining nature of *right?*. If it indexes shared knowledge, then it is not only pointing to what the supervisor assumes that the student knows, but also what they ought to know. By thus communicating the supervisor's expectations, it makes it harder for the student to respond other than positively.

Finally, it is instructive to look at examples of sequences which contain both *right?* and *okay?*. In Extract 7.46, *right?* is followed by further explanation on the same topic, while *okay?* marks the close of that phase:

Extract 7.46: Aga 8-9

```
1   Scott:  =But even within tha' age, you would then (0.7) °er wou-°
2           tha' tha' age group would be: um (0.3) predetermined.
3           (0.5)
4           Right?=
5   Aga:    =°Mm°=
6   Scott:  =.h But then, (.) once you have that predetermined
7           [popula]tion, then you sample with↑in that.
8   Aga:    [°Mm°]
9   Aga:    Yes. And with that, that would be probability.
10  Scott:  Yeh.
11  Aga:    Uh huh.
12  Scott:  Then [you have to] (.) yeah.
13  Aga:         [(°I see°)]
14  Aga:    Okay.
15  Scott:  Okay?
16  Aga:    ↑Hm.
```

In Extract 7.47, we can see *okay?* being used affiliatively as well as marking completion:

Extract 7.47: Lee 5-8

```
1   Sam:    I'm ↑looking at (0.3)
2   Lee:    y- er v- th- er v-=
3   Sam:    =yeah=
4   Lee:    =y- y- er (0.6) the: focus problem [is lo]gistic.
5   Sam:                                       [yeah]
6   Sam:    Right.
7   Lee:    So (.) I [decided]
```

```
8    Sam:            [°Yeah (   )°] That's >°tha- okay. Okay?°<
9                .h What you're doing (0.7) is that you're (0.3) splitting a
10               topic ↑yeah?
11               (0.9)
12               Right?=
13   Lee:        =Er yeah.
14   Sam:        .hh I'm looking for your rea:sons, (0.5) why you split this
15               topic this way.
16               (1.6)
17   Lee:        Er[mm]
18   Sam:          [Owkay?]
19               (0.2)
20   Lee:        Yah.=
```

Here Sam cuts short a hesitant explanation from Lee in line 8. His rushed and quiet 'tha- okay. Okay?' seems designed to mitigate the face threat of his interruption (note that reduced volume seems to be an affiliative marker, or contextualisation cue, in Gumperz's (1983) terms). *Right?* then follows a reference to shared knowledge, which is in turn followed by his main point, which is designed as new information. *Okay?* marks an affiliative conclusion to his criticism.

In Extract 7.48, Scott is writing as he explains a model of HRM in China:

Extract 7.48: Weilin 1.28-30

```
1    Scott:  So he basically says,
2            (3.7) ((writing - continues until line 17))
3            ricebowl
4    Weilin: Rice[bowl]
5    Scott:      [is] one. Right?
6    Weilin: Mm,
7            (0.5)
```

```
8   Scott:   Hybrid (1.4) one.
9            (0.9)
10           Hybrid (1.7) two.
11  Weilin:  Hy↑brid? °What's tha,°
12  Scott:   Er:m, an [I'll] >just finish,<=
13  Weilin:           [(  )]
14           =Okay.=
15  Scott:   =Erm <this is er> (1.7) pure, (0.4) imported, (0.4)
16           Okay?
17           0.3
18           .h [So] they have a typology this is a typology
19  Weilin:     [°Mm°]
20  Scott:   (0.5) of (.) aitch ar em,
21  Weilin:  ↑Oh.
22  Scott:   in China.
23  Weilin:  Mm.
24  Scott:   Okay?
25  Weilin:  [Mm.]
```

Again, *right?* (line 5) is used while there is more of the explanation to come. Scott responds to Weilin's repair initiation in line 11 with 'I'll just finish', and he continues until he has finished writing down the different parts of the model. Both *okay?*s mark boundaries.

Finally, Extract 7.49 contains an interesting example of *okay?* being used affiliatively by Sam to counter Lee's misunderstanding of his criticism:

Extract 7.49: Lee 58-65

```
1   Sam:   Yes exactly. And and that is the point. You have to have your
2          your: main idea in it. .h And this ↑is .hh (0.7) this
3          contents is l:ike what you can find in a textbook (0.4) about
4          logistics.
5   Lee:   Er no no no no [no.]
6   Sam:                  [No] °I know° (h)I kn(h)ow
```

```
 7  Lee:    Er [yeah I I I know you mean.]
 8  Sam:       [h-h-huh 'kay]
 9          [☺Am I right?] Okay?=
10  Lee:    [But er]
11  Sam:    =[.h I (now)] know what you're doing okay?☺
12  Lee:     [But er]
13  Lee:    [°Yeah°]
14  Sam:    [.h] But it is very much the same. Yeah?
15  Lee:    Yeah, [but er]
16  Sam:          [°Okay?°]
17  Lee:    .h But er this, but actually this is=
18  Sam:    =°I know.° [( )]
19  Lee:              [I] I r- I I consider about my plan,
20  Sam:    °Uh°
21  Lee:    For (  ) a a whole days.
22  Sam:    Mhm.=
23  Lee:    =A whole day and er .hh and I ((0.4 page turning)) You you
24          can s- you also can see it, I I er based o:n thi- this
25          [er (      )]
26  Sam:    [Yes I know.]
27          You don't have to ☺defend yourself here okay?☺
28          .huh [huh I huh I know what you]=
29  Lee:         [And er I I (   )]
30  Sam:    =I know what you have done, yeah?
31  Lee:    Yeah.
32  Sam:    But if I would take a textbook, (0.4) I would find similar
33          headings.
34  Lee:    Ah: yuh.=
35  Sam:    =°A' righ'?°
36          (0.9)
37          So there's nothing n- d- (°there   °)
38          When you look at your report there's nothing different from a
39          textbook.
```

Sam's criticism that Lee's plan is 'like what you can find in a textbook' seems to

be taken by Lee as an accusation of copying, which he takes pains to rebut. Sam's

point seems rather to be that Lee has not developed his own rationale for his plan. Sam begins by using laughter (lines 6 and 8) to minimise the criticism, along with expressions of understanding ('I know'). As Lee persists, the conflict comes to a head with Sam's emphatic 'Yes I know' (line 26) and, smiling, 'You don't have to defend yourself here okay?' (line 27). Sam deploys *okay?* affiliatively four times, and the quiet *alright?* in line 35 is also conciliatory[3].

Finally, it is interesting to compare his 'Am I right?' in line 9 with 'Is that okay?' in Extract 7.41. While the latter points to *okay?* as enquiring about acceptability, the former links to the epistemic concerns of *right?*

These uses of *right?* and *okay?* are summarised in Table 7.1:

Table 7.1: Uses of *right?* and *okay?*

Right?	Okay?
Prospective, projecting more	Retrospective, transitional, closing
Epistemic – shared knowledge	Affiliative, affective, relational
Conducive, coercive	Invitational, requesting permission

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined both the immediate responses to PG/R tags and the subsequent trajectories of talk. It is clear that the students usually orient to PG/R tags as pursuing a (stronger) response, and that their responses are most often followed by continuing talk from the supervisor. At times, however, supervisors continue without waiting for a response, and sometimes the PG/R tag allows the

---

[3] See (Gardner, 2001) for a discussion of *alright* as a variant of *okay* rather than of *right*.

student to take the floor. This highlights the fact that PG/R tags may be used not only to emphasise the first turn in the sequence (cf. chapter 5) or to question the adequacy of the student's response (cf. chapter 6), but also to mark transitions in talk and, more affiliatively, to invite the student to speak. The chapter also looked more closely at particular uses of *okay?* and *right?*.

In the final chapter I will review the extent to which I have been able to address my research questions. I will also reflect on the research process and will discuss implications for supervisors and students.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The preceding three chapters have attempted to explicate the working of PG/R tag sequences by examining each turn in the sequence. In this final chapter I will summarise my findings with reference to the research questions I set out in chapter 3. I will also reflect on the research process and suggest some implications for supervisors and students.

8.1   Discussion of research questions

The research questions I established were as follows:

1. Why do supervisors use PG/R tags? What are their functions?

2. How is their use related to supervision? What is institutional about them? How is their use related to supervisors' and students' roles and responsibilities?

3. How does their use relate to understanding, or the progress of intersubjectivity? Is their use related to the identities of the students as international?

I will discuss each of these in turn.

8.1.1   Research question 1: What are the functions of PG/R tags?

While these uses overlap, PG/R tags seem to be doing one of more of the following: punctuating the supervisor's talk, checking the student's understanding or agreement, and working to maintain a positive relationship.

8.1.1.1   *Punctuating the supervisor's talk: marking importance and transitions*

PG/R tags are usually 'marking that there is a point to be taken' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 63). This relates to the fact that, as described in chapter 5, they usually follow a turn in which in the supervisor is informing, advising, persuading, instructing or

assessing – all actions which display a 'knowledgeable' epistemic stance (Heritage, 2012). One of the functions of PG/R tags is thus to underline or emphasize the action expressed in that turn. In doing so, they display the supervisor's stance towards the importance or relevance of that action.

At the same time, much of the supervisors' talk consists of *extended* informing and advising turns. These are punctuated by student continuers and other response tokens, usually at transition relevance places. In addition, they are frequently marked by PG/R tags, both in the course of and at the conclusion of the extended turn. This transition-marking function of PG/R tags is illustrated in Extract 8.1, where Scott is explaining how he thinks Riaz should organise the literature review section of his proposal:

Extract 8.1: Riaz 2-9

```
1   Scott:   .h So, >I mean,< in terms of the first question, (0.5) .hh
2            (0.5) part of your proposal, (0.4) will be:, a literature
3            review, on the concept of motivation. Generally speaking.
4   Riaz:    Mhm.
5   Scott:   Yeah?
6   Riaz:    Right.
7   Scott:   So, (1.2) ↑your proposal, is five thousand words long.
8            (0.2)
9            Ye[ah?]
10             [°°M]hm°°
11           (0.6)
12           I would estimate, that you would do one thousand words,
13           (0.3)
14           on motivation.
15           As a concept.
16           (0.6)
17   Riaz:   Mhm.
```

18	Scott:	Okay?
19		.h So <u>this</u> <u>sec</u>tion of your proposal, (2.2) <u>real</u>ly should-
20		(0.5) em (1.7) be:: (1.0) .h th- (0.6)
21		.h The <u>literature</u> re<u>view:</u> (0.5) <u>sec</u>tion, (0.5) should be:
22		(1.7) <<u>illus</u>trative>, (0.9) <u>o:f</u> (0.2) the <u>con</u>cept of
23		motivation.
24		In management and organisation theory.
25	Riaz:	Right.
26	Scott:	.h And <u>also</u>, <u>pur</u>poseful.
27		Because <u>then</u> it- it <u>moves</u> in the direction of what <u>you're</u>
28		par<u>ti</u>cularly wanting to look at.
29		(0.6)
30	Riaz:	Right.=
31	Scott:	=Yeah?
32	Riaz:	Yeah.
33	Scott:	.h So, (0.5) You may s- you may split the th- the- the
34		literature re- <u>view</u> into say <u>four</u> ↑<u>sec</u>tions.
35		(0.4)
36		Yeah?
37	Riaz:	Mm.
38		(0.5)
39	Scott:	<u>First</u> one, <u>ge</u>neral, <u>his</u>tory, de<u>ve</u>lopment,
40		(0.2)
41	Scott:	o[f mo]tivation theory,=
42	Riaz:	[Aha.]
43	Riaz:	=Right.
44		(0.5)
45	Scott:	.hh <u>Se</u>cond one, (0.7) <u>di</u>fferentiations be↑<u>tween</u> theory,
46		(0.3)
47		Y'know, [your <u>con</u>]tent and your [<u>pro</u>]cess theories,
48	Riaz:	[°°Right°°] [(°°Yeah°°)]
49	Scott:	.h ↑Third one, (0.3) may:be: (0.3) <u>Mo</u>dern (0.4) theories of
50		moti↑vation,=
51	Riaz:	=Mm[yuh]
52	Scott:	[Be]cause, (.) y'know, .h in recent years, (0.2) theorists
53		have (.) de<u>ve</u>loped (.) concepts such as em<u>po</u>werment,

```
54   Riaz:    Yeah.=
55   Scott:   =to encount for mo-
56   Riaz:    [Yeah]
57   Scott:   [>moti]vation<, .h and then the fourth section,
58            (1.3)
59            motivation, (.) and (.) intrinsic and extrinsic rewards,=
60   Riaz:    =°Right.°
61   Scott:   Yeah?
62   Riaz:    [Right.]
63   Scott:   [.h] So you can see that your your literature review, starts
64            to st- starts to funnel in, starts to focus,
65   Riaz:    Mhm.=
66   Scott:   =and move in your- the direction you want it to go in,
67            (0.2)
68            yeah?
69            (0.9)
70   Riaz:    [Right.]
71   Scott:   [.hh] And at the end of the- y'know, the end of the
72            literature review section, (0.5) you really should develop
73            (.) a ↑model,
74            (0.7)
75            and this model, is the one that you use,
76            (0.8)
77            in your research.
78            (0.9)
79   Riaz:    °Right.°
80   Scott:   Okay?
81            (1.4)
82  (Riaz:    .hh)
83   Scott:   ↓So,
84            (1.1)
85   Riaz:    The:: (.) I can take the models er (0.5) any: any model m:ade
86            by someone else or I have to make this model by myself,
```

Each of the PG/R tags marks a stage in this extended advising turn, and in this way Scott deploys them to chunk/punctuate his talk. In most cases, the PG/R tag follows a response (lines 4-5, 17-18, 30-1, 60-1 and 79-80), which suggests a congruence in both participants' orientation to the coherence of Scott's talk. On two occasions (lines 9 and 36) the PG/R tags follow silence. Conversely, there are two sections of the talk which are punctuated with response tokens but not with PG/R tags. The first (lines 19-28) is marked by hesitations and false starts indicative of difficulty on Scott's part in formulating his point. After an increment in line 24, Riaz responds with *right*. Scott then continues with two additional increments before marking completion of his turn after another *right* from Riaz.

The second of these sections is between lines 39 and 59, where Scott is enumerating the four sections of the literature review. This is punctuated by a number of acknowledgment tokens from Riaz, but Scott does not employ any PG/R tags until he has finished listing the contents of 'the fourth section' of the literature review. In fact, he holds the floor by employing a 'rush through' (Schegloff, 1982) in line 57, speeding up his delivery of the word 'motivation' and moving straight on to introduce 'the fourth section' before pausing at a place which is hearably not a complete turn-constructional unit. Riaz duly waits until its possible completion before receipting it with *right* in line 60.

Scott is thus using the PG/R tags to display his control of this stretch of talk and to divide it up into coherent chunks. It is possible that the absence of PG/R tags between lines 39 and 59 has to do with the presence of the sequential markers

first, *second*, *third* and *fourth*. In other words, the PG/R tags have a similar 'signposting' function, except that they are retrospective rather than prospective.

In Extract 8.1 Scott deploys PG/R tags frequently and thus underlines most of the points he is making. This contrasts with his use of PG/R tags in Extract 8.2, a section of a similar length with a different student, Aga. Scott has been explaining differences between different types of sampling. The beginning of this extract contains three sequences containing PG/R tags, but after line 21 there are no more until line 68:

Extract 8.2: Aga 11-15

```
1   Scott:   =So you may be you may be constrained to go ↑down the non-
2            probability ↑route.
3   Aga:     Mhm,
4   Scott:   Yeah?
5            (1.2)
6   Aga:     Mhm.
7   Scott:   These are difficult choices,
8   Aga:     Mhm
9   Scott:   Complicated erm (.) business, the business of (0.8)
10           [social scientific analysis].
11  Aga:     [Mm. Yes, and how] how (.) big thing how to do things hh=
12  Scott:   =Mhm. Yeah. This is- this is the key to to a successful um
13           (0.9) project.
14  Aga:     °Okay°
15  Scott:   Yeah? .h When you do all this hard work at the moment,
16  Aga:     °Mm°
17  Scott:   .hh looking at philosophical and methodological issues,
18  Aga:     [Mhm]
19  Scott:   [it] will bear fruit (.) later.
20  Aga:     M[hm.]
21  Scott:   [Yeah?]
```

22	**Aga:**	**Well I hope so [hh]**
23	Scott:	[And] don't worry about (.) quite often these
24		types of de- debates are unre↑solvable
25	Aga:	Mhm
26	Scott:	Because we're talking about the nature of re<u>a</u>lity,
27	Aga:	Mhm
28		(1.2)
29	Scott:	So- you know, when we get into those type of Areas, (.) it
30		becomes a <u>con</u>test between different points of ↑view
31	Aga:	Mhm=
32	Scott:	=as we ↑know.
33		(1.0)
34		Science, (.) <u>so</u>cial science=
35	Aga:	=Mhm=
36	Scott:	=You know th- the whole debate is whether social science
37		should follow the natural sciences,
38	Aga:	Mhm=
39	Scott:	=and the techniques a:nd approaches, or whether it should
40		adopt different approaches because we're dealing with human
41		beings,
42	Aga:	Mhm
43	Scott:	Who aren't always ↑rational.
44	**Aga:**	**Oh no:**
45	Scott:	H-h-h= ((laughs))
46	**Aga:**	**Irrational?=**
47	Scott:	=Y(h)es=
48	**Aga:**	**=(Most of the time)**
49	Scott:	You could argue that that our very ↑nature (.) is
50		irrationality.
51	Aga:	Mhm
52	Scott:	Yeh. So,
53	Aga:	Mhm=
54	Scott:	=That would push us down that (kind of)
55	Aga:	Mhm
56	Scott:	You know th- they <u>are</u> complicated debates, don't worry about
57		re[<u>sol</u>]ving them=

```
58  Aga:      [Mm]
59  Scott:  =you just really need to demonstrate,
60  Aga:    Mhm
61  Scott:  an a↑wareness and an under[stan]ding that your (0.6)=
62  Aga:                              [Mm]
63  Scott:  =tsk .hh em (.) your er (0.5) topic requires a certain
64          [a↑pproach].
65  Aga:    [Mm] Mhm=
66  Scott:  =You kno- it's you- the strength of your justification,
67  Aga:    Yeah. Just like [(what I)] what I'm doing, [(okay).]
68  Scott:                  [°Okay?°]                 [Yeah.]
69  Aga:    [Mm]
70  Scott:  [Okay?]
71  Aga:    Right. So I'll (.) definitely (0.8) need to you know to find
72          out (.) about that (    )
```

The content of Scott's explanations here is not noticeably linguistically or conceptually simpler than in Extract 8.1, but the absence of PG/R tags in the second section can be explained in terms both of how Aga presents herself and how she responds to Scott's talk, and of the nature of that talk. In the preceding part of the interaction Aga has displayed independence and competence (both linguistic and academic) in the questions she has asked and the comments she has made. This is evident here in several of her responses, which are not always minimal continuers and acknowledgements. In line 11 she anticipates the conclusion of Scott's unfinished turn (after a pause of 0.8 seconds), overlaps his completion and continues her turn, which is treated as unproblematic by Scott. She displays linguistic and cultural competence in her downplayed response (in line 22) to his idiomatic 'it will bear fruit' (line 19); in the way she 'upgrades' his comment about human rationality (lines 44-8); and in her expanded response to his comment in line 66. Scott orients to her competence and independence

explicitly with inclusive markers such as *you know* (lines 29, 36, 56, 66), *as we know* (line 32), and *we* (lines 26, 29, 40).

With regards to Scott's talk, the three PG/R tags at the start all follow first turns that focus on the successful completion of Aga's research project. But between lines 23 and 66 he talks more digressively about ontology and human nature, explicitly playing down the possibility and importance of resolving these issues (note his 'don't worry' in lines 23 and 56). His quiet, mitigated, *Okay?* in line 68 marks a return to more specific advice-giving (starting in line 59).

Scott therefore displays a less 'supervisory' orientation in this section. He does not emphasise his points with PG/R tags, but instead he orients to Aga as more independent, less subordinate, less a student to be instructed, more a member of his 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). More specifically, he does not treat his comments as either difficult or important enough to need underlining, and he does not display any doubt about Aga's ability to grasp them.

All this points to the use of PG/R tags as a pedagogic device to underline points the supervisor regards as important and, as a consequence, to segment extended informing and advising turns into manageable chunks. In addition, PG/R tags are also used to mark more global transition points. This seems to be particularly the case with *okay?*, as discussed in chapter 7. In both these extracts, Scott uses *okay?* to bring the section to a close. In Extract 8.1, the *okay?* in line 80 is followed by a substantial gap, a low-pitched stand-alone *so* and another gap, before Riaz then takes the opportunity to initiate another question. In Extract 8.2, Scott's *okay?* in line 70 is treated by Aga as an invitation to take the floor,

which she does with a reference to their earlier discussion and a statement of intention, which implies that she has no 'other business' on her agenda.

Finally, it is worth noting that Scott does not always wait for a response after the PG/R tag. In Extract 8.1, Scott continues without a pause after the PG/R tags in lines 18 and 61, and he does the same in Extract 8.2 after the *yeah?* in line 15. These examples, and similar ones described in chapter 7, support the notion that PG/R tags are not always pursuing a (more adequate) response. This parallels other researchers' descriptions of lecturers' use of *okay?* and *right?* as 'progression checks' (Schleef, 2005) or 'discourse fillers' (Perez-Llantada, 2005).

8.1.1.2 *Checking the student's understanding and agreement*

However, one of the functions of PG/R tags clearly *is* to prompt a stronger response from the student, and the frequency with which students 'upgrade' their responses after PG/R tags shows that they are orienting to this function. In Extract 8.1, Riaz upgrades his responses after 6 out of 8 PG/R tags, by providing a response where one was absent before (lines 10, 37 and 70), or by offering a more explicit or more clearly articulated acknowledgement (lines 6 and 62), or by matching the PG/R tag (line 32). In Extract 8.2, Aga's 'well I hope so' in line 22 is a good example of an unusually sophisticated upgraded response.

This 'prompting' function of PG/R tags can be particularly clearly seen when the supervisor's first turn is requesting information or confirmation, as in Extract 8.3, where Scott's 'B event statement' (Labov & Fanshel, 1977) makes a response relevant:

```
1   Scott:   =and I th- I take it you wanna do probability sampling.
2            (1.0)
3            Yeh?=
4   Aga:     =Probability.
```

After a one-second gap, Scott pursues a response with *Yeh?*, and immediately receives confirmation from Aga.

However, because the majority of PG/R tags follow informing or advising turns, the response that is usually being sought is not confirmation of a proposition, but an expression of understanding or agreement. The fact that the initial student response that they follow (if any) is almost always *minimal* suggests that even when PG/R tags do not appear to be explicitly pursuing a more adequate response, they index doubt about the student's understanding or agreement. This doubt is inextricably bound up with the pedagogical purposes of supervision and with the asymmetrical relationship between students and supervisors.

Extract 8.4 (previously discussed in chapter 7) illustrates this:

```
1   Scott:   In your lectures, have you: approached the ideas of (1.0) m
2            sampling,
3   Aga:     .h Yeah. Today lecture was all about sampling.
4            (0.2)
5   Scott:   [And]
6   Aga:     [But it] did sou:nd quite complicate. For ↑me at lest.
7   Scott:   Well, (.) it's (.) e- e- you basically (1.6) y- you break it
8            down to probability and non-probability sampling.=
9   Aga:     =Mhm.=[Mm:]:.
```

```
10   Scott:       =[Right?]
11            (0.3)
12   Scott:   So y-you're comfortable with tha:t, yeah?
13   Aga:     Mhm:.=
14   Scott:   =Yeah?
15            (0.3)
16   Aga:     Uh huh, well I know the difference.=°I mean°=
17   Scott:   =Yeah,
18            (1.5)
19            Tell me the difference, °(in muh)°
```

Scott's informing in lines 7-8 is occasioned by Aga's admission that she found the lecture on sampling complicated. She responds to Scott's informing with a minimal acknowledgement (line 9), which is immediately followed by Scott's *right?*, indexing his prior informing as shared knowledge. Unusually, he then expands this with a more specific question about Aga's understanding (line 12). This displays not only his doubt about the state of her understanding, but also that the PG/R tag on its own is too vague to advance an exploration of this. This chimes with Jefferson's argument that even in cases where the post-response tag elicits an 'upgraded' response, it is not very successful. This is because, while it marks 'the pointedness of a prior, completed utterance, and propos[es] that a recipient should now exhibit that he has taken the point of that prior utterance', it does not 'explicate the point of that prior utterance' (1981a, p. 75). In other words, the post-response tag does not give the recipient enough information on which to base a revised response. She goes on:

> The Response Solicitation informs a recipient that his response was/is inadequate, but provides no further materials from which the recipient might construct an 'improved' analysis. ... At best, it sets up a guessing-game or test ...
>
> (1981a, p. 75)

In this case, however, Scott's question in line 12 ('So y-you're <u>com</u>fortable with <u>tha:t</u>, yeah?') does give Aga a clue that he is seeking more than an acknowledgment (although she does not actually supply more than this until after another prompting *yeah?*). She is then able to respond more specifically ('well I know the difference'). Her quiet 'I mean' seems to promise more, and Scott's *yeah* (line 17, flat intonation) seems to be a continuer response to this. In other words, it is another prompting tag, but is a second position response to Aga's turn rather than a PG/R tag. However, it is followed by a 1.5 second gap, which seems to prompt Scott to make another more specific request: 'Tell me the difference', which is then followed by Aga beginning to explain her understanding of the two types of sampling.

In this extract, then, Scott works to establish a starting-point for the explanation that Aga has requested. In order to do this, he needs to find out what she knows, and he therefore has to expand his prompts in line 10 (a PG/R tag) and line 17 (a second position continuer), as these are not specific enough. This lack of specificity of PG/R tags and other invariant tags usually passes unnoticed in informing and advising sequences, but it remains the case that students may not know exactly what aspect of the supervisors' prior talk the tags are referring to, just as supervisors may not be able to glean much from students' minimal responses.

A second problem with the use of PG/R tags to pursue a more informative or compliant response is their 'conduciveness' in a situation of potential face threat. Jefferson throws doubt on the validity of upgraded responses after PG/R tags

when 'the participants can be characterized in terms of a Superordinate/Subordinate relationship' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 73). She suggests that it may be that the 'recipient is specifically invoking that relationship as the account of his behavior; i.e. is recognizably saying what he sees that his superordinate wishes him to say, and no more than that' (Jefferson, 1981a, p. 73). The specific relationship she cites is teacher-student, and an illustration of the problems associated with teachers attempting to check students' understanding is given by Cazden (1988), who cites a study (Meier, 1985) of 'writing conferences' between a basic writing teacher and individual adult students on a six-week summer programme. In the first half of the course, 'even though [the teacher] made well-intentioned checks on the students' understanding of his comments on their work, they "invariably responded with 'mm,' 'yeah,' or 'okay,' even when they didn't really understand what [the teacher] was talking about, something which seven of the ten students in the study 'admitted' [in conferences with Meier] to having done on at least several occasions."'

One of the 'well-intentioned checks' quoted in Meier's examples is *You see what I mean?*. Cazden reports Meier's comments that a negative answer indicating lack of understanding would risk loss of face and also implicitly challenge the clarity of the questioner.

> In addition, the status relationship between [the teacher] and the students as well as the way in which the conferences were structured – their brevity, [the teacher's] obvious instructional agenda – tended to favor simple, unelaborated assent to whatever [he] said, whether understood or not.
>
> (Meier, 1985, pp. 170–1) in (Cazden, 1988, pp. 64–5)

There are clear parallels between this situation and supervision, and a similar example from my data can be seen in Extract 8.5. This sequence follows a period of confusion in which Weilin has attempted to explain her intention of using 'four approaches' that she has found in a book which she can't name. Scott has expressed lack of understanding ('I don't understand what you mean by four approaches') and has listed some examples of HRM models, one of which, he suggests, she should pick and use as a 'conceptual framework'. Here he makes another attempt to explain what he means by a *model* by making an analogy with a painter's tools:

Extract 8.5: Weilin 2. 24-27

```
1   Scott:   A house painter needs (.) paintbrushes,
2   Weilin:  Yeah
3   Scott:   And paint, and ladders,
4            (0.5)
5            [Right?]
6   Weilin:  [Uh huh]
7   Scott:   That's what he needs to do to paint.
8            (0.6)
9            .h You need a conceptual framework,
10  Weilin:  Yeah.
11           [(   )]
12  Scott:   [A model.]
13           (0.9)
14           That's your tools.
15  Weilin:  Mhm.
16  Scott:   Research tool.
17           (0.6)
18           Yes?
19  Weilin:  [°Research tool°]
20  Scott:   [You under]stand?
```

```
21   Weilin: Yeah.

22   Scott:   Sure?

23   Weilin: Yeah yeah, research (tuhl)

24   Scott:   .hh Wha- what I would suggest we do for next week is (.) e:m:

25           (1.3) tsk I- I would certainly suggest that you keep what you

26           had last week.
```

His conclusion, 'That's your <u>tools</u>' (line 14), receives a minimal response, and he adds 'Re<u>search</u> tool'. After a pause he solicits acknowledgment with 'Yes?' and Weilin repeats 'Research tool' very quietly. Scott's response overlaps, but he does not treat her repetition as an acknowledgment, reinforcing his 'You understand?' with 'Sure?'. Finally, Weilin claims understanding with 'Yeah yeah' and another repetition of 'research tool', although her pronunciation of 'tool' suggests that she may just be repeating a word she hasn't recognised. Scott then changes topic. Their behaviour up to this point and the fact that they don't explore this topic any further suggest that Weilin has *not* understood the analogy that Scott has drawn but is not going to admit it. He, meanwhile, is not convinced that he has got his point across but decides that nothing further can be gained by pursuing it.

PG/R tags are sometimes directed at pursuing agreement rather than understanding. In Extract 8.6 Scott tries to persuade Feng to limit what she takes on:

```
1   Scott:   You must really focus o:n ↑one of those.
2            (0.5)
3   Scott:   Yeah?
4   Feng:    [phhhh] ((big sigh))
5   Scott:   [Well.] It [would be] better.
6   Feng:                 [Mm:,]
7            (0.2)
8   Scott:   Yeah?=
9   Feng:    =Mm::,
10  Scott:   Because when you come to do your research, (1.3) er (.) you
11           don't want to do: too many ↑things. Yeah?=
12  Feng:    =Mm:.
13  Scott:   You give yourself a a much more difficult task.
14  Feng:    Okay.
15  Scott:   [Yeah?]
16  Feng:    [Yes.] Yes.
```

Scott's run of *yeah?*s shows him working to persuade Feng after her show of reluctance in line 4. The combination of *yeah?*s and persuasive accounts achieves a shift in Feng's responses from an equivocal *mm,* to a clearly acknowledging *yes.* While the supervisor can never be sure whether a student has actually been convinced, this is perhaps a less serious issue than the question of whether mutual understanding has been achieved.

One final point could be made about the PG/R tags' 'pursuit of response', and that is that they sometimes seem to be triggered not so much by the *inadequacy* of the student's response as by its indication that the student has undergone a change in their state of knowledge. This is when the PG/R tag follows an *oh* or *ah*, or a repair initiation. An example of the former that was discussed in chapter

5 is shown below in Extract 8.8. An example of a PG/R tag following the student's

repair initiator is seen in Extract 8.7:

Extract 8.7: Weilin 2.39

```
1  Scott:   So, try to get it started. Try to think what you're going to
2           do there. Obviously the literature review is extremely
3           important, it's the biggest, single part, of it. So, it may
4           be more than a thousand. It may be two thousand.=
5  Weilin: =Two thousand.=
6  Scott:  =Yeah?
```

Here Weilin's repeat of 'two thousand' is highlighted as a question that may need

to be explored.

8.1.1.3   *Maintaining a positive relationship*

In chapter 3, I discussed some of the difficulties inherent in the supervisor-

student relationship, and mentioned other researchers' comments to the effect

that supervisors need 'a blend of pedagogical and personal relationship skills'

(Grant, 2003, p. 175) and that they are required to 'support students' agency while

controlling the quality and direction of their work' (Vehviläinen, 2009b, p. 189).

At the same time, students may wish to display both compliance and

competence. Admitting a lack of knowledge or understanding can therefore be

face-threatening, especially to less experienced and less confident students (a

point also made by Waring (2002b) in the context of a graduate seminar). An

example of this can be seen in Weilin's behaviour in Extract 8.5, above.

In this context, *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?* all play a part in addressing students' and

supervisors' face needs. As mentioned in chapter 7, *okay?* seems to be the least

coercive and most affiliative of these tags, often addressing the question of the acceptability of, for example, a suggestion or arrangement. At the same time, its use as a marker of transition means that it can invite students to take the floor, as at the end of both Extract 8.1 and Extract 8.2 above.

Yeah? can also be used as a prompt to invite the student to speak, as in Extract 8.8:

Extract 8.8: Weilin 1.18

```
1   Scott:   Seven or eight, (0.8) so maybe you wi- might wish to do s-
2            ↑interviews.
3            (0.7)
4   Weilin: °Oh:.°
5            (0.9)
6            i- (0.5)
7   Scott:   [°Yeah?°]
8   Weilin: [in]terv- er interview.
9   Scott:   °Right.°
```

The quiet, mitigated, production of *Yeah?*, and its positioning after Weilin begins to speak but hesitates in line 6, indicates that Scott is encouraging her to speak, not simply to respond affirmatively.

Right? tends to be used rather differently. Because it can index shared knowledge, it may be used to orient to students' competence and thus to avoid the impression of being patronising. The danger of this, of course, is that it is more conducive of an affirmative response and makes it more difficult for the student to admit difficulties with understanding.

PG/R tags are also deployed persuasively, as we saw in Extract 8.6. A similar example can be seen at the end of Scott's second meeting with Weilin, in Extract 8.9:

Extract 8.9: Weilin 2.33-7

```
1   Scott:   Everythin' else, out of the way.
2            (2.0)
3            Focus.
4            (0.8)
5            Yeah? (.) .h Don't worry about (0.5) everything else.
6            One of th- the major concerns that people have when they do::
7            research is (0.6) am I doing enough,
8   (Weilin:Mhh)
9   Scott:   Yeah?
10           (0.7)
11           Let me guarantee.
12           (0.5)
13           That's enough.
14  Weilin:  Uh huh huh= ((Laughs))
15  Scott:   =Yeah?
16  Weilin:  ☺Okay.☺
17  Scott:   That's (.) enough.
18           (1.2)
19           The more focused you are (.) the better.
20  Weilin:  Mm.
21  Scott:   Because you will have lots and lots to talk about.
22           (0.8)
23           Yeah?
24           (0.5)
25           Lots.
26           (0.9)
27           The more focused (0.5) your research is, (.) the better for
28           ↑you, (.) and the better (0.3) ↑mark (.) °you will get.°
```

```
29          (0.4)
30          °Yeah?°=
31 Weilin: =U[m]
32 Scott:    [The] better per↑formance.
```

Here, the PG/R tags do not seem to be countering resistance so much as bolstering Scott's reassurance. He does not stop after Weilin's clear acceptance in line 16.

8.1.2 Research question 2: How do PG/R tag sequences relate to supervision? What is institutional about them? How do they relate to supervisors' and students' roles and responsibilities?

The actions of both participants in PG/R tag sequences display an orientation to their identities as supervisor and student. As we saw in chapter 5, the most frequent action in the first turn in the sequence is informing. By thus displaying a knowledgeable epistemic stance, the supervisors orient to their roles as teachers. Other frequent actions in the first turn are advising, persuading and instructing, all actions which reflect supervisors' rights and responsibilities with regard to students. For their part, the students generally accept this orientation in the second turn, responding with acknowledgments and continuers of various kinds. This is often indicative of an orientation to the supervisor as engaged in an extended turn at talk, at times not dissimilar to a lecture. Minimal responses in this position can be heard as indicating the student's 'passive recipiency', and this can be still more marked when the student withholds an immediate response. The student's minimal second turn can therefore function to elicit further talk from the supervisor, and in this way instructional or advisory sequences are co-constructed by both parties.

It is in the third turn of the sequence, the PG/R tag itself, that this institutional asymmetry is most clearly seen. In pursuing a response after one has already been given or apparently withheld, the supervisor asserts their right to control the interaction in a way that is not open to the student. At the same time, this action underlines the importance of the supervisor's first turn, challenging the student's freedom to make their own judgment as to its significance. In addition, the tag's expression of doubt about the student's understanding or agreement is itself tied to the asymmetrical relationship, particularly when it follows the student's expression of understanding or agreement in the second turn. By deploying PG/R tags, supervisors assert their right to question students' claims in a way that would be unacceptably face-threatening if the situation was reversed. At the same time, the tags paradoxically address students' face needs by treating their understanding or agreement as consequential. The pursuit of a response orients to a norm of interactivity whereby the supervisor does not simply assume understanding or agreement, but rather solicits an explicit assurance of it. And the pursuit of a response after one has been given or withheld displays a recognition that (to some degree at least) it is the asymmetry, or power imbalance, itself that undermines the credibility of the students' claim to understand or agree.

8.1.3 Research question 3: How do PG/R tag sequences relate to understanding (or the progress of intersubjectivity) and to the students' status as international students?

In section 8.1.1.2 I described one of the key functions of PG/R tags as being to check students' understanding. Here I will focus on the second turn in the PG/R tag sequence.

In the second turn in the sequence, the student makes or passes up a claim to understanding. At the same time, their response (if they give one), may display more or less knowledgeability. At one extreme of this continuum, *yeah, I know* claims prior knowledge, whereas *oh* or *ah* marks the supervisor's informing or advising as unanticipated. Both of these responses display a lack of sophistication that may be associated with the student's limited linguistic proficiency: the first because *I know* (rather than *I see*) face-threateningly marks the supervisor's first turn as unnecessary, and the second because a freestanding *oh* marks the prior talk as informative without explaining what it is that makes it so. By contrast, responses such as *right* and *I see* may display a student's greater linguistic proficiency (or interactional competence), as may a response that explicitly expresses limited understanding (such as Aga's '*Well, I know the difference*' in Extract 7.23**).

8.2 Reflections on the research process
Over the period in which I have been involved in this project, my focus of interest has shifted from the general question of how academics communicate with international students to the more specific one of how they communicate in

supervision meetings, and how supervision meetings are 'talked into being' as institutions.

My decision to adopt CA as my research methodology suited my interest in using 'naturally occurring data' (Silverman, 2007). It provided a fascinating and steep learning curve, and its inductive approach meant that it took me some time before I settled on the particular area that became my focus of study. By that time, I had myself begun to supervise international masters students. This made me particularly conscious not only of the tensions involved in supervision, as discussed by (among others) Grant(2005b) and Anderson et al. (2006), but also of the moment-by-moment negotiation of understanding that goes on in supervision meetings. One limitation of my research that was particularly apparent was the absence of visual data, as this would have helped to clarify the status of tags after silence. Some of these silences may be related to one or both participants reading, writing or reflecting rather than waiting for a response, and knowing the direction of their gaze at time would allow more robust interpretation of the data (Stivers & Rossano, 2010).

8.3 Implications for practice

8.3.1 Implications for supervisors

PG/R tag sequences highlight a dilemma for supervisors, particularly when students are displaying passive recipiency. This orientation by students may be shortlived, in informing or advice-giving episodes, or it may prevail over longer periods of the supervision meeting. In the latter case, where the interaction is largely one-sided, the epistemic asymmetry between student and supervisor is particularly marked, and this may relate to the student's linguistic and cultural

background as much as their junior academic status. In other words, some students may limit their contributions to minimal response tokens because they lack fluency in English or because they regard it as culturally appropriate (cf. Cargill, 2000). Such minimal uptake may encourage supervisors to use PG/R tags in order to pursue a fuller response, or, at least, a more credible claim of understanding. The difficulty with this, as Jefferson (1981a) points out, is that the asymmetrical power relationship makes the PG/R tag conducive of an affirmative response, such that even an 'upgraded' response to the tag may represent no more than a display of compliance. The strength of such conduciveness will depend on many contextual and personal factors, but it is worth noting that among them may be the choice of tag itself (*right?* being particularly conducive because of its implication of shared knowledge), as well as exactly how it is delivered in terms of features such as intonation, timing, speed and volume.

What I am arguing, then, is that supervisors should be aware of the danger of inadvertently coercing students to claim understanding or agreement, or of taking such claims at face value. This is not to deny that PG/R tags can be productive. The fact that supervisors sometimes continue to elaborate their explanation or advice after the students' post-PG/R tag response displays their continuing uncertainty about the students' uptake. Such elaboration may benefit the student by allowing them to establish more clearly exactly what the supervisor is trying to say. In this way, the PG/R tag sequence can be seen as supporting a student's strategy of encouraging further elaboration. However, it might benefit supervisors to consider two additional or alternative ways of

encouraging students to speak and establishing what they know. The first is simply to allow students more time to respond or to initiate a new line of talk. The PG/R tag makes it difficult for the student to depart from the supervisor's agenda. This may particularly be the case with students who are used to showing 'an appropriate respect for the primary speakers' right to formulate and produce their talk undisturbed' (Clancy et al., 1996, p. 382). Allowing more time for students to respond parallels the concept of 'wait time' in school classrooms (Rowe, 1974).

The second strategy that supervisors might consider is to check students' understanding more overtly. Scott does this in Extract 7.23 when he asks Aga to 'tell me the difference' between two types of sampling. Similarly, many English language teachers are familiar with 'concept checking questions' as a way of avoiding the problems inherent in asking students whether they understand (see e.g. Scrivener, 2010).

8.3.2 Students and teachers of English for academic purposes

An awareness of the workings of PG/R tag sequences would also benefit students and, particularly, teachers of English for academic purposes (EAP). Some features that would be useful to teach or highlight would be:

- the need to vary response tokens when they are offered in a series in order to display interest and understanding (see section 6.2.2);
- the use of *right* as an acknowledgement token (see section 6.2.3);
- the differing connotations of *I know* and *I see* (see section 6.3);
- recognising *okay?* as a pre-closing signal (see section 7.3.1);

- the value of invariant question tags as devices to aid fluency (see section 4.3.2).

8.4 Conclusion

I began this project with an interest in how academics communicate with international students, and I recorded these supervision meetings in order to be able to observe and analyse this. As the project progressed, I realised that the process of supervision itself was also a worthwhile focus, and I became interested in how supervision meetings were 'talked into being' (Heritage, 1984a, p. 290). My decision to focus on the particular interactional practice of PG/R tags was driven by my perception that they were both pervasive and distinctive. The CA approach that I have taken gives grounds for believing that the prevalence of PG/R tags in these meetings is neither a product of mere chance nor is it explicable as an idiosyncratic tic of these three supervisors. Rather the use of PG/R tags is a systematic practice which, like the initiation-response-feedback (IRF) sequence in classrooms (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), is part of the fingerprint of supervision meetings.

That is not to say that they are unique to supervision meetings. As I mentioned in chapter 4, they can be found in transcripts of other types of institutional interaction, though only in the mouths of the institutional representative – the example I gave is of a neurologist in consultation with a patient, and Waring (2001) contains an example spoken by a professor in a graduate seminar. Nor am I claiming that all supervision meetings contain PG/R tags. I am fairly sure that my supervisor did not use any during our meetings (though I may not have been listening hard enough). But, as I have tried to show, their use indexes particular

conditions. Firstly, they may be used where a student fails to reply to a question, but they are mostly used following a supervisor's informing or advising turn, particularly when this is extended. Secondly, they follow a gap or a minimal response from the student. This means that when the student responds with a fuller turn, the PG/R tag is less likely to occur, except when the supervisor overlaps the start of that turn in order to press home their point. In other words, the PG/R tag points to an underlying asymmetry in the interaction: the supervisor is 'doing' being the informer or adviser (cf. Sacks, 1984), and the student is doing 'passive recipiency' (Jefferson, 1983). And in that context their use communicates some doubt about the student's understanding or agreement.

This doubt, or uncertainty, may have different origins. It may derive from the supervisor's perception of the difficulty or importance of the information or advice given, or from the supervisor's own packaging of that information or advice. In other words, the supervisor may be communicating their own difficulty in explaining a point. Alternatively, the PG/R tag may be indexing doubt about the student's academic or linguistic knowledge or competence. It may also, in the case of advice, be orienting to the student's possible resistance or reluctance. In response to this uncertainty, the PG/R tag is a useful device to underline the point (or sequence of points) that the supervisor is making.

However, this useful device can be a double-edged sword, as it can induce the student to give a more positive response than they might have given unprompted. This upgraded response may be claiming a degree of understanding or agreement which is not well founded. There is evidence of this in the data, just

as there is evidence that supervisors can be aware of it. Sometimes, of course, it may be in the interests of either or both parties not to pursue a problem of understanding or agreement but to 'let it pass'. Nevertheless, there is a danger that supervisors may unwittingly make it more difficult for students, especially those who feel less confident in their use of English or in their academic ability, to speak, to admit non-understanding or to express disagreement. There are times when it may be more productive to wait for the student to process what has been said than to pursue a response with a PG/R tag.

Of course, PG/R tags are not necessarily malign. They seem to have a role in addressing participants' face needs, and *okay?* (and *alright?*) may invite the student to initiate a turn when it is used as a pre-closing signal or change-of-activity token, particularly when it follows a PG/R tag sequence or gap. What sets these tokens apart from such signals in ordinary conversation is their rising intonation, which displays the supervisor's control of the agenda. Even here, though, we can detect uncertainty towards the student's intentions. Whereas *okay* in conversation can mark the speaker's readiness to end the conversation or to move to a new topic, the rising intonation of the supervisor's *okay?* marks it as an enquiry about the student's readiness. Like the shop assistant's 'anything else?' or the meeting chair's 'any other business?', the supervisor's *okay?* points to their right and responsibility to structure the agenda.

Discussing the possible application of an analysis of the use of continuers in research interviews, Richards argues that 'through examining their own talk, interviewers can develop a sense of what might be described as their interview

idiolect and they might even decide to change aspects of this' (2011, p. 108). The same might be said of supervisor talk, though there will be few supervisors who will want to listen to their own talk, let alone transcribe it. Nonetheless, an awareness of the existence and systematic nature of micro-interactional features such as PG/R tags may enable supervisors to develop a greater sensitivity to the interactional needs of their students. It may be possible not only to notice our own use of *yeah?*, *okay?* and *right?* but also when and why we use them, and what consequences follow.

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