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Identifying a French-specific laughter particle[1]

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ABSTRACT

Aspirated sounds placed in a stream of talk prior to the onset of laughter are oriented to by interactants as minimal-equivocal laugh particles. These particles are available to carry out various interactional tasks, signalling an opportunity for co-participants to co-ordinate their laughter, to join in an episode of shared laughter for example. They may also contribute to keying actions as non-serious.

The analysis of data from my corpus of French talk-in-interaction has revealed several instances of a voiceless palatal fricative following a word-final high front vowed [i]. This sound will be shown to occupy interactional slots generally associated with minimal-equivocal laughter particles. From evidence of its placement in sequences of turns keyed as non-serious, accompanying dispreferred actions, and in a terminal position in interactional sequences, the voiceless palatal fricative will be shown to be oriented to by French speakers as a minimal-equivocal laugh particle.

1 INTRODUCTION

Laughter is commonly associated with jokes or funny stories, which can be characterised as stretches of talk-in-interaction (Schegloff, 1991:152) which have been specifically designed to generate laughter. Actions, not only but including talk, which have been designed to generate co-participant laugher are termed 'laughables' (Glenn, 1989:133). The evident correlation between laughables and laughter does not account for many of the occurrences of laughter in interaction however, for research has repeatedly shown that most laughter occurs during the course of everyday, mundane conversation. Of 1,200 observed instances of naturally occurring laughter in Provine's (1996) corpus for example, only 20% was generated by a laughable of some sort.

The context of most of the laughter in Provine's corpus is characterised as 'mutual playfulness, in-group feeling and positive emotional tone' (Provine, 1996:41). When transcribing my own corpus of naturally occurring talk-in-

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interaction between French speakers, it was therefore not surprising that there were a large number of instances of laughter. Given my aim of examining the ways in which people establish and maintain their relationships through their talk, together with Provine's characterisation of interaction featuring laughter, I was drawn to examine these instances in greater depth.

In that it is sensitive to the complex interrelations between language and social actions and to the situated nature of both, the methodological approach of Conversation Analysis was found to provide the most appropriate framework for the analysis of my corpus of interactional data.

Conversation analysts work to uncover the ways in which participants organise their behaviour in interaction. Their approach to the analysis of data is sensitive to the fact that interactional behaviour is temporally situated and locally managed by interactants. The actions carried out by individuals through their behaviour in interaction are generally, but not always, realised through their talk. The underlying mechanisms which are revealed by analysis provide the means for individuals to construct their own actions, and assign meaning to the actions of others. People are free to act in any way they please, but what they do or refrain from doing will be viewed by others in the light of normative expectations based on the behavioural regularities or orderliness produced by such mechanisms. In other words, interactants are accountable for their actions.

The work of conversation analysts is underpinned by a number of fundamental premises[2] but the principle 'order at all points' (Sacks, 1992 vol 1:484) in particular has given rise to some interesting discoveries. Sacks argues that order is to be found organising even the most mundane minutiae of behaviour in interaction. No detail of interactional behaviour can therefore be overlooked or dismissed by the analyst who is working to uncover the mechanisms underlying interactional orderliness.

With this premise in mind, I wish to present my observations of a rather small particle which occurred recurrently throughout the corpus of 20 tapes recorded from interaction in French for my research. In this article I aim to show how, in applying the methodology of conversation analysis to the analysis of a number of extracts of data from the corpus, it is possible to reveal how French speakers orient to this little piece of interactional behaviour. By 'orient to' I refer to the ways in which people design their talk to show an understanding of, and hold each other accountable for a particular instance of behaviour in interaction.

The examination of the particle in question will be prefaced by the analysis of an extract of data featuring a dispreferred action.

Actions which threaten social solidarity in any way are generally performed as dispreferred actions (Heritage, 1984(a):269). Dispreferred actions are actions which are neither invited nor projected by the design of the action in the talk

[2] See for example Psthas (1995:3).

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that they follow or respond to. They are structurally marked in some way, usually by delays, hedges or features which can be described as 'weakly stated components' (Pomerantz, 1984:89). The turn shape which is characteristic of dispreferred actions contrasts with that of preferred actions, which are invited by the action they respond to.

The dispreferred talk in this extract of data incorporates a voiceless aspirate '*hhh*' which will be shown to be oriented to as a minimal-equivocal laugh particle. Such particles can be described as featuring 'some of the characteristics sounds of laughter', or as being 'not definitively laughter but could be' (Jefferson, 1979:89). They are open to reanalysis as laughter in the light of subsequent actions (Jefferson, 1979:89). That is to say, if sounds resembling laughter are followed by clear and unequivocal laugh notes, interactants have been found to orient to these preceding sounds as 'minimal-equivocal' laugh particles (Jefferson, 1979:89) pertaining to the onset of laughter. If laughter does not follow, such sounds are generally oriented to as audible breaths or similar sorts of activities.

The analysis of the dispreferred action featuring the minimal-equivocal laugh particle will be followed by the analysis of a number of data extracts which feature the particle which is the focus of this article, a voiceless palatal fricative '*jj*'.[3]

2 LAUGHTER AND LAUGH SOUNDS

The talk in data extract 1 was recorded in a restaurant. The group of diners were deliberating over their choice from the menu.

Data extract 1

Tape: MC L'Estrapade

1		(5.0)
2	Cr	j'suis tentée par le poisso:n?
3	MC	°voi↓là
		(.)
→ 4	MC	°c'est bon pour le ré↓g(hhh)ime (.) hmm ((whispered)) (2.0)

Cr's possible choice of the fish dish is evaluated by MC with '*voilà*' (line 3). Talk which evaluates some preceding action is analysed by conversation analysts as an assessment. Unlike many of those assessments which are examined by Pomerantz (1984), this particular assessment displays neither strong agreement nor strong disagreement with Cr's preceding turn. One sequential location or 'slot' (Sacks, 1992, 1:262) which commonly features assessments of some kind is situated at the end of interactional sequences (Goodwin, 1986:210), so it could be argued that MC's assessment displays her

[3] This symbol has been chosen in preference to the IPA symbol for the voiceless palatal fricative as the transcriptions presented in this study are not the 'detailed impressionistic' phonetic transcriptions which would be required for work on the phonetics of interaction (see for example, Local, 1996).

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orientation to a move towards concluding their ongoing deliberation. This assertion can be supported by evidence from the downward intonation to her assessment. A marked falling shift in pitch is often argued to project the boundary of interactional units such as turns or sequences although it should be noted that the correlation between unit boundaries and a downward movement in pitch might not be as clear cut as is commonly asserted (Local, 1996:190).

Assessments have been shown to be followed by a second assessment of the same referent (Pomerantz, 1984). An orientation to this interactional pattern is evident from the analysis of this data extract, for when no one else takes the floor following MC's first assessment, she carries on after a short pause, to produce a second assessment herself (line 4).

From MC's reference to diets in this second assessment, it could be inferred that diets are relevant to Cr's choice and, by extension, that Cr should watch her weight. MC's second assessment is thus potentially critical of Cr.

Looking at the way this turn is produced in greater detail, it is noticeable that the potentially contentious item '*régime*' is interrupted by an aspirated sound. In addition, once the turn reaches a possible completion point, MC produces a further aspirated particle which is immediately followed by a nasal consonant [m].

Laughter in interaction generally consists of individual laugh particles or notes which occur either singly or in a series. It has been found that the number of notes in a series produced by an individual laugher in a stretch of interaction is constant, regardless of the intensity of the laughter (Edmonson, 1987:31). So the potential for producing a laughing response which can vary from a minimal laugh to an intense bout of mirthful laughter (Moerman, 1988:73) cannot be accounted for by some aspect of the form of a series of laugh notes. Instead, this potential appears to result from differences in the constituent sounds of the laugh notes, from the loudness of the laughter and from the number of series of laugh notes occurring together (Edmonson, 1987:26–27). The regularities in the composition of series of laugh notes also enables interactants to co-ordinate their laughter (Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1987:155) in order to join in an episode of shared laughter. The marked decrescendo towards the end of a series of laugh notes (Provine and Yong, 1991:199–220) may also be significant to co-ordinating laughter.

Individual laugh notes are minimally composed of an initial consonant-type sound, an aspirate or a nasal consonant, [m] or [n] depending on the degree to which the mouth is opened. This initial consonant may be followed by a medial vowel-like sound, usually a variant of [e] or [a] sounds and a final aspirate. Interestingly, the vowel-like sound tends to be constant across a series of laugh notes, any variation affecting the initial or concluding notes of the series.

Laughing together is sufficiently important to interactants that they organise their behaviour in interaction in such a way as to facilitate the co-ordination

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of their laughter. So for example, minimal-equivocal laugh sounds are placed towards the completion of a turn in order to invite others to join in an episode of shared laughter (Jefferson, 1979). Should co-participants not take up the invitation proffered by the laugh sounds, Jefferson found that a laughing response may be pursued over a number of turns unless the sequential relevance of that laughing response is terminated by the occurrence of some alternative action (Jefferson, 1979:83).

So returning to data extract 1, it can be argued that the particle following MC's intra-utterance aspirated sound (line 4) is composed of two laugh-initial consonant sounds which together produce an unambiguous if minimal laugh note. The placement of this laugh note, in turn, leads to the analysis of the preceding aspirate as a minimal-equivocal laugh particle.

Not only does Cr refrain from responding to the minimal equivocal laugh particle and following laugh note by joining in an episode of shared laughter, but she does not terminate the relevance of laughter by producing talk generated by, or sequentially relevant to MC's turn.

A potentially critical assessment is the sort of action which can threaten social solidarity, and as such, is usually marked as a dispreferred action (Pomerantz, 1984:89). Yet although MC's second assessment is potentially critical of Cr, an examination of the shape of the turn featuring that second assessment reveals that her talk does not feature any of the usual markers of turns incorporating a dispreferred action.

Behaviours which are normally associated with some particular activity may be transformed into an alternative but equally meaningful activity (Goffman, 1974:44). The transformation from one interactional 'frame' (Goffman, 1974:46) of meaning to another is 'keyed' (Goffman, 1974:44) by signals co-occurring with the behaviour. Such signals cannot be assigned stable meanings (Gumperz, 1992:232). They are thus context-dependent and their use has the potential to vary between cultures or between speech communities.

Laughter is among those signals which can be used to key a non-serious[4] frame to a stretch of interaction. It would appear that the minimal-equivocal laugh sounds accompanying MC's contentious talk key a non-serious frame to her potentially critical assessment. So from the analysis of this extract it can be suggested that in keying a non-serious frame to dispreferred actions, laughter displays some form of mitigation or appeasement.

3 THE CASE OF THE VOICELESS PALATAL FRICATIVE

Data extract 2 is taken from a meal time conversation between four diners. C and Y have just arrived for a short stay on M and Mme H's smallholding. They have joined their hosts for an evening meal.

[4] The term 'non-serious', contrasting with 'serious', covers a wide range of playful or humorous activities (Schegloff, 1987:206).

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Data extract 2

Tape: YE May Break VI

	1	C	voilà mad↓ame
	2	Mme H	et ma↑dame ↓elle évite?
→	3	C	o pardon oui(jj) j'avais oublié peuchère

C produces his talk (line 1) as he refills Mme H's glass. He serves everyone with the exception of Y. Repair of his omission is initiated Mme H's inquiry (line 2). She manages to avoid making a potentially offensive criticism of C's action by inquiring about Y refraining from drinking, a possible account for the omission, rather than making any direct reference to his action.

The repair of some problematic stretch of talk may be initiated by the interactant who produced the problematic talk, but alternatively, repair may be initiated by some other co-participant. In their research into repair, Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977:375) have found that other-initiated repair is oriented to by interactants as a dispreferred action, in contrast with the preferred alternative, self-initiated repair. Their observation that instances of the dispreferred action, other-initiated repair, are often keyed as non-serious (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks, 1977:378) correlates with the assertion of a link between dispreferred actions and laughter.

From an analysis of the placement of '*oh*' tokens in interactional sequences in English, Heritage (1984b) has found '*oh*' to function as a 'change of state token'. In view of the placement of this token following a turn introducing a piece of information which was possibly unknown, it can be argued that C's turn-initial '*o*' (line 3) indicates a change in his knowledge. That is to say, by means of his '*o*' token, C displays to his co-participants, and therefore of course to the overhearing analyst, that he was unaware of his omission.

The high front vowel [i] of his subsequent agreement token is followed by a voiceless palatal fricative sound '*oui(jj)*'. This agreement token precedes an account of his error *'j'avais oublié'* which clearly mitigates the repairable omission. As a subsequent turn-construction unit, this account is likely to be upgrading an initial assessment. It can thus be argued that C's agreement token '*oui*' is an initial assessment which provides a relatively neutral assessment of the repairable omission.

This neutral assessment does not show any orientation to the potentially contentious nature of the omission, however, in that its dispreferred status is not marked in any way. An orientation to the dispreferred status of the talk is clearly displayed in the upgraded account of the omission which follows the '*oui*' token. In view of the organisation which has been shown to typify such sequences, it is probable that this account is an upgraded version which follows a more neutral display of the dispreferred status of the action. It can thus be suggested that the voiceless palatal fricative might serve to display a degree of appeasement in that it somehow mitigates the contentious action. This degree of mitigation is then available to be upgraded in the subsequent account.

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The next data extract is taken from the recording of interaction in the restaurant which was featured in the first extract of data.

Data extract 3

Tape: MC L'Estrapade

			(2.0)
	1	G	vous avez fait ↑votre choix:?
	2	L	|presque|=
	3	Cr	|e:: |
	4	L	= hehh
→	5	Cr	en partie(jj)
	6	G	↑e:n pa:r-tie::.
	7	Cr	qu'est-ce que vous pouvez nous proposer pour les enfa:nts?
	8	G	be:: a j:- tout-tout ↓sur la carte

This sequence is initiated by the waiter, G, who produces the first pair part of an adjacency pair. His question projects an agreement as the preferred second pair part response, which should be provided by the diners, yet neither L nor Cr, who take the floor simultaneously on completion of G's turn, provide the projected second pair part.

Although Sacks (1987:63) observes that a preference for agreement in second pair part answers results in the deferment of answers which incorporate a disagreement, L's dispreferred '*presque*' is contiguous with G's first pair part. His orientation to the dispreferred status of his turn is displayed by his choice of a somewhat mitigated term rather than an unmitigated alternative such as '*non*' for example. This mitigation is upgraded by the laughter particle he places on the completion of his talk.

Cr, on the other hand, produces a prolonged non-lexical vocalization 'e::', a sound which is typically found in a turn-initial position throughout my corpus of French interaction. This slot is commonly available for 'appositional beginnings' (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974:719), turn-initial sounds which serve to take the floor or to project a turn at talk prior to embarking on its construction. So, although she also does not incorporate any pause in the design of her dispreferred second pair part, her response (line 5) is nevertheless produced at some distance from the first pair part. Like L, her choice of descriptor '*en partie*' incorporates a degree of mitigation. Through the design of her turn, Cr thus also displays her orientation to the preferred response projected by G's first turn.

The high front vowel [i] at the completion point of Cr's turn construction unit is followed by a voiceless palatal fricative. G repeats the talk constituting Cr's turn (line 6) but his repeat does not feature the terminal voiceless palatal fricative.

It could be argued that this sound is a feature of Cr's idiolect but not part of G's. Yet if we examine other instances of the high front vowel [i] produced by the same speaker, (see for example data extract 4, line 6) the voiceless palatal fricative is not produced.

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This means that the voiceless palatal fricative cannot be accounted for as a feature of the production of the high front vowel [i] by a specific speaker in a particular environment.

Despite their apparent similarities, the turns produced by Cr and by G can be distinguished in terms of the actions that they perform, which can, in turn, be determined by examining their placement within the interactional sequence.

So far, in view of its placement following G's first pair part of a question/answer adjacency pair, Cr's turn has been argued to be a dispreferred second pair part response.

Repeated stretches of talk such as that constituting G's turn may serve to locate a problem with preceding talk (Jefferson, 1972:299). The interactants' orientation to a repeat initiating a repair would give rise to a subsequent turn which is sequentially relevant to the repair however, and in the data extract being considered this is clearly not the case.

Repeats are also used as formulations which 'furnish the gist' (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1986(1969):170) or summarise preceding talk. Formulations may also be implicated in repair sequences in that they provide a display of how a stretch of talk has been understood (Heritage and Watson, 1979:128). Heritage and Watson (1980:249) observe that formulations are often found in service encounters such as this, in sequences that consist of a formulation followed by a confirmation, disconfirmation or decision (Heritage and Watson, 1980:252).

So G's turn summarises the gist of L and Cr's preceding turns. Formulations consisting of repeats are not particularly effective, however, as a means of displaying understanding when compared to formulations which consist of a paraphrase of the talk being summarised. But in preserving the topical focus of L and Cr's previous turns G's formulation maintains the sequential relevance of the topic initiated by G's first turn. This is important because the relevance of this topic might have been terminated with L and Cr's dispreferred second pair parts which effectively concluded the question and answer sequence. His formulation enables G to pursue the topic over further turns. This assertion can be supported by looking at the talk which follows the formulation. In that the following turns do indeed pertain to the topic of the diners' choice from the menu, the participants themselves display an orientation to G's repeat as a formulation.

A comparison of L and Cr's dispreferred turns reveals that the voiceless palatal fricative occupies the same terminal slot within C's turn that is occupied by the laughter particle mitigating L's dispreferred turn (lines 2, 4). It can thus be concluded that the laughter particle and the voiceless palatal fricative are likely to be significant to the interactional task of the turns in which they are placed, both of which are dispreferred second pair parts, quite distinct from the task carried out by G's formulation.

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From the analyses presented so far it appears that, in common with the minimal-equivocal laugh particle analysed in data extract 1, the placement of the voiceless palatal fricative appears be designed to mitigate dispreferred actions. Further evidence to support this claim will be provided by the analysis of data extract 4. In this example, the voiceless palatal fricative placed in a dispreferred turn also generates laughter from a co-participant.

Data extract 4

Tape: MC L'Estrapade

1	G	↑E: c'est- c'est servi	|avec du|
2	Cr		|c'est |=
3	Cr	= servi avec	|quoi|=
3	(M)		|e::: |
4	G	= avec du riz	
5	(M)	ma-maman-	
6	Cr	avec du riz ça vous va le riz	
7	G	mais on peut leur faire des pommes sautées si elles veulent	
8	Cr	sinon quoi d'autre	
9	Ch	e: des pommes des pommes de terre ou du riz à la place. (.) =	
10	Ch	= (c'est)	|comme vous voulez |
11	A		|des pommes de te:rre.|
12	G	|voi:(là: |	
13	Ch	|Manon|	
14	Cr	|et toi Manon|	
15	M	|moi |=	
16	M	= du riz	
17	Cr	phhhh heh heh heh. ç(hh)a m'aurait étonnée. hheh heh heh =	
18	Cr	= ↑al↓ors on choisit c'est l'un:? (.) où l'autre.	
19	M	pommes de terre Maman	
→ 20	A	moi du riz(jj)	
21	Cr	°heh	
22	Ch	bon on lui mettra un petit riz à côté	
23	Cr	huhm	
24	G	= ↑do:nc (hh) un plat pour pour les deux?	
25	Ch	ouais	
26	G	|d'accord|	
27	Cr	|oui:. |=	
28	Cr	= ça suffira.	

Cr has been ordering M and A's main course. Although constraints of space mean that the argument cannot be developed here, the initial turns of this sequence can be accounted for in terms of G and Cr maintaining their 'participant roles' (Levinson, 1988:164) as service provider and customer speaking on behalf of the children respectively, both thereby displaying their orientation to this talk as pertaining to a service encounter.

The turn at talk which is of interest in this discussion (line 20) follows Ch's

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intervention (line 9). Prior to this intervention, G and Cr have been negotiating possible alternative side dishes to accompany the children's main course. In his intervention, Ch offers the two choices of accompanying dishes directly to the children (line 9). A chooses potatoes (line 11), but M eventually states her preference for the other option, rice (lines 15,16).

M's turn is followed by a series of laughter particles produced by Cr (line 17). The laugh-initial [p] which rarely occupies a laugh-initial position,[5] and the aspirate (hh) intruding into the initial part of her subsequent assessment, '*ça m'aurait étonné*', display the uncontrollable nature of her burst of laughter. This assessment is also followed by a number of laughter particles, before she carries on to reformulate the choice on offer to the children.

From their location immediately following M's turn, both Cr's turn initial laughter and the subsequent assessment can be seen to be generated by and responsive to the preceding talk. The laughter which is placed following her assessment frames that talk as non-serious. It also upgrades the strength of her laughing response to M's preceding turn.

Looking at Cr's reformulation of Ch's question, we can see that this turn construction unit is marked with a topic initiating particle, '↑*al*↓*ors*' (line 18), and it features no further laughter particles. She switches from the plural proform '*vous*' used by Ch to the singular '*on*' to address M and A, and uses a proform to refer to the two available choices. In contrast with her assessment, this is a serious request that the children come to a decision.

Given Cr's negative assessment of the childrens' choices, albeit keyed as non-serious, and her contrasting, unmarked thus serious reformulation, it can be inferred that the children's choice of different side dishes is inappropriate. In other words, the preferred action projected by the final turn-construction unit of Cr's turn is a joint choice between the two options. The switch to the proform to refer to the options may key a particularly serious frame to this talk, emphasising the fact that this is not the first time that the choice has been put to the children, with the inference that they should hurry up and come to a decision.

M provides a second pair part response immediately, as Cr's turn-construction unit reaches completion. She changes her choice to potatoes (line 19). A's turn (line 20) follows immediately on the completion of M's tagged vocative '*maman*', changing her choice from potatoes to rice. Although her response is not marked by any dispreferred marker such as hesitancy or laughter, it is nevertheless a dispreferred action in that, despite the repeated request suggesting the inappropriacy of different choices, A's modified choice does coincide with M's new choice of potatoes. As the turn reaches completion however, the final high front [i] of 'riz' is followed by a voiceless palatal fricative.

[5] [p] does not feature in descriptive accounts of laughter and this is the only example of [p] in a laugh-initial position in my corpus.

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A's voiceless palatal fricative is immediately followed by a single laugh note produced by Cr (line 21). This note is produced more quietly relative to the surrounding talk. In view of its placement immediately following the completion of A's turn, it would appear that the laughter particle is produced in response to some feature of the preceding talk. There is no clearly keyed laughable preceding this laugh particle which could account for its production.

As a result of its association with the completion of turns featuring a laughable of some sort, Schenkein (1972:366) suggests that laughter is also available to signal the completion of other turn-construction units, while Schegloff and Sacks (1973:305) note that it is used to signal the boundaries of a particular interactional sequence.

Cr's laugh particle is not placed in the terminal stages of the sequence, since the projected decision has yet to be made. From its placement, it would therefore appear that this laugh is produced in response to M's voiceless palatal fricative.

If M's turn at talk (line 20) is compared with MC's contentious turn in data extract 1, it is clear that the voiceless palatal fricative is occupying a similar terminal slot in a dispreferred turn to that which is occupied by the minimal-equivocal laugh note mitigating MC's contentious turn.

→ MC °c'est bon pour le ré(g(hhh)ime (.) hmm ((whispered))

Thus, as was argued to be the case in data extracts 2 and 3, it appears that the voiceless palatal fricative serves to mitigate a dispreferred action. Moreover, given the evidence from this data extract, that the voiceless palatal fricative may generate co-participant laughter much as the minimal-equivocal laugh sound was argued to invite laughter, we are in a position to suggest that this particle might be oriented to by French speaking interactants as a minimal-equivocal laugh particle.

In order to ascertain conclusively whether this is the case however, other interactional slots generally associated with laughter also need to be examined for its occurrence, and for evidence of participants' orientation to that particle as pertaining to laughter in the design of their subsequent actions.

A correlation between laughter and the boundaries of interactional units has been observed (Scheinkein, 1972:366, Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:305), the claim of an orientation to this particle as a minimal-equivocal laugh sound might therefore be supported by evidence of the voiceless palatal fricative in the terminal slots of clearly delimited sequences.

In data extract 5, the voiceless palatal fricative is placed at the end of a short sequence featuring a request for help from M. The participants are sitting down at the table and beginning to look at the menu. Several competing floors are being maintained simultaneously, indeed, M's sequence-initial vocative (line 2) overlaps a second assessment produced by MC (line 1) who was talking to Cr immediately prior to this extract.

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Data extract 5
Tape: MC L'Estrapade
(Note: Talk from competing floors has been omitted for reasons of clarity)

	1	MC	|bon. |
	2	M	|maman|=
	3	M	=|maman est ce que|=
	4	Cr	|qu'est ce qu'il y a |
	5	M	tu peux mettre ma serviette autour de mon cou
→	6	Cr	oui(jj)
	7	M	°d'accord

M repeats her vocative once MC's turn reaches completion, together with an account for her intervention, a request for help (lines 3, 5). This request is the first pair part of an adjacency pair. Cr complies with the request (line 6), with an agreement token 'oui' with a voiceless palatal fricative following the final, high front vowel. The agreement token is the second pair part of the adjacency pair, effectively terminating the relevance of the preceding turn and concluding the sequence. M's orientation to the termination of the sequence is displayed by her assessment token, line 7. So the voiceless palatal fricative is oriented to by the co-participants as signalling the end of this stretch of interaction.

Thus, just as has been shown to be the case for laughter, the voiceless palatal fricative is oriented to as signalling the boundaries of an interactional sequence.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the analysis of the five data extracts presented in this article, snippets of everyday talk, it can be seen that the methodological framework mooted by conversation analysts is particularly sensitive to the situated nature of behaviour in interaction. By adhering to Sack's fundamental principle of "order at all points" in the analysis of interactional data, it has been possible to examine, in a rigorous analysis, the significance of a particle which it would have been easy to overlook.

Firstly, a correlation between laughter and dispreferred actions was established, with the analysis of data extract 1. Building on this analysis it was possible to show, through the analysis of data extracts 2 and 3, how a voiceless palatal fricative was also oriented to by interactants as mitigating dispreferred actions. In the analysis of data extract 4 the voiceless palatal fricative accompanying a dispreferred action was found to invite laughter in the same way as other minimal-equivocal laugh particles, while data extract 5 provided evidence of the placement of this particle in the terminal slot of an interactional sequence.

If the aim of the current article is to present a rigorous analysis of interactants' orientations to the voiceless palatal fricative, it might be suggested

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that the analysis of single instances of interaction in which this sound is placed is insufficient to provide unequivocal evidence of how this particle is oriented to in interaction. Conversation analysts argue that the reoccurrence or otherwise of a particular interactional behaviour is not necessarily relevant to an analysis to reveal a pattern or mechanism organising that behaviour. Its occurrence demonstrates that the pattern is available to interactants and their co-participants in that that they can produce the behaviour or understand its significance respectively. Whether the behaviour reoccurs or not adds no further information about the interactional management of the behaviour in that instance (Psthas, 1995:50).

It can thus be argued that we have sufficient evidence to conclude that the voiceless palatal fricative which has been found to follow a high front [i] in a word-final position is oriented to as a minimal-equivocal laugh particle by French-speaking interactants.

There has been no mention of this particle despite an extensive analysis of laughter in interaction between English speakers (see for example Scheinkein, 1972; Jefferson, 1979; Jefferson, 1985; Jefferson, Sacks and Schegloff, 1985; Glenn, 1989). It would appear that this particle is specific to interaction in French, although any claims about its distribution would need to be supported by the analysis of laughter within other speech communities.

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TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS[6]

These are based on the system for the transcription of natural conversation devised by Gail Jefferson:

Overlapping utterances are indicated by | at the onset of the simultaneous talk and | at its conclusion.

Latched or continuous utterances, ie either those continuing over different lines of the transcription or those produced by different speakers which follow on with no discernable pause, are indicated by =

Pauses in the stream of talk are shown by numbers, representing the duration of the pause in seconds in brackets where they occur, within or between utterances, (x.x)

Untimed, micropauses in the flow of talk are indicated by (.)

Rapid delivery is indicated by > marking the onset of the faster talk and < at its conclusion.

Sound stretch or the elongation of a sound is indicated by a colon :, several colons indicate further prolongation of the sound :::

[6] See also Psathas (1995:70) for example.

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Cut off or the abrupt termination of a word or sound is indicated by -
Falling intonation is indicated by a full stop .
Rising intonation is indicated by a question mark ?
Marked rising or falling shifts in intonation are indicated by ↑ or ↓ respectively
Emphasis is indicated by underlining
Loudness is indicated by UPPER CASE LETTERS
Quietness indicated by a preceding °
Audible exhalation is indicated by (hhh)
Palatalisation is indicated by (jjj)
Transcriptionist doubt is indicated by single parentheses enclosing the (dubious item).
Empty parentheses indicate that the talk could not be heard sufficiently to hazard any guess as to what was said ( )
Verbal descriptions are given between double parentheses (( ))

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