Laughter at Last: Playfulness and laughter in interaction[1]

Elizabeth Holt
University of Huddersfield (e.j.holt@hud.ac.uk)

Abstract

Conversation analysis is used to examine a collection of sequences involving playful turns that are not immediately explicitly framed as laughable through laughter. Rather, laughter by the same speaker occurs after or in overlap with the recipient's response. Elements of the turns contribute to their playfulness, such as using exaggerated, formal and colloquial language. However, they are ambivalent in that they also do serious work. Many are first pair parts such as questions. Sacks (1992, p. 627) pointed out that non-serious first pair parts can be responded to with laughter, and thus not treated as having the sequential implications they might otherwise have. But in this collection responses align with serious sequential implications while sometimes simultaneously acknowledging and contributing to their playfulness. Laughter following or in overlap with the response then explicitly frames first turns (and, to an extent, the pair) as playful. However, its role in aligning with the just prior turn is often ambiguous, raising questions about the relationship of turns in this sequence. In general the analysis supports consideration of how playfulness is constructed and responded to in talk and of a technical understanding of the phenomenon.

1. Introduction

According to Bateson (1972) playful and serious actions are not completely distinct, thus when animals play-fight they signal that a bite is not a real attack but a mock one. They use metacommunication to indicate that 'this is play' (Bateson, 1972, p. 179). Once framed as play, actions do not have the same imports they would otherwise have. This applies to playful turns at talk. In interaction playful contributions may resemble non-playful ones but do not necessarily carry the same sequential relevancies. For example, a turn that takes the form of an invitation but has playful elements may not make an acceptance or a declination relevant but instead orientation to its playfulness (Glenn, 2003, p.137). This phenomenon is complicated by the fact that many contributions to interaction are not entirely playful: rather, they are ambivalent. Metacommunicative signals, according to Bateson (1972), are paradoxical because they require both serious and non-serious interpretation at the same time. Further, complex forms of play may be 'constructed not upon the premise "This is play" but rather around the question "Is this play?"' (p.182). Thus, playful exchanges are the product of negotiation and the distinction between playful and non-playful actions is not clear-cut.

This article focuses on a collection of sequences beginning with an ambivalently playful turn. Instances were drawn mainly from transcribed two-party telephone calls and analysed using conversation analysis. It arises out of a larger project exploring laughter in

interaction (Holt, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). In the majority of instances in the larger collection[2] laughter occurs in close proximity to its target or laughable (Glenn, 2003, p.49), usually at the end of the same turn or in response. However, in these the laughter occurs following the recipient's response. The sequence is as follows:

1→ A turn with playful elements but no immediate laughter by speaker A
2→ A response from speaker B
3→ Laughter from speaker A

A partially playful turn is produced without laughter and is responded to seriously or semi-seriously. Then laughter is produced by speaker A. Here is an instance from the collection to further illustrate the pattern.

(1)[Ramsay:27.3.96:B1:MR:3.37]
(From a call to a gas supply company. The customer has been sent a supply disconnection notice before his invoice.)

```
1     C:              ….you sent me the le:tter on the Friday .hh but
2                     you didn't send me the invoice to pay the gas bill
3                     until the ↑Saturday. .hh
4     E:              °ri:ght°
5     C:              .hh so you sent me the cut off notice first and the
6                     invoice afterwards
7     E:              right
8     C:1→            now is this normal with ((company name)) nowadays=
9     E:2→            =no wh- [wha-
10    C:3→                    [.hh HEH HEH HEH HE=
11    E:              £n(h)o sh- [we'd (still     ) you first Mr Brown£
```

The extract begins with the customer formulating (lines 1-3) and then reformulating (lines 5 and 6) the nature of the problem, both of which are responded to with 'right' (lines 4 and 7). In line 8 the customer asks whether it is "normal" for the company to send supply cut-off notices prior to sending out invoices. The turn is packaged as continuing this sequence whereby C summarizes his complaint, but it asks E to confirm that this mistake is normal practice. Thus, his suggestion evokes an unreal world where a company would routinely send cut-off notices prior to bills. But there is no laughter during or immediately after the turn. Rather, laughter occurs in overlap with the employee's response (line 10) where C produces four loud beats of laughter.

Analysis of this collection enables exploration of a number of issues. First, in considering the initial turn in the sequence it is possible to throw light on how playful turns are designed and what recurrent resources may be used by participants to create playful packaging. At the same time, however, the ambivalence of these turns is clear: as well as being playful, they also do serious work. Thus, it is possible to explore the overlapping nature of playfulness and non-playfulness. Second, examination of the responses facilitates consideration of how recipients respond to these ambiguously playful turns, especially in terms of whether they align with the serious work they perform. Third, the presence of laughter in the third turn supports analysis of its role in constituting turns and sequences as non-serious3. Interestingly, initial turns do not have laughter as part of their

design although laughter is recurrently central to constituting turns as non-serious. Analysis of these sequences shows that there are interactional benefits of not laughing at the beginning but using laughter to orient to playful aspects once the recipient has responded (or has had the opportunity to respond). Issues of alignment (Stivers, Mondada and Steensig, 2011) come to the fore as the laughter can reinforce a play frame when recipients have oriented to serious implications of the first turn. At a general level, the analysis throws light on how ambiguously playful sequences are designed and negotiated and how this can contribute towards a better understanding, in technical terms, of what playfulness is.

Closely related to playfulness is the phenomenon of non-seriousness. Sacks (1992, p. 672) offered the basis for a technical understanding of the distinction between seriousness and non-seriousness in sequential terms. He pointed out that second pair parts can treat first parts as non-serious by, for example, laughing:

> (I)t's one criterion of an utterance being a first pair member that it can be followed with, not <u>only</u> the second pair member but <u>either</u> the second pair member or laughter- or, alternatively, the question 'Are you kidding?' or 'Are you serious?'
> (P.672, original italics)

Thus, there can be 'sequential ambiguity' (Sacks, 1992, p. 671) as to whether a first turn should be treated as having its usual sequential implications (for example, an invitation making relevant an acceptance or a declination) or treated as making relevant alignment with non-serious aspects such as by laughing (Glenn, 2003, p.137). The design of the turn may, however, invite either serious or non-serious orientation. Thus, Jefferson (1979) showed how laughter during or at the completion of a first turn can invite reciprocation. Holt (2013) analysed the impact of the laughter in the following extract (line 9) in constituting the turn as non-serious (or, at least, not entirely serious).

(2) [Holt:O88:1:4:2]
(Lesley has been asking Eleanor about an upcoming event involving country dancing. It seems that, in contrast to Lesley, Eleanor attends regularly.)

```
1      Lesley:        .hhhh Right so-e ↑see you the:[re.
2      Eleanor:                                      [O:kay then?
3      Lesley:        .hhh ah I hope ↑it won' be too difficult,
4                     (0.5)
6      Eleanor:       No::[::
7      (Lesley)           [↑ih
8      Eleanor:       ↓No[::
9      Lesley: →         [ih Go on. Eh hheh heh
10     Eleanor:       eh hheh ↑he[h
```

In response to Lesley's expressed concern about the difficulty of the dances (line 3), Eleanor responds with 'no' uttered twice. Lesley admonishes by casting doubt on the accuracy of her claim with '<u>Go</u> on'. However, the three beats of laughter at the end of the turn reframe it as not entirely serious. As a non-serious turn it has different sequential implications to a serious turn (Holt, 2013; Glenn, 2003, p. 137; Sacks, 1992, p. 672). Had it been treated as serious Eleanor may have responded with more reassurances about

the lack of difficulty. Instead she responds with laughter. Thus, she treats it as not having the sequential implications of a disagreement, but as inviting laughter.[3]

Thus, two points are apparent. First, consideration of the sequential implications of elements of the design of turns (such as laughter) and of the way they are oriented to by recipients provides the basis for developing technical understandings of vague (and, in the first place, lay) terms like non-seriousness and playfulness. Consequently we can profitably distinguish between them. Second, and more specifically, analysis of non-seriousness in interaction has highlighted the importance of laughter which is also central to the current investigation. Laughter in the third turn reinforces or reinvokes the playful framing but does not negate the serious trajectory of the first-turn action. To illustrate this, consider the following contrasting extract in which a playful turn has turn final laughter.

(3)[Holt:J86:1:2:2]
(Trevor is trying to get hold of Lesley's daughter, Katherine, but has been told she is not at home. Lesley suggests ringing her at her student accommodation.)

```
1      Trevor:       Okay I'll khh I'll give 'er (h)a (h)ring.
2      Trevor:       [.hhh!
3      Lesley:       [O-:kay
4      Trevor:-->    Why can't he ↓catch the girl these da(h)ys hheh
5      Lesley:       ehh heh hu-e-[huh .hhh
6      Trevor:                    [ (        [  )
7      Lesley:                               [I kno:w there's someb'dy
8                    ↑else: th't rings fr'm Castle Cary 'hhh just to speak...
```

This comes towards the end of a call in which Trevor has failed to reach his intended target, Katherine, and has had a conversation with her mother instead. At line 1 he accepts Lesley's just prior suggestion to ring her at her student accommodation. The laugh particles that interpolate the end of this turn are termination relevant (Holt, 2010), though they might be subsequently form a pivot to the play frame. In line 3 Lesley produces a minimal agreement which is also sequence termination relevant. However, Trevor then adds a further turn relating to his failure to reach her. Contributing to its playfulness is the use of 'he' to refer to himself and 'the girl' to refer to Katherine. Interpolating 'days' and at the end of the turn are two beats of laughter. Lesley does not orient to his turn as a serious question, rather she reciprocates the laughter, thus orienting to it as non-serious.

The playful turns in the current collection contrast with the playful turn in extract (3) in that although they share its ambivalent nature they do not have laughter as part of their construction. Further, although they have playful elements they also do serious work. Thus, this supports existing findings relating to the complexity and ambivalence of playful, non-serious or humorous contributions, demonstrating that the division between these and serious action is not distinct (Drew, 1987; Dynel, 2011; Holt, 2013). Aspects of their design suggest they are playful, however, other elements, and the lack of any

explicit framing as non-serious through laughter, invite serious treatment (in terms of their sequential implications). I begin by considering playful elements of the turns in the current corpus, but show that they also project responses which align with their serious sequential implications. I then consider the recipients' responses exploring how they orient to these ambivalent actions. Finally, I consider the laughter, its relationship to the prior turns and how it more explicitly reframes the prior as playful.

2. Turn one: the ambiguously playful turn

Previous research into contributions to interaction related to playfulness and non-seriousness has identified resources recurrently employed in their construction. These include exaggeration and overstatement (Drew, 1987; Ford and Fox, 2010; Holt, 2011), use of colloquial and taboo language (Holt, 2007), importing expressions associated with other contexts (Haakana and Sorjonen, 2011), irony and hyperbole (Schegloff, 2001) and 'impossible description' or a brief sharing of an extraordinary reality (Torode, 1996). In the current collection first turns in this three-part sequence include elements recurrently associated with playfulness. To illustrate this and the patterns that underpin their use I present several instances from the collection. In the first extract Hal is inviting Lesley to a country dancing event.

```
(4) [H:SO88(II):1:3:17]
1      Hal:            uhIt's on Fridee ni↓:ght.
2      Lesley:         ↑Oh well I'll ↑have a↑ word with Skip when 'ee
3                      comes ↓ho[me,
4      Hal:                       [Ye:s.
5      Lesley:         [Yes.
6      Hal:            [If you want to [come ↓come[ but [don't
7      Lesley:1→              [((sniff))        [ .mt [↑WELL I'LL
8             1→       ↑haf to ↓come I've bought myself a new
9             1→       skirt in Newca[stle.
10     Hal:   2→                     [Oh you- (.) ih
11            2→       Tha' would be ↓lovel[y,
12     Lesley:3→                           [hHehh hah[ hah  hah  a a h]    [.u
13     Hal:                                          [eh-heh hah hah]ha[:h=
14     Hal:            =hu[h heh
15     Lesley:            [.hhhh Ye[:s °u°
16     Hal:                        [Um
17                      (0.2)
18     Hal:            Tickets are ↑only two pound ea:ch
```

In lines 7 to 9 Lesley says she will have to come to the dance because she has recently bought a new skirt; thus she reframes her acceptance as necessity by providing this account. Hal begins to respond with what may be a news mark, but self-corrects to produce a positive assessment. Lesley overlaps the end of his turn with the first of five beats of laughter. In claiming that she will have to come because of the purchase of the

skirt, Lesley makes an unreal assertion. Her use of "↑haf t<u>o</u>" contributes towards the overstatement; i.e. suggesting that she is compelled to be there. The increased volume at the start of the turn and the shifts in intonation (indicated by the arrows) convey aspects of the delivery which help to make it sound forceful, supporting the framing of her acceptance as a necessity. The turn is delivered without laughter or smile voice. Thus, there are indications that it is playful, but it is not immediately explicitly framed as such through laughter. Lesley does eventually produce five beats of laughter, but not until after the recipient's response.

In the next extract Deidre produces a playful contribution in response to her initially failing to recognize her relative, Mark, from his first name alone (line 4).

(5)[Holt:M88:2:1:1]
```
1       Deidre:        ...ni:ne wh<u>o</u>'s calli:ng
2       Mark:          M<u>a</u>rk.
3                      (0.9)
4       Deidre:         M<u>a</u>rk wh<u>o</u>[:.
5       Mark:                      [Field.
6                      (0.6)
7       Deidre:         Mark ↑<u>FIE</u>:ld.
8       Mark:          <u>Yea</u>:h.
9                      (.)
10      Deidre: 1→   Not <u>the</u> Mark Fie:ld
11                     (0.2)
12      Mark:   2→   Well I h<u>o</u>pe so<u>:</u>,
13      Deidre:3→   ehh::: he <u>He</u>[llo how're you:[↑<u>:</u>
14      Mark:                     [.hh.<u>hhh</u>        [hh Alright thank ↑you?
```

After Mark gives his last name at line 5, Deidre first repeats his full name before contributing a playful turn with "Not <u>the</u> Mark Fie:ld". The exaggerated emphasis on 'the' helps dramatize the question, suggesting that his identity is extremely significant. Further the design is somewhat formulaic, borrowing from situations involving recognitions of noteworthy co-participants (generally involving well-known figures). Haakana and Sorjonen (2011), in their analysis of purchasing lottery tickets, show how playfulness can be produced by invoking another context, for example a financial investment encounter (see also Holt, 2011). Here Deidre invokes a context in which Mark's identity is significant such as in the case of meeting a celebrity. Following Mark's response Deidre produces two breathy laugh particles (line 13).

The following extract occurs during talk about Hal's visit to Kent, an area that Lesley knows well. They begin to discuss mutual friends who have also visited and the relations that live there.

(6)[H:SO88(II):1:3:10]
(Lesley mentions Kent-based relatives of mutual acquaintances, then Hal remembers that his wife, Ann, also has a cousin living there.)

```
40    Hal:          (Cuz Joe's a) cousin a' Ann's ↓you see.
41                  (.)
42    Lesley:       ↑Oh:[: yes of cou:r[se:::.h
43    Hal:              [But I-        [B't I for↑↑GOT that actually,
44    Lesley:1→     [↑Oh well there yo[u are↑ you[should've consulted me=
45    Hal:          [But-             [But-      [But we WENT
46    Lesley:1→     =first[.hh°h°
47    Hal:   2→          [°y:° [Yes I should've[(done).
48    Lesley:3→           [°hh°          [hheh huh[huh .hhhhh
49    Hal:                                        [C'z you
50                  would've known where all the relations ↑a[↓:re.
```

Talk about the relatives of mutual friends living in Kent reminds Hal of his wife's cousin who lives there. Lesley then criticizes Hal saying that he should have "consulted" her before taking a trip there so that he could have benefitted from her knowledge or the area. The use of this formal term 'consulted' (as opposed to the less formal 'talked' or 'spoken') and the forthright way in which the suggestion is made, using "should've", for example, help construct this as playful.[4] Elements of its packaging suggest a serious admonishment of Hal, but other aspects (such as its forthright design) and its position in an environment of agreement and affiliation, render it ambivalent. There is a little quiet breathiness at the end of Lesley's turn which may be equivocal laughter, but it is not until near the end of Hal's agreement (line 47) that she produces three louder, unequivocal beats of laughter.

In the next instance a participant again makes an ambivalently playful assertion which isn't immediately followed by laughter. Lesley and Kevin are discussing the advantages of taking sandwiches to work.

```
(7)[Holt:88U:2:2:5]
1     Kevin:        Oh I see I I jus:t um (0.4) uh::: (0.3) you know take
2                   sandwiches on the uh (0.9) ground that um
3                   (.)
4     Lesley:       .hh they're more ↑who:lesome.
5                   (0.6)
6     Kevin:        so much easier to get on an' you c'n um
7                   (.)
8     Lesley:       ((sn[iff))
9     Kevin:           [you know you c'n ha[ve (          )  ]=
10    Lesley:                               [↑That's ↑↑ri↓:ght]=
11    Lesley:       =[ y'neh stop where you li:ke. ]hh
12    Kevin:         =[wherever you weh wherever you] want 'n:d em (0.4) drive
13                  off 'n see another customer 'n=
14    Lesley:        =That's ↑ri↓:ght. ↑Ye[:s.
15    Kevin:                              [get around a lot better
16    Lesley:1 →    ↑Ye:s .h Have a nice snoo::ze in your ca:r.
17                  (1.1)
18    Kevin: 2 →    Well I don't know th't I do that,
```

```
19      Lesley:3→    eh heh heh heh e-heh[.hhhh (0.3) .hhhh]How's Nan
20                   al↑right              [--------(1.0)--------]
```

Over several turns at the start of the extract Kevin extolls taking sandwiches on the
grounds that it makes travelling around easier. Lesley then playfully attributes another
motive - 'Have a nice snooze in your car'- thus, teasing Kevin by attributing a
reprehensible reason for the practice. Coming after Kevin's extended account on grounds
which indicate that he is diligent and professional (i.e. that it enables him to reach clients
more easily) this suggests that he does it for self-serving and non-professional reasons.
Once again it is said without laughter, but the use of 'nice snooze' contributes to its
playful nature: it contrasts with previous talk relating to Kevin's professional role by
sounding informal and perhaps even childish. Following the pause and Kevin's po-faced
(Drew, 1987) response (line 18) Lesley produces extended laughter.

So, all these instances have characteristics which suggest their producer is being playful.
In (4) Lesley makes an unreal assertion by saying that she will 'haf to come' to the dance
due to the purchase of the skirt. Extract (1) above also involves an unreal suggestion as
the customer asks whether it is 'normal' practice to send cut-off notices before invoices.
In (5) Deidre produces a dramatised response to discovering the identity of the caller,
borrowing from another context and thus aggrandizing the significance. In (6) Lesley
criticizes Hal for not 'consulting' her before travelling to Kent, thus doing a teasing
admonishment of Hal . In (7) Lesley implicitly undermines Kevin's portrayal of
professionalism in taking sandwiches by accusing him of doing it so he can 'snooze' in
the car. In this way overstatement, exaggeration, making unreal assertions and doing
controversial actions in a forthright way contribute to creating playfulness.
But there is no immediate explicit framing of them as laughables through laughter.
Laughter comes at some remove, following or in overlap with the recipient's response.
Further, whilst being playful, they are not entirely so, there are serious elements to
them.Thus, for example, in the following Beth uses the playful turn to make a request.

(8)[H:O88:1:5:1]
(Beth is a university student returning home – nearby Lesley's house – for a few days.)
```
1      Lesley:        ↑Oh- u-ho hello Be:th,
2      Beth:          I'm home f'a few da:[ys.
3      Lesley:                            [.t ↑Oh are ↑yo[u?
4      Beth:  1→                                        [↑( ) wonder if
5             1→      you'd like the honor'v a visit.
6      Lesley:2→      .hhhh ↑Oh ↓ye:s, yes yes ↑ye[s
7      Beth:  3→                                   [hh-hheh
8      Beth:          .hh When w'be ↓best.
```

In lines 4 and 5 Beth asks whether she can visit Lesley. However, she packages the
request in the form of an offer. Perhaps orienting to the trickiness of requesting to visit
rather than waiting to be invited, she makes it somewhat playful by including 'honor',
thus, nicely satirizing the cheekiness of her action. In a similar manner to (5), 'honor'

aggrandizes Beth's identity and her visit. The turn is ambivalent: it is a serious request with a playful component.

Similarly in (4) the playful turn also does serious work. Hal has invited Lesley to the dance, but so far she has not accepted, she has only said that she will have to discuss it with her husband.

```
(4) [Detail]
1      Hal:          uhIt's on Fridee ni↓:ght.
2      Lesley:       ↑Oh well I'll ↑have a↑ word with Skip when 'ee
3                    comes ↓ho[me,
4      Hal:                     [Ye:s.
5      Lesley:       [Yes.
6      Hal:          If you want to [come ↓come[ but [don't
7      Lesley:1→                    [((sniff))      [ .mt [↑WELL I'LL
8           1→       ↑haf to ↓come I've bought myself a new
9           1→       skirt in Newca[stle.
10     Hal:   2→                    [Oh you- (.) ih
11          2→       Tha' would be ↓lovel[y,
12     Lesley:3→                         [hHehh hah[ hah  hah  a a h]    [.u
13     Hal:                                   [eh-heh hah hah]ha[:h=
14     Hal:          =hu[h heh
```

Hal's turn in line 6 may be orienting to the lack of clear acceptance in Lesley's preceding talk. Thus, the playful turn as lines 7 to 9 is also the first clear indication that she is accepting Hal's offer, and in that sense, does serious work.

The turns in these (and other extracts in the collection) are ambivalent: they contain elements recurrently associated with playful contributions; however, at the same time, they do serious work such as making a request or accepting an invitation. This ambivalence contributed to by the fact that there is no laughter invites recipients to orient to them as retaining their usual sequential relevancies rather than, for example, laughing. Many of the turns are first pair parts and they invite a second pair part that aligns with the action projected in the first part.

```
(5)[Detail]
10     Deidre: 1→   Not the Mark Fie:ld
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(8)[Detail]
4      Beth:  1→                           [↑(  ) wonder if
5             1→     you'd like the honor'v a visit.
```

In extract (5) the playful turn is a question, and (8) it is a request. Thus, in order to align with these first pair parts recipients are invited to produce the relevant second pair parts. Even in instances where the turn does not take the form of a first pair part, still recipients are invited to provide some kind of response that aligns with the serious sequential

implications. Thus, in (4) Lesley's turn suggests that she is accepting Hal's offer to come to the dance, thus inviting Hal to orient to her implicit acceptance. Stand-alone laughter by Hal would be highly ambiguous as to its acknowledgement of Lesley's implicit acceptance. Interestingly, the self-repair in Hal's response may suggest he changes tack in order to implicitly orient to it as an acceptance. It is possible that the form he begins in line 10 ("O̲h you-") orients to it as news with news mark ('Oh you did, did you?') orienting to her announcement, whereas the form he repairs to -'T̲h̲a̲' would be ↓lovel[y'- acknowledges acceptance of her invitation.

Further, the environment of Lesley's playful acceptance is slightly delicate. In response to Hal's invitation Lesley does not provide a preferred response (an acceptance) but says she will talk to her husband (lines 2 to 3). Hal's response 'If you w̲a̲n̲t̲ to come ↓come' (line 6) casts her decision as one of preference. Thus, her playful turn is both positive in terms of accepting the offer as well as recasting it in terms of necessity. Playful turns in other instances in the collection also occur in delicate environments. For instance in (1) the caller formulates and then reformulates his complaint but in each case is responded to with 'right' which is used as a 'marker of epistemic dependency' between elements of the information provided (Gardner, 2007: 319) but does not acknowledge the complaint relevance of the information. Thus, the playful turn which imputes this is normal practice subtly orients to the lack of recognition of any culpability on the part of the employee. Extract (7) is a tease: Lesley teases Kevin about his reason for taking sandwiches to work. Drew (1987) explored why many of the teases in his collection are responded to in a 'po-faced' manner despite being clearly designed to signal their non-seriousness. He found that the teases recurrently occurred after certain activities which were 'overdone' in some way. In (7) Kevin's explanation for taking sandwiches is extended over a number of turns. Thus, like teases, these playful turns recurrently occur in delicate environments and are treated seriously by recipients. In the next section I explore these responses in more depth.

3. Turn two: the response
In the previous section it became clear that first turns in these sequences are ambivalent: they exhibit playful packaging but also do serious work. Thus, there is an ambiguity concerning how recipients should align with them: they can align with the playfulness by producing playful turns, they can orient to the serious action of the turn, or produce a response that is similarly ambivalent. In (1) the employee aligns with the customer's question by providing a response in which he denies the suggestion that sending out the cut-off notices before the bills is 'normal nowadays'.

(1)[Detail]
8   C:1→   now is this normal with ((company name)) nowadays=
9   E:2→   =no wh- [wha-
10   C:3→   [.hh HEH HEH HEH HE=
11   E: £n(h)o sh- [we'd (still   ) you first Mr Brown£

E orients to the turn as serious. Only after C's laughter does he produce a more ambivalent turn with both laughter and a denial of the practice. Most responses in the

collection are more ambivalent: while aligning with the serious action projected by the prior turn, recipients recurrently also make some nod to the playfulness.

In (8) Lesley orients to the prior turn as a request. However, there is also acknowledgment of the playfulness of the prior turn.

```
(8)[Detail]
1       Lesley:         ↑Oh- u-ho hello Be:th,
2       Beth:           I'm home f'a few da:[ys.
3       Lesley:                            [.t ↑Oh are ↑yo[u?
4       Beth:  1→                                        [↑( ) wonder if
5             2→        you'd like the honor'v a visit.
6       Lesley:3→       .hhhh ↑Oh ↓ye:s, yes yes ↑ye[s
7       Beth:                                        [hh-hheh
8       Beth:           .hh When w'be ↓best.
```

Lesley orients to the serious action of the turn – requesting a visit – but also makes a nod to the playful element in Beth's turn by producing 'yes' four times. Her enthusiastic reply echoes the positive assessment of the visit in Beth's use of 'honor'. It also orients to her request as an offer, thus going along with Beth's playful packaging of the request in this manner.

In the next extract, the recipient again aligns with the serious sequential implications of the turn though there is acknowledgement of its potential playfulness. Near the beginning of the call, in response to a how-are-you question, Nancy announces that she has been given a raise at work.

```
(9)[NB(II):2:1]
1       Emma:           .hh How you ↑doin.
2       Nancy:          .t hhh Pretty good I gutta rai:se.h
3                       .hh[hh
4       Emma:              [Kuu:u[d.
5       Nancy:1→               [↑Yeh two dollars
6             1→        a week..h
7                       (.)
8       Emma:2→         Oh w[ o : w .   ]
9       Nancy:3→           [↑↑uh::: h]uh hu[:h   hu:h↑  ]
10      Emma:                            [Wudee gun:] do with it a:ll.
11      Nancy:          Gol' I rilly I jis don't know how ah'm gunnuh spend
12                      all that money.
```

Having announced that she has a raise, and in response to Emma's positive receipt of the news - "Kuu:ud" ('good') - Nancy states its extent which is minimal (lines 5 to 6). However, Emma responds with an elaborate news receipt, "Oh wo:w" more appropriately fitted to a significant announcement. The response aligns with the prior turn as a news announcement; however, the emphatic nature of the turn (note the emphasis and

elongation) is not well fitted to the minimal amount. Thus, while orienting to the prior as news (and thus as having the usual sequential relevancies of a news-announcement), Emma contributes to the playfulness by making her response fitted to a much more significant amount. Note that Emma continues to play along in this manner in line 10 by implying that it is a large amount by referring to it as 'it all' and suggesting it will be difficult to spend so much.

In these instances recipients orient to playful first turns as retaining their relevant sequential implications, while sometimes simultaneously contributing to the playfulness. This suggests a technical basis for understanding playfulness: playful turns invite their relevant sequential nexts while also making relevant 'playing along'. Laughter on the part of the play instigator following the response then explicitly invokes the play frame.

4. The third turn: laughter by play instigator

In this section I begin by exploring the laugh turns before moving on (in the next section) to consider their relationship to the prior turns in more depth. The laugh turns in the corpus vary in terms of the length and strength of the laughter. In these two extracts for example the laughter is brief.

```
(5)[Detail]
10      Deidre: 1→   Not the Mark Fie:ld
11                   (0.2)
12      Mark:   2→   Well I hope so:,
13      Deidre:3→   ehh::: he He[llo how're you:[↑:
```

```
(8)[Detail]
4       Beth:  1→                                [↑( ) wonder if
5              1→   you'd like the honor'v a visit.
6       Lesley:2→   .hhhh ↑Oh ↓ye:s, yes yes ↑ye[s
7       Beth:  3→                                [hh-hheh
```

In (5) there are two beats of laughter: a first drawn out one, then a second short beat. In (8) there are two quick beats of laughter.

In most of the extracts in the collection the laughter is more elaborate: it is louder and more extensive. The nature of laughter is recurrently fitted to its contribution and the environments in which it occurs. Thus, for example, in responding to complaints (Holt, 2012) somewhat disaffiliative laughter in response to critical turns is minimal, often equivocal and disengaged. As such it does not sound 'mirthful'. It contributes towards closing the sequence and is not reciprocated. In the current collection the laughter is often more elaborate and 'mirthful', celebrating playful elements of the prior talk.

```
(7)[Detail]
15      Kevin:                              [get around a lot better
```

```
16      Lesley:1 →    ↑Ye:s .h Have a nice snoo::ze in your ca:r.
17                    (1.1)
18      Kevin: 2 →    Well I don't know th't I do that,
19      Lesley:3→     eh heh heh heh e-heh[.hhhh (0.3) .hhhh]How's Nan
20                    al↑right              [--------(1.0)--------]
```

(1) [Detail]
```
8       C:A→          now is this normal with ((company name)) nowadays=
9       E:B→          =no wh- [wha-
10      C:C→                  [.hh HEH HEH HEH HE=
```

In (7) five beats of laughter and some breathy equivocal laughter by Lesley follow Kevin's response. In (1) four loud beats of laughter overlap the beginning of E's continuation in his response turn.

Focusing on the position of the laughs reveals that they recurrently occur immediately following or in overlap with the response. When in overlap, the laughter does not begin until the action of the response turn is clear. This is interesting given that laughter can overlap talk. Thus, it appears that, while producing the laughter early (i.e. not necessarily waiting until the end of the response) speakers wait until the action of the response is clear before laughing: laughter occurs at or after the recognition point.

(4)[Detail]
```
7       Lesley:                       [((sniff))      [ .mt [↑WELL I'LL
8                             ↑haf to ↓come I've bought myself a new
9                             skirt in Newca[stle.
10      Hal:                               [Oh you- (.) ih
11                            Tha' would be ↓lovel[y,
12      Lesley:→                                  [hHehh hah[ hah  hah  a a h]    [.u
```

(8)[Detail]
```
4       Beth:                                         [↑(  ) wonder if
5                             you'd like the honor'v a visit.
6       Lesley:       .hhhh ↑Oh ↓ye:s, yes yes ↑ye[s
7       Beth: →                                   [hh-hheh
```

In these two extracts the laughter by the speaker who produced the potentially playful turn overlaps the end of the response. Thus, the action of the recipient's turn is apparent. In both extracts the intonation contour contributes towards indicating that the turn is reaching a transition space: in (4) there is a fall on 'lovely', while in (8) there is a rise towards and especially on the final 'yes'. Also the four 'yes's are produced quickly as one coherent unit.

In the next extract there is evidence to suggest that Mark withholds more elaborate laughter as he finds himself in overlap with Deidre's extended response to his playful turn.

(10)[Holt:M88:2:1]

```
1    Deirdre:        ehh::: he He[llo how're you:[↑:
2    Mark:                        [.hh.hhh      [hh Alright thank ↑you?
3    Deirdre:        Pretty goo:d my mum's at Brownies at the moment Mark
4                    I'll jus' give you t'Da[:::d.]
5    Mark:  1→                            [.p.t ].hhhhhh What that
6           1→       miserable old-
7                    (0.6)
8    Deirdre: 2→    ˚u˚ Oh I[know you- you [call im all the mi:sera[ble=
9    Mark:     3→           [˚uhk .h˚        [˚puhhyhh˚            [.hh
10   Deirdre: 2→    =[things you ↓like[(that's what we do)
11   Mark:     3→    =[hh .h       [hhehh huh huh huh ↑.hehh.hehh
12   Deirdre: 3→    heh-heh-he[h!
13   Mark:                   [hheh hheh!=
14   Deidre:         =.eh.e[h
15   Mark:          [.hu- ↑.hehhhh
16   Deirdre:       [(See you later]o:n,)
17   Mark:           [ Yes alright, ]ek .hhh If eez arou:nd,
```

In line 9 there are three quiet breathy laughs overlapping Deidre's response. Then, as it becomes clear that she is playing along, and she reaches a potential completion point after 'like' Mark's laughter becomes louder and more elaborate. Thus, while Mark does not entirely refrain from laughing during Deidre's extended response, his laughter is quiet and restrained. Only once she has reached a potential transition space does it increase in volume and intensity.

Thus, the laughs occur after or in overlap with the recipient's responses. Where they do overlap, they occur mostly at or after the recognition point. While laughter can overlap talk, and while laughter generally occurs in close proximity to a laughable, the laughs here follow or overlap the end of the response.

While the producer of the first turn initially refrains from framing it as playful through laughter, by laughing following (or in overlap with) the recipient's response, they explicitly orient to the preceding talk as laughable. In some instances evidence for the impact of the laughter can be seen in the next turn following the laughter as recipient's orient to the import of the turn.

(1)[Detail]

```
8    C:1→     now is this normal with ((company name)) nowadays=
9    E:2→     =no wh- [wha-
10   C:3→             [.hh HEH HEH HEH HE=
11   E:       £n(h)o sh- [we'd (still    ) you first Mr Brown£
12   C:                  [HE HE HE HE
13   E:       uh- from looking at t[he account
14   C                             [I think it's quite hilarious
```

In line 9 the employee begins to respond seriously to the customer's preceding turn. He responds to the question with 'no' and then begins what might be an account. This is overlapped by C's loud laughter. The laughter reframes C's previous turn as non-serious. In response to C's laughter E repeats 'no', then adds a component which (though impossible to completely make out) appears to orient to the suggestion that it is normal practice. There is laughter during the 'no' and smile voice throughout the turn. Thus, the employee now orients to the prior talk as non-serious. However, just as the playful turn at line 8 is ambivalent, so the employee's turn at line 11 is also ambivalent. The laughter and smile voice orient to the playfulness of the suggestion, but E denies that not sending a bill first is a company practice.

In some instances orientation to the non-seriousness of the prior talk following the laughter comes in the form of shared laughter by the recipient. In the following extract the recipient's laughter is extended.

```
(4)[Detail]
7       Lesley:1→                  [((sniff))        [ .mt [↑WELL I'LL
8              1→     ↑haf to ↓come I've bought myself a new
9              1→     skirt in Newca[stle.
10      Hal:  2→                  [Oh you- (.) ih
11             2→     Tha' would be ↓lovel[y,
12      Lesley:3→                        [hHehh hah[ hah  hah  a a h]    [.u
13      Hal:                                       [eh-heh hah hah]ha[:h=
14      Hal:          =hu[h heh
15      Lesley:       [.hhhh Ye[:s °u°
```

Extract (4) is quite unusual in the corpus in that the playful turn and response are followed by shared laughter with Hal's overlapping laughter beginning after two beats of Lesley's in line 7.[5] Through the extended shared laughter Hal and Lesley celebrate her playful acceptance and his complement which aligns with the play frame initiated in the first turn.

5. Laughter and the laughable

The occurrence of the laughter at some distance from the laughable raises questions concerning its relationship to and alignment/non-alignment with the previous turn. Turns at talk regularly align with the action of the prior turn. Stivers (2008), in an analysis of vocal continuers and nods in response to storytelling, described alignment as a contribution that supports the "structural asymmetry of the storytelling activity: that a storytelling is in progress and that the teller has the floor until story completion" (p.34). Disaligned responses, in contrast, "undermine this asymmetry by competing for the floor or failing to treat a story as either in progress – or at story completion – as over" (p.34). Thus, aligned responses support the activity in progress, while disaligned ones undermine it. In the extracts examined here, the nature of laughter and its position within the sequences makes it highly ambiguous as to its relationship to the just prior turn.

A first question to consider is whether the laughter is responsive to the prior turn at all since it has a strong link to the first turn in the sequence, constituting it as a laughable. However, there is evidence to suggest that the laughter is also responsive to the just prior turn. In the previous section it became clear that laughs are responsive in terms of their onset (after or at a recognition point). Further evidence is provided by the following extract. Here Lesley produces a contribution that is ambivalently playful. The recipient does not orient to this but to an earlier unit within the turn. Lesley does not laugh. This suggests another way in which the laughter is responsive to the second turn: when the recipient does not provide a fitted response, laughter is not forthcoming.

(12)[Holt:SO88:1:10:2]
(Mark has rung to offer Lesley and her husband a lift to the country dancing event taking place that evening. Her question in lines 1-2 refers to the price of tickets. The Cat Ash is a local pub.)

```
1     Lesley:        <Thanks very much. .hhhh Okay then w['l u-↑How much is=
2     Mark:                                              [(    )
3     Lesley:        =it d'you kno:w,h
4                     (.)
5     Mark:          I've (0.2) no ide[a
6     Lesley:                         [↑n- No no[:
7     Mark:                                     [I don't know anything at
8                    all about it.
9     Lesley:        No:.
10                    (.)
11    Lesley:  1→   Well let's hope it's on if not we'll all go t'the Cat Ash.
12                    (1.0)
13    Mark:          (he-e-e) ((not laughter))
14                    (.)
15    Mark:          It's suppose t'be on ye:h.
16    Lesley:        Ye:s. .p.hhh ↑Okay the:n,hh
```

In line 11 Lesley suggests that if the dance is not on they should go to a pub (called the 'Cat Ash'). The design of the component suggests this may not be conveyed in an entirely serious manner. As with a number of instances of these ambivalently playful turns, a rather delicate action is done in a forthright way. Rather than being designed as a suggestion (e.g. 'we could all go..' or 'shall we go..') it has a more definite form, 'we'll all go'. This is particularly forthright given that Mark has offered her a lift and would therefore have a kind of 'host' role. Thus, it is possible that this is the kind of object that might be followed by laughter in the third turn. However, there is no laughter. After an extended pause and some possible breathiness from Mark, he responds by aligning with the first part of her turn (i.e. 'Well let's hope it's on'). He does not orient to her suggestion, but his inclusion of 'let's hope' implies that her suggestion is undesirable. Thus, laughter at line 16 may well seem ill fitted; it may be heard as orienting to Mark's response rather than indexing her playful suggestion.

Thus, while laughter does link back to the first turn, it is also responsive to the prior turn. However, the exact nature of its relationship varies. In instances where recipients produce a serious response to the first turn, the laughter disaligns with the play trajectory.

(11) Homes by the sea/More 4/6/11/14
(From a TV programme about property. The presenter, A, talks to a couple about plans for building holiday lets.)
```
1      A:     B't they're very ni:ce
2             (0.6)
3      A:1→   I'll come and stay in them when they're done. ((Serious expression,
4             looking down at laptop))
5      B:2→   °Brilliant°
6      A:3→   >huh huh huh< ((sits back, looks towards couple))
```

(1) [Detail]
```
8      C:1→           now is this normal with ((company name)) nowadays=
9      E:2→           =no wh- [wha-
10     C:3→                   [.hh HEH HEH HEH HE=
11     E:             £n(h)o sh- [we'd (still     ) you first Mr Brown£
12     C:                        [HE HE HE HE
```

In these extracts the laughter orients to the playful turns and does not align with the serious responses: in (11) B orients to the prior turn as a genuine offer or request to stay, while in (1) E orients to the prior turn as a question about procedures. As shown above, in (1) E follows C's laughter with a turn in which he does orient to playful aspects of the first turn (line 11). Thus, C's laughter in line 10, which is non-aligned with E's serious response may prompt him to produce a turn which aligns with playful aspects of the sequence.

However, in instances where the recipient's response is more elaborate and playful it is possible that the laughter orients to both turns as laughable and thus aligns with the play frame begun in the first turn and continued in the second.

(4)[Detail]
```
7      Lesley:                    [((sniff))       [ .mt [↑WELL I'LL
8                      ↑haf to ↓come I've bought myself a new
9                      skirt in Newca[stle.
10     Hal:                          [Oh you- (.) ih
11                     Tha' would be ↓lovel[y,
12     Lesley:→                            [hHehh hah[ hah  hah  a a h]    [.u
```

(8)[Detail]
```
4      Beth:                                        [↑(  ) wonder if
5                      you'd like the honor'v a visit.
```

6	Lesley:	.hhhh ↑Oh ↓ye:s, yes yes ↑ye[s
7	Beth: →	[hh-hheh

In (4) Lesley's extended laughter may orient both to her prior playful turn and Hal's more ambiguously playful response, aligning with the playfulness present in both frames. Similarly, in (8) Beth's brief laugh may orient to, and align with, Lesley's enthusiastic response as well as her playful request.

This ambiguous relationship between the laughter and its target is interactionally beneficial in that serious work is accomplished before the two turns are treated as laughables. Thus, for example, in (9) Beth's request is made and accepted before laughter orients to playful aspects of the sequence. A further interactional advantage of the relationship occurs in instances of some non-alignment or disaffiliation between speakers. In such cases the laughter may be highly responsive to the second turn while also orienting to playful aspects of the first turn. By laughing the speaker emphasizes the playfulness of the sequence. In an investigation of laughter in job interviews, Glenn (2013) analysed the following instance which includes a potentially playful turn and same-speaker laughter following the recipient's response. His analysis suggests that the laughter is highly responsive to the second turn.

(13)[I, 3, 22:34]
(Jill is the interviewer for a publishing company)
1	JILL:	and if you ever wanted to move up quickly
2		within the company you could always go the
3		development route where you did- don't need to
4		go into outside sales .hh or if you did wanna
5		become like an editorial director some day and
6		really like [just manage a whole list.]
7		[((arms open wide, smiling))]
8	ALAN:	W'you know I- I noticed that the um one a the-
9		one a the presidents: at Carson Ed did graduate
10		UCC Campus [with an A]merican Studies degree
11	JILL:	[Mm hm↑]
12	ALAN:1→	[so:] it's not- it's ↑not out of the question
13	JILL:	[Mhm↑]
14	ALAN:1→	question that [one] day I'll be running
15	JILL:	[Yeah]
16	ALAN1→:	the show=
17	JILL: 2→	=Yeah
18→	ALAN:3→	Uhhuh[uh]
19	JILL:	[And] if you're running the show you need
20		to have sales experience

In lines 8 to 10 Alan displays knowledge of the company by saying he noticed that one of the directors did the same course. He then goes on to make a comparison between them by saying that he could one day be "running the show". As Glenn points out, Jill's

response in line 17 is minimal and repeats her previous response in line 15 without upgrading it, thus it "accepts but does not appreciate Alan's claim" (Glenn, 2013: p. 267).

> Alan's laughs invite a reframing of his statement, after Jill's serious and discouraging response. His talk may be heard as overdone self-assessment: she has proposed that he might someday 'manage a whole list'; he has responded that he might one day be 'running the show'. Furthermore, Jill's prior turn proposed that he consider going into sales; his misaligned response leapt to a fantasy of running the company. (P. 267)

Thus, according to Glenn, the laughter in line 18 operates "post-hoc on potential interactional trouble", and is therefore highly responsive to Jill's turn, but reframes his prior turn as non-serious. The potential to be reframed as a laughable, however, lies in the playfulness of Alan's turn Lines 14 and 16). In similar fashion to several of the instances in the collection, 'running the whole show' is overstated and idiomatic. Thus, although the laughter is highly responsive to Jill's turn at line 17, it also exploits playful aspects of the prior contribution. So, in instances of interactional trouble, laughter may orient to a turn as non-serious in light of the recipient's response while exploiting playful aspects of the prior turn.

Unlike many turns at talk, the laughter in these sequences does not straightforwardly orient to the just prior turn. It links back to the first turn, framing it as a laughable, but also orients to the just prior turn. Where the recipient has responded with a serious response the laughter may disalign with this trajectory. Where the response is playful the laughter aligns with the non-seriousness of both turns, celebrating and explicitly evoking the play frame.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on Bateson's (1972) analogy, in the sequences presented here the 'bite' is both playful and serious, it is responded to seriously, or in a similarly ambivalent manner, then its playful aspects are celebrated. Part of the complexity of the sequences comes from the overlaying of actions: serious actions such as acceptances, requests, announcements, and complaints are packaged in ambivalently playful ways. Elements of the first turns suggest their playfulness, such as exaggeration, overstatement, formal language, aggrandizement and unreal claims. But rather than not retaining their usual sequential implications, these turns do invite responses that provide the relevant next (e.g. as a question, a request or a suggestion). So recipients are presented with options in terms of responding to these playful first turns. They can align with playful aspects, or with serious elements, or both. Laughter in the third turns links back to first turns, explicitly framing them as laughable. But it also responds to second turns. Where the second turns are playful it aligns with both turns, but where the second turns are serious it disaligns, evoking the play frame incipient in the initial turns.

The ambivalence of these sequences has several interactional benefits. They enable participants to tackle actions in a playful way while still retaining some seriousness (thus 'biting' and playing at the same time). So, delicate actions such as complaining (extract 1), teasing after a co-participant 'going on' about something (extract 7), asking to visit (extract 8), are managed in ways that are more socially cohesive than had they been done

seriously. In the case of accepting an invitation (extract 4) and offering to rent holiday accommodation (extract 11), doing them playfully might mean the speaker is less culpable if these commitments do not materialize. Further, their ambivalent nature allows speakers to perform several actions at the same time (with more or less degrees of explicitness). Thus, in (8) Beth can both request a visit while at the same time nodding to the cheekiness of her self-invitation. In (9) Nancy can announce her raise while at the same time implicitly complaining about its derisory amount.

Analysis of these sequences suggests a basis for a technical understanding of playfulness. Playful turns invite their relevant sequential nexts. 'Playing along' involves orienting to the prior turn as retaining its usual sequential relevancies while simultaneously orienting to playful aspects. This may be seen most clearly in sequences of extended and elaborate playfulness, where, for example, participants collaborate to create hypothetical scenarios (Holt, 2007). It also provides the basis for distinguishing between playfulness and non-seriousness in technical terms. While playful turns invite their sequentially relevant nexts, non-serious turns (for instance, turns that have playful elements, occur in certain sequential positions [e.g. at topic termination (Holt, 2010)] and have turn-final laughter) may invite laughter or some other orientation to their non-seriousness (Holt, 2011). Thus, treating a prior turn as non-serious involves responding with laughter or some other orientation to it in terms other than its serious sequential implications.[6] Consequently technical use of the term 'playful' invites consideration of the packaging of turns and actions; while 'non-serious' invites consideration of whether the turns do what they might otherwise be treated as doing (complaining, requesting, etc.). However, this is not to say that there is not much overlap between these in interaction. In interaction participants collaborate in producing sequences whereby they are playful and non-serious and orient to these through laughter moment by moment to create rich, complex and multifaceted talk.

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[2] By 'larger collection' I mean all the instances of laughter in interaction, of which the current collection is a subset.

[3] This is not to say that turn completion laughter always acts as an invitation. Rather, laughter - along with other aspects of a turn's environment and design - may coalesce to make the laughter likely to be treated as such (Holt, 2011). Laughter accompanying a turn with other playful elements is likely to be treated as an invitation to laugh.

[4] It is interesting to note that Hal repeats 'should've' in his response, perhaps suggesting that he is struck by the term and endorses its use.

[5] The fact that laughter from the recipient of the playful turn is unusual in the corpus provides evidence that the speaker's laughter is not similar to repair on the recipient's prior turn. In other words, a possible import of the laughter is that it orients to the recipient's response as inappropriately serious and invites a less serious response in the form of laughter. However, recipients do not generally appear to orient to that laughter as such as they rarely laugh following the laughter.

[6] Recurrently in interaction turns are ambivalently serious and non-serious and responses orient to both these by, for example, an agreement plus laughter (Holt, 2013).