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DIPLOMARBEIT

“Of geeks and nerds –
Do conversation and phatic communion take place
in a natural way in the sitcom
The Big Bang Theory?”

Verfasserin

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1 Introduction

Conversation analysis as developed by Harvey Sacks focuses on the investigation of recurring patterns in naturally occurring speech encounters. (cf. Asher 1994a: 749-750; Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998: 17f.) Thus, in the majority of cases, conversation analysis is applied exclusively to natural conversation, such as face-to-face interactions and telephone calls. Most widely known in the latter domain is Sacks et al.'s analysis of incoming telephone calls at an American suicide prevention centre. Despite the significance of such research, they may be suggestive of conversation analysis being devised exclusively for these naturally occurring verbal interactions. What is rather neglected, however, is the investigation of scripted and represented talk as occurring in television productions. The latter, as is claimed in this thesis, can be equally investigated according to the principles of natural talk. The negligence of scripted conversation in conversation analysis may stem from the intuitive assumption that television language use is unrealistic in any case and that thus it might not be worth the effort to investigate it in the same way as real speech encounters. Although such assumptions are comprehensible because television programmes are *productions* and that thus they might be entirely artificial, this thesis is not influenced by such prejudices. Thus, the investigation is free from all speculations regarding its outcomes. This is crucial as only then one can remain open to new, potentially surprising insights that can be gained on the basis of the analysis. In addition, this thesis sets out to bridge the gap between natural and unnatural talk as it considers them as being not more or less than two distinct ways of realizations of conversation. Realistic and artificial language use are treated similarly throughout the analysis in order to warrant an examination as uncommitted as possible.

As was mentioned before, the analysis of scripted talk is a rare area in the application of conversation analysis. However, attention should be drawn to one inspiring pioneer in this area, Paulo Quaglio. In *Television dialogue: the sitcom "Friends" vs. natural conversation*, published in 2009, he impressively investigates the situation comedy *Friends* and compares it to natural talk. It is

the approach adopted in this work that strongly influenced the development and the consecutive formulation of the research interest of this thesis. Quaglio's research and my investigation of the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* are similar in that both aim at comparing a series to natural talk. Quaglio, however, examines amongst other things concrete linguistic choices and their implications while I refrain from doing so in my thesis due to a slightly different focus. My intention is to provide an overall insight to language use rather than a detailed account of selected linguistic phenomena.

In the area of television programmes analysis, many works are devised from a media studies approach. Examples for this are Dona Cooper's *Writing great screenplays for film and TV* (1994), Jürgen Wolff's *Sitcom: ein Handbuch für Autoren: Tricks, Tips und Techniken* (1997), Andrew Horton's *Writing the character-centered screenplay* (1994) and Evan Smith's *Writing television sitcoms* (1999). As the titles indicate, these works almost exclusively are production oriented, meaning that they are designed for prospective screenplay authors. Valuable as they are, in focusing only on television and situation comedy in specific from the angle of production, they exhibit a one-way, partial point of view. What they do not incorporate is a consumer-oriented approach that would provide both layperson, such as television viewers, and professionals, such as linguists, with an analysis of those productions already existent. The results provided in this thesis contribute to compensate the lack of consumer orientation in that it should enable consumers – active television audiences and experts in the field of linguistics and media studies – to critically reflect on the realism and the constructedness of television productions. Additionally, by focussing on language usage, the analysis is linguistic in nature and therefore it balances and complements the media studies approach that frequently takes precedence in the area of television genre investigations.

The thesis is organized into three parts, the first of which sets out the theoretical framework concerning conversation, conversation analysis and phatic communion. This part is devised in such a way that it leads the reader from general discussions concerning conversation to concrete principles of conversation analysis, according to which one can examine speech encounters. Here, explicit reference will be made to Sacks, Schegloff and

Jefferson, who are considered the main contributors to the development of conversation analysis. The chapter on phatic communion focuses on a specific area of conversation, namely the marginal phases of speech encounters that frequently are referred to as ‘small talk’. In this area, Bronisław Malinowski was most influential in providing a clear definition of what phatic talk implies. Similarly to conversation, phatic communion can be analyzed with reference to various principles, all of which will be discussed at length in the first part of the thesis.

The second part gives an overview of situation comedy and the series *The Big Bang Theory* as the latter will be subject to investigation in the last section of the thesis. Additionally, the current part includes more general aspects regarding television, television genres and television language so as to provide a more comprehensive view of situation comedy as an area of media production.

The third part comprises the analysis of the situation comedy *The Big Bang Theory* according to the principles elucidated in the first part of the thesis. Nevertheless, discussions of the results of individual analytical points will comprise explicit references to the input provided in the second part as well. The analysis will focus on three main areas: turn taking, adjacency pairs and phatic communion. The results of these individual analytical steps are incorporated in the respective chapters in the form of conclusions although a general discussion of the outcomes and the implications of the results will follow in the last chapter.

PART I Theoretical Framework

2 Conversation

2.1 Conversation versus discourse

Sometimes it seems as if the terms ‘conversation’ and ‘discourse’ were not utterly clear to those using them. Consequently, they tend to confound the terms. In order to avoid such incorrect usages, the following definitions of ‘conversation’ and ‘discourse’ will help separate the two notions from each other more clearly.

According to Allen and Guy (1974: 11), conversation can be defined as follows:

> Conversation is the primary basis of direct social relations between persons. As a process occurring in real time, conversation consti-tutes a reciprocal and rhythmic interchange of verbal emissions. It is a sharing process which develops a common social experience.

As this definition does not give any concrete information about the number of people involved in conversation, one might add that a conversation “involves verbal exchange between two persons, although more than two persons may participate” (Allen & Guy 1974: 30). What becomes clear, however, from the above definition of conversation, is that this concept refers to a specific type of interaction between people. When talking to each other, the interlocutors are in a direct relationship with each other, meaning that conversation takes place in real time and that the speakers usually are in the same place. This is what makes up the social aspect of conversation. As concerns the way in which the participants in a conversation interact with each other, the definition implies that they contribute to a more or less equal extent to the overall verbal exchange and that each person’s contribution relies on a previous contribution. Therefore, a conversation is made up of reciprocal utterances. In saying that in a conversation the interlocutors exchange their ideas in a ‘rhythmic’ way, the definition also implies that a conversation has an underlying structure. This refers to facts such as that the interlocutors make contributions alternately and that speaker change

happens according to specific patterns. For example, the participants of a conversation seem to know when it is appropriate to say something and what they are required to say in certain situations. Therefore, conversation is not as unstructured and undefined as one might think.

In contrast to conversation, discourse is defined as ‘language use’ or ‘language-in-use’. This definition, however, only applies to discourse when the term is used as a mass noun, i.e. when it carries no article. When used as a count noun (‘a discourse’ or ‘the discourse’), it usually refers to a concrete set of language use in specific contexts. An example for this would be “the medical discourses of the middle ages“ (Asher 1994a: 940). In linguistics, the term ‘discourse’ means “*connected* speech or writing occurring at suprasentential levels (at levels greater than the single sentence)“ (Asher 1994a: 940). Therefore, one also speaks of discourse as being a text. Other approaches equalize discourse with various other concepts. The critical approach, for example, considers discourse as power or knowledge. Another definition for conversation is provided by the empirical sociological approach. The latter characterizes discourse as conversation and it due to this equalization that one might consider this definition as most problematic from the point of view of linguistics. (cf. Asher 1994a: 940) Furthermore, it is possibly this approach, which leads to confusion amongst various people. They might - although this is inappropriate in linguistics – be tempted to use the terms discourse and conversation interchangeably.

For linguists it is important to bear in mind that discourse can both be written and spoken. The most important characteristic of discourse, however, is that it is the product of language use. When comparing discourse to conversation, one can say that the latter is by definition an oral phenomenon. It refers to direct verbal exchanges between people and thus it includes aspects of how the interlocutors behave in such situations. Nevertheless, one has to point out that discourse possibly can become part of a conversation. Discourse refers to ‘language use’ or ‘connected speech’ and thus a longer connected utterance of one participant in a conversation might be referred to as discourse. However, conversation generally relies on the interaction of the participating speakers and so it is more interesting to examine how two or more people contribute to a conversation, i.e. how the speakers construct the

conversation. As a consequence, language as an isolated product (as a text or as connected speech) is not at the centre of interest in this thesis.

2.2 Speaking versus writing

One can distinguish between two different ways of language production: spoken and written. The comparison of these two types of language output might help comprehend some important characteristics of spoken language more easily. The understanding of these characteristics sets the basis for the considerations of conversation and conversation analysis that will follow in later chapters.

Paralinguistics

To begin with, a speaker always has the possibility to use additional effects concerning his/her voice, for example in order to change or support the meaning of the words that s/he employs. These effects belong to the 'voice quality' and thus they are part of the domain of paralinguistics. The field of paralinguistics is also concerned with gestures and facial expressions as well as with postural systems (i.e. the positioning of the speakers while they talk to each other). With the help of all these paralinguistic features, a speaker can achieve shades of meanings, create humour, express an attitude towards something etc. The writer, however, has no such possibility. S/he only has the letters and words as tools in order to produce an output. (cf. Brown & Yule 1983: 4)

Time

Another issue that is relevant to a speaker is the one of time. As Cornbleet & Carter (2001: 26) put it, "[m]ost everyday conversation is spontaneous, unplanned and unrehearsed". Because of this spontaneity, each of the participants in a conversation constantly has to monitor what is going on in the conversation, i.e. s/he has to reflect on his/her past contribution as well as on the reception of the contribution by the interlocutors. The speaker might for example ask him/herself 'What do the others think of what I just

said?' or 'Have I touched upon a difficult issue here?'. At the same time, s/he possibly has to produce a new utterance. In addition, the speaker already has to think ahead and plan what s/he will say after the current contribution. Thus, the interlocutors are permanently required to reflect on what they say as well as on how their verbal contributions are interpreted by the other participants of the conversation. This implies that a conversation takes place under more demanding conditions than the process of writing a text. (cf. Brown & Yule 1983: 4-5)

Structure

An aspect that is closely connected to time is structure. While a writer has enough time to rethink his/her ideas and to arrange or rearrange them, the speaker has no such possibility. The listeners will perceive everything a speaker says and the respective utterances cannot be deleted afterwards. Moreover, a speaker, unlike a writer, usually has no record of what has been said already in the ongoing conversation. S/he cannot go back and check the exact words that s/he or any other speaker has used. Because of this, speakers for example might repeat or reformulate something in order to make a point clear or to connect previous utterances with a current idea. Therefore, the utterances in a conversation might be considered less structured. The reason for this is the time pressure under which speakers formulate their utterances. They have only a limited amount of time to say something and thus speaking might be considered less ordered than writing. (cf. Brown & Yule 1983: 5)

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that an oral exchange is unstructured. Halliday (1989: 77) claims: "The disorderly appearance of speech is an artefact of the way it is transcribed". From this quote, one can deduce that speech, at the moment of its performance, does not appear unstructured either to the speaker him/herself or to the listener. Only when a piece of oral language, such as a videotape, is transcribed, it starts to appear unstructured because of all the hesitation markers, repetitions etc. that become visible in the transcript. This means that a piece of transcribed speech might look 'formless' although there is still a structure behind what has been said. Halliday argues that this formlessness is the result of the

simple fact that oral language is not intended to be written down. When a speaker says something, s/he usually does not consider the possibility that everything, i.e. each pause, each repetition etc., might be noted down meticulously. Thus, Halliday stresses that speech usually is meant to stay an oral product just as a piece of writing normally is not intended to be read out aloud as if it were normal speech. It would simply not be authentic. (cf. Halliday 1989: 76-77)

Observation and feedback

Something that a speaker can use for his/her advantage is the permanent observation and feedback that is taking place in a conversation. This means that s/he can observe the interlocutors, interpret their contributions, gestures and mimics in order to produce relevant utterances. For example, if s/he realizes that what s/he has just said has not been fully understood by the listener, s/he can reformulate or explain the utterance. Therefore, the observation of the interlocutor's reaction to the contribution helps to make the conversation more effective, i.e. to avoid communicational problems. The aspect of observation, however, can also be considered a disadvantage on certain occasions. Possibly one of the participants reveals his/her personal reaction (e.g. disagreement, refusal, rejection) to a speaker's contribution without intending to do so. The interlocutors probably do not expect such a high degree of openness and therefore they might be amazed or even feel offended. It is imaginable that this may have a negative impact on the conversation and the relationship between the speakers as a whole. (cf. Brown & Yule 1983: 4-5) In addition to the interpretation of the interlocutor's reaction, one might also consider the possibility of explicit feedback. Speakers have the possibility to ask another speaker directly for clarification or they can seek the interlocutor's approval or doubt. In contrast to this, a writer has no access to such feedback. S/he does not know how the reader will react and so the writer cannot adapt to this reaction. Therefore, instant interaction between the interlocutors is an advantage inherent to conversation.

Interaction

An obvious, though noteworthy aspect distinguishes speaking from writing: whereas writing is something we can do by ourselves and thus without a partner whom we address, a verbal interaction only functions if there are at least two persons present. This requirement of a minimum of two interlocutors implies that the two speakers normally behave in a certain way so that the conversation does not break down. It is claimed that their verbal exchange functions according to the basic principle of turn taking. This means, that each speaker contributes alternately to the conversation, for example by responding to a previous question. Usually, a conversation works automatically, meaning that turn taking is a natural feature of conversation and that the speakers stick to this principle unconsciously. Furthermore, it is to say that the system of turn taking normally does not fail. Hence, gaps or overlaps of speech do not appear in disproportionate manners or quantities. (cf. Cornbleet & Carter 2001: 27)

Interaction also refers to the relationship between the participants of a conversation and the relationship that a writer has to the audience that s/he might address. To begin with, speakers interact in real time and very often they are in direct contact with each other (for example, telephone conversations would be an exception). Thus, the speakers can observe the other persons and they can get instant feedback during the conversation. This, however, has already been referred to in the previous chapter. In contrast to this, a writer has no such direct relationship to the audience. What a writer notes down in one place at a certain point in time might be read by somebody many years later and in a country far away from where the written output was produced. Thus, a writer usually does not share either time or space with his/her audience. Tannen (1982: 45) distinguishes between two types of relationships: the relationship between the interlocutors of a conversation on the one hand and the relationship between the writer and his/her audience on the other hand. She claims that the first type of relationship is characterised by ‘involvement’ and that the latter is defined by ‘detachment’. Thus, she defines the distances between the producers (speaker, writer) and the audience (listener, reader) as either close or distant.

Function

Brown & Yule (1983) do not only discuss the differences between spoken and written output with regard to their production but they also claim that speaking and writing can be distinguished due to their different functions. They claim that a person, who writes something down, usually does so in order to convey information to somebody else. Brown & Yule call this "working out of and transference of information" the transactional use of language. Speaking, on the other hand, is perceived to have an interactional function because it is predominantly used for the "establishment and maintenance of human relationships" (Brown & Yule 1983: 13). Nevertheless, it is important to note that oral language use, i.e. speaking, can have the function of conveying detailed information as well. For example, in a lecture a professor talks in front of a certain number of students in order to familiarize them with input on a certain topic. Another example would be the frequently quoted doctor-patient interaction in which the patient informs the doctor about the symptoms. This kind of information can be very detailed and factual as well. For Brown & Yule the interesting point about this oral conveyance of factual information is that the listener often takes notes of what s/he is told. In the example of the lecture that has been mentioned above, the students normally write down at least parts of the information they gain from the professor in the lecture and during a doctor-patient interaction the doctor is likely to note down the patient's symptoms, possibly in order to remember them correctly and to provide an accurate diagnosis. This whole notion of writing down what one is being told hints at what Brown & Yule claim to be the biggest difference between speaking and writing: writing allows us to make language last, whereas speech as such cannot be preserved. Hence, oral language output is considered transitory whereas written language output is claimed to be permanent. (cf. Brown & Yule 1983: 13-14)

2.3 Conversational bond

Especially one thing should have been made clear by the preceding chapters: conversation is characterized by its social aspect. There is a direct relationship between the participating speakers. This relationship enables the speakers to aim at a consensus which means that the speakers all try to understand each other and to achieve a common understanding. For example, when talking about the plans for the weekend, the speakers in a conversation might try to decide together what they want to do and so each of them might propose one activity and argue for what s/he would like to do best. It is with the help of the interaction between the speakers that they are able to decide on one plan, i.e. to achieve a consensus. When such a consensus or common understanding has been reached, one can say that the speakers have created a mental union amongst each other. This mental union can be called a 'conversational bond', which is characterized by three different aspects, namely "mental, physical and social properties" (Allen & Guy 1974: 11). Therefore, one might say that the participants in a conversation can get closer mentally, physically and socially.

Mental aspects

The creation of a mental bond between the speakers depends on a common set of language and vocabulary. Only if people share words and expressions, can they communicate their ideas efficiently. The most obvious example for this is that two people have to speak the same language because otherwise they will not understand each other. With relation to this, it is important to note that this shared knowledge concerning language is not static but it develops and enlarges through the exchange between the speakers. Each person learns something from the others and thus everybody can enlarge his/her scope of language use. Furthermore, interaction and conversation can lead to the general change of how, for example, certain words are used or what they are associated with within a group of people. For instance, the members of the group might start to use a word in a different sense than another group would do. The general result of the exchange between speakers is an extension of the individuals' language skills as well as a mental approximation between the speakers. For

example, one speaker understands better what another interlocutor wants to say because both share certain expressions. Hence, the speakers achieve a ‘common consciousness’, i.e. an agreement about the meaning of the language they use.

Physical aspects

The physical aspect of the conversational bond is particularly characterized by rules and restrictions. The speakers have a certain physical position to each other and they are not allowed to stand closer or more distant than defined and accepted by convention. In addition to that, the positions, which the interlocutors can adopt, are limited and they only have a restricted set of movements and physical contact at their disposal so as to support the verbal contact during the conversation.

Social aspects

When two or more people group together for a verbal exchange, they are in a social relation to each other and they are subjects to “rules of interaction” (Allen & Guy 1974: 12). The speakers are required to obey these rules in order to establish and uphold the conversation, i.e. the temporary social contact. Social aspects, however, also include longer relations between the interlocutors such as family relationships, friendship etc. A conversation contributes to such existing relationships as it becomes a part of them and modifies them. One can thus say that the current conversation “becomes a part of the social history of the individual actors” (Allen & Guy 1974: 12). For example, when two friends meet and talk about their plans to go on holiday together, this conversation has an impact on their future relationship. What they agree on now will possibly become the basis for future interactions. (cf. Allen & Guy 1974: 12-13)

The mental, physical and social aspects of the conversational bond are related to what one might call a joint production (cf. Andersen 2001). Conversation is a social event and thus the participating speakers need to collaborate and cooperate. Andersen (2001: 76) considers conversation as more than simply an interaction by claiming that conversation can be regarded “as a product of the joint efforts of both (all) participants”. This

shows that conversation can only take place if the speakers work together to at least some degree and that they need to make joint efforts to achieve a certain outcome.

2.4 Goals in conversation

In the previous chapter that concentrated on the functions of speaking and writing, an allusion has been made to the transactional and interactional use of language. This division has initially been made by Brown & Yule (1983: 13). They claim that speaking predominantly serves an interactional function whereas writing mostly is used in order to fulfil a transactional purpose. Cheepen (1988: 3f.) borrows this division between transactional and interactional functions of language use. However, she applies this distinction only to speech encounters, disregarding writing altogether. The transactional and interactional use of language, according to Cheepen (1988), can be used as indicators of the two major goals of speech encounters. She claims that a conversation can either have an interactional or a transactional goal.

Transactional goal

A conversation has a transactional goal when the speakers talk to each other in order to achieve an external change, i.e. an external goal. For example, the interlocutors might interact with each other because they want someone – possibly one or more persons who take part in the conversation – to do something. In short, they want the conversation to have a certain effect “on the ‘outside’ world” (Cheepen 1988: 3).

Interactional goal

A speech encounter with an interactional goal is focused on the participants of the conversation and not on the outside world. The aim of such a conversation is ‘internal’ to the participants and thus it does not concern anyone outside their interaction. One could also say that this type of speech encounter takes place for the sake of “the INTERPERSONAL world, or the relationship between speaker and hearer” (Cheepen 1988: 3). Cheepen

argues that it is neither useful nor possible to classify single utterances or whole conversations according to a transactional or an interactional goal because frequently there can be a mix of both goals. However, she notes that in a speech encounter usually one of the two goals prevails, i.e. that a conversation is either predominantly interactional or predominantly transactional in nature. Cheepen gives the example of a conversation between a shop assistant and a customer. It is customary that such a verbal exchange contains for example expressions of politeness. However, the overall function of such an exchange is to buy (from the point of view of the customer) or to sell (from the point of view of the shop assistant) goods. Therefore, one could say that this conversation normally is transactional in nature although some individual utterances in it might be interactional. (cf. Cheepen 1988: 3, 22-23)

2.5 Conversation as dyadic interaction

Conversation between groups is common but the far more typical case probably is conversation between exactly two individuals. In order to define the conversation between two people, Allen and Guy (1974: 26f.) use the term ‘dyadic interaction’. Concerning the beginning and the end of such a conversation, they write:

> The conversational dyad begins when two persons concentrate attention and behavior on their mutual verbal interchange and terminates when the focus of action of either participant is trans-ferred to something outside the system of immediate verbal inter-course. (Allen & Guy 1974: 27)

This means that the interlocutors come together to exchange ideas. For the time of the interaction, the speakers concentrate on the verbal exchange and in order for the interaction not to be interrupted, the interlocutors stick to two basic rules. First, they create an action boundary, meaning that they ignore all external influences with the help of the ‘exclusion principle’. Their joint focus is on the verbal exchange and they ignore everything else. Second, they jointly concentrate on the topic of their conversation. This

becomes obvious when considering that the speakers produce “successive cycles of verbal interchange” (Allen & Guy 1974: 27). Thus, the interlocutors interact with each other about a topic and they develop this topic together by formulating successive utterances. (cf. Allen & Guy 1974: 26-30) The issue of topic in conversation, however, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

2.6 Topic in conversation

Wardhaugh (1985: 139f.) uses the term ‘topic’ for referring to the subject of a conversation. He states that it is a matter of impossibility to provide a concrete definition for the term ‘topic’ that would apply precisely to the domain of verbal encounters. Therefore, he does not intend to be more specific about it. For him – and for the understanding of this thesis – it is enough to know that ‘topic’ refers to what people talk about in a conversation.

The topic of a conversation usually is not made explicit amongst the participating speakers, i.e. they do not verbally label the subject of communication, in for example, saying ‘At the moment, we are talking about shoes.’ In addition to that, they do not agree what they are going to talk about before actually starting to speak about it. The topic develops in the course of the conversation. Because of this implicitness of the topic, each speaker needs to infer the subject of the conversation by him/herself by considering the contents of the individual utterances.

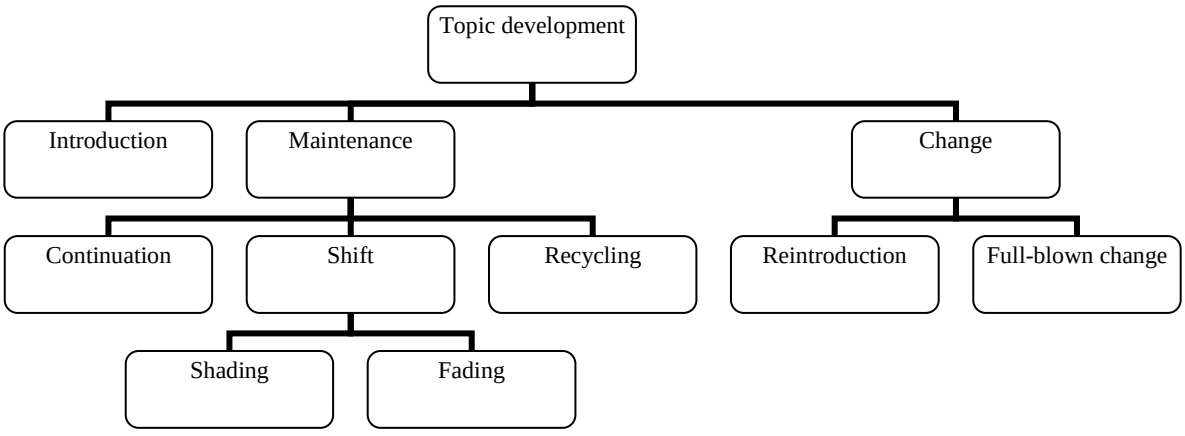
What a group of speakers talk about depends on the group itself, i.e. its constellation and the individual speakers’ characteristics. Some speakers, may “have no reservations either about topic or manner of discussion” (Wardhaugh 1985:140) whereas others might be influenced in their linguistic performance due to formal or informal restrictions. Such restrictions can for example be “official ‘rules of order’, with certain kinds of procedures and language prohibited” (Wardhaugh 1985: 140). Apart from these official restrictions, there might be unofficial or cultural reservations such as taboos. A taboo may concern both the topic and the language used in the

conversation. For example, sex and politics very often are considered inappropriate topics to be discussed. Concerning taboos in language use one can say that people very often try not to say anything that could be offensive in any way. Possibly, the speakers also do not want to talk about a subject because of embarrassment. They either do not want to mortify themselves or any other participant of the conversation.

Speakers contribute to the development of a topic by creating 'topical', i.e. topic related, utterances.[1] These topical utterances, however, depend on the individual speaker's interpretation of what is relevant for the current topic. This can mean that a topic develops into a different direction than expected because one or the other speaker might say something that – although it still is related to the current subject – leads away from the present issue. One could thus say that an individual speaker can never keep a topic under control because each of the participants might form utterances that might change it. The topic is rather the joint result of all of the speakers' utterances and it undergoes constant change through these contributions. (cf. Wardhaugh 1945: 139f.)

A very useful and clear description of how a topic is developed in a conversation is provided by Gardner (1984: 113, quoted in Schneider 1988: 86f.).

Figure 1: Model of topic development



[1] For further information on 'talking topically' and its realizations in conversation, see Sacks & Jefferson (ed.) (1992a: 752f.).

Figure 1 indicates how a topic is dealt with in a conversation. After a topic has been introduced, it can either be maintained or changed by the speakers. The former can happen in three major ways: continuation, shift and recycling. Continuing a topic is probably the most obvious way of how a group of speakers can retain one subject. They simply stick to the current issue. Another type of maintenance, recycling, refers to the possibility that one speaker revives a topic although the same topic is already almost exhausted. The speaker may go back to a previous aspect of the subject matter and talk about it again. Thus, s/he brings the topic back to the centre of the conversation. According to Gardner (1984: 113), however, the most common way of maintaining a topic is shifting. This can happen according to two principles. First, the speakers can shade the topic, i.e. they can broaden the subject area. For example, when talking about universities, the speakers can shade the topic to the issue of education in general. Second, the speakers can also fade, which means that they slowly move away from the current topic towards a different, new subject. Gardner (1984: 113) also claims that the notion of fading is the one that is closest to the concept of changing a topic, which is represented on the third branch of the above figure. The participants of a conversation can change the current topic by what Gardner calls a reintroduction and a full-blown change. Reintroducing a topic means that a subject that has already been replaced by a different one, is taken up again later in the conversation. Thus, it is different from recycling because in the case of reintroduction there is for example an outside event or a different topic that separates the initial subject matter and its subsequent reintroduction. Finally, the topic can also be fully changed when a completely different issue at once becomes the central topic of the conversation.

A slightly different way of looking at how topics are developed in a conversation is to distinguish

> between *stepwise* topical movement in which one topic flows into another and *boundaried* topical movement in which the closure of one topic is followed by the initiation of another. (Atkinson & Heritage 1989: 165)

When comparing Gardner's (1984) model with the two-fold approach of stepwise and boundaried topical movement, one could note that shading and fading a topic (i.e. shift) corresponds to the notion of a stepwise alteration of a topic whereas reintroduction and full-blown change (i.e. change) would match with the notion of a boundaried movement.

Unimportant which of the two approaches outlined above is preferred, the comparison of them shows that there seems to be a consensus with regard to how speakers tend to handle topics in a conversation because both models refer to the same types of topic changes. However, Gardner groups 'shift' within the maintenance of a topic although the topic still is changed, at least to some extent. One could thus say that Gardner considers a stepwise change of the current topic as a temporary maintenance of the topic, whereas Atkinson & Heritage classify it more clearly as a change.

This chapter has been about speaking and conversation in general. The subsequent section will go into more detail in this domain and it will thus be about the analysis of conversation. This chapter, together with the one on phatic communion, can be considered the most important theoretical input for the analysis of the situation comedy 'The Big Bang Theory' that will form the last part of this paper.

3 Conversation analysis

3.1 Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis

Ethnomethodology

Asher (1994b: 1161) defines ethnomethodology as the study of

> the *methods* actually practiced (used) by *members* of society for accomplishing (doing) whatever it is they are doing (including their ways of talking about whatever it is they are doing).

Ethnomethodology is thus interested in the methods that people use to fulfil actions and to achieve practical goals. It identifies, describes and consequently analyzes these methods. The term ‘ethnomethodology’ by definition refers to people who are members of a group (hence, ‘ethno’) that makes use of certain methods (hence, ‘methodology’) in order to be able to act in a certain way in social situations.

Ethnomethodology belongs to the area of social sciences because it considers the world as a social reality. This social reality, as ethnomethodology argues, is created through people’s actions and utterances. People always try to interpret and make meaning out of these actions and utterances. This particular behaviour, i.e. the handling of actions and utterances, contributes to the creation of the social situation or the social reality. Thus, one could say that people’s actions and utterances as well as the interpretation thereof construct social reality. In addition to that, people are said to always act with relation to the current situation or context, meaning that human action does not only reflect the present situation or context but also that the action depends on them.

Harold Garfinkel can be considered the founder of ethnomethodology. He was probably the first who was interested in how people (‘members’) “make sense of the social world”. (Asher 1994b: 1161) Garfinkel collaborated intensely with Harvey Sacks, the latter of whom continued their work and developed, together with Emanuel Schegloff, conversation analysis. Thus, conversation analysis nowadays could be regarded as the most influential

and most significant branch of ethnomethodology. (cf. Asher 1994b: 1160-1161)

Conversation analysis

According to Crystal (1992: 84), conversation analysis (hereafter also referred to as CA) refers to "[t]he analysis of the methods people use to engage in conversation and other forms of social interaction involving speech". This means that CA is interested in how people behave in situations in which they use language for interaction and that it tries to describe this behaviour. More explicitly than Crystal (1992), however, Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998:13) stress that CA does not solely focus on the language of conversation itself. They strongly emphasize that CA does not only focus on the product, i.e. the language, of a conversation but rather on how interaction between speakers is organized. Therefore, they believe that the terms 'talk' or 'conversation' alone do not show clearly enough what CA is interested in. For them, 'talk-in-interaction' would be a more appropriate term to define the subject of interest of CA.

For its investigations, CA makes use of recordings of conversations that take place naturally, meaning that they are neither scripted nor planned. Transcriptions are made of these recordings in order to be able to analyze specific patterns of verbal interaction. However, both the transcriptions and the actual recordings are consulted in the course of the analysis. The aim of CA is to find stable characteristics of conversation within speech events in which content, participants and contexts might be dissimilar. Special interest is devoted to those aspects of conversation that indicate interactional features such as turn taking. (cf. e.g. Asher 1994a: 750)

Harvey Sacks and the origin of conversation analysis

The development of CA is quite commonly associated with Harvey Sacks (1935-1975) who was influenced and inspired by Garfinkel, the latter of whom did not only teach but also collaborate with Sacks. Pushed by his interest in ethnomethodology and interaction, Sacks spent some time in the early 1960s "at the Center for the Scientific Study of Suicide in Los Angeles" to carry out an analysis of incoming telephone calls at the Suicide Prevention

Center. He investigated the way in which the telephone conversations took place. To be more precise, he looked at turn taking, sequences and structures that the speakers used to carry out conversational activities. The results from this study as well as the findings from Sack's co-operation with Schegloff and Jefferson led to a detailed account of CA, including aspects such as the general organization of conversation, repair, topic, story telling etc. (cf. Asher 1994a: 749-750)

Sacks's initial assumption, which he tried to prove with the help of the recordings of natural talk that were made at the Suicide Prevention Center "was that ordinary conversation may be a deeply ordered, structurally organized phenomenon" (Hutchby & Woffitt 1998: 17). The analysis of this data allowed Sacks to assume three general facts about conversation and its analysis. First, one may consider utterances and language as objects, which one can use in order to achieve goals or fulfil tasks. Thus, they are a sort of linguistic tool that allows speakers to 'accomplish' things when they interact with other individuals. Second, he argues that talk can be considered 'methodic', meaning that it relies on the use of certain methods. However, this does not imply that the methods, which work in one situation, work in every context. Therefore, looking at language from a methods-based point of view does not mean that one can set up rules or even recipes for how language has to be used. For all that, the analysis of natural talk still aims at finding generalities. Although utterances always are dependent on the situation in which they are used and hence in some way unique, the assumption of CA is that certain features are common to every conversation. It is the intention of CA to describe these general features. The third basic principle is that talk-in-interaction can or should be the object of a distinctive area of analysis. Very often language is only seen as a medium through which one can analyze phenomena such as class or gender. Examples of language and language use are only used to find out and proof significant features of such phenomena. However, CA rests upon the argument that talk-in-interaction should be investigated for its own sake and not to find out about any superordinate phenomenon. Conversation is a distinct social process which deserves a distinct analysis. (cf. Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998: 17-23)

What follows is a detailed discussion of the subject area of CA, namely the structure of natural conversation. The major focus will be on the system of turn taking and on adjacency pairs. However, the chapter will commence with a short consideration of the different phases in conversation, as it is crucial for the understanding that the three phases of speech encounters are the result of the structure of conversation. Therefore, the final structure depends, for example, on how turn taking takes place and how the speakers make use of adjacency pairs.

3.2 Structure of conversation

3.2.1 Three phases of conversation

One can say that a conversation consists of three parts: an opening, a centre and an ending. The speech event starts with an opening, which serves the function of setting the conditions of the conversation. The interlocutors establish contact, define the relationship between them and if the speakers know each other, they can refer to previous shared conversations. The closing phase, which represents the ending of a conversation, serves as a possibility to reflect on the relationship between the speakers with regard to whether it has changed because of the current conversation or not. In addition to that, the closing of a conversation can also be used to refer to the future relationship between the interlocutors. For example, they can state that they all desire their friendship to continue like that. As concerns the purpose of the margins (i.e. opening and closing) of a conversation, one can say that they are social in nature. They establish or define the current or future contact between the speakers. However, they also serve a textual function. They prepare the topic of the conversation (as in the case of the opening phase) and they sum up the most important points of this topic and draw a conclusion (as in the case of the closing phase). The margins thus imbed the centre of a verbal interaction that can be considered as the 'interaction proper'.[2] (cf. Schneider 1988: 97-98)

[2] For further information on the margins of a conversation, see chapter 4 on phatic communion.

However, the overall tripartite structure of conversation does not reveal anything about how the conversation as such develops. It only shows the final structure of it. It is even more interesting to look at how, or why, such a structure comes into being. Because of this, one needs to consider the basic features of conversation and the methods that the speakers use in order to communicate.

3.2.2 Turn taking

In order to be able to investigate what turn taking in CA includes, it is essential to clarify what 'turn' itself means. By saying that 'turn' refers to "everything one speaker says before another speaker begins to speak", Tsui (1994: 7) nicely sums up Sacks et al.'s (1974) account of what are the building blocks of conversation. Thus, with 'turn' Sacks et al. mean an individual contribution a speaker makes during a conversation. The simplicity of this definition is noticeable because it leaves open how long such a turn can be. A turn plainly is what one speaker says in one go and it does not finish until someone else takes the turn. In addition to that, the definition already indicates what turn taking is. It refers to the occasion when one turn is over and when someone else starts to talk.

Sacks and his colleagues Schegloff and Jefferson were interested in the way in which speakers organize themselves in a conversation with regard to taking turns. In 1974, they published the article "A simplest systematics for the organisation of turn-taking for conversation". The basic assumption adopted by Sacks et al. (1974) is that turn taking is a systematic procedure. The result of their investigation was a detailed description of the turn taking system. The motivation behind conducting this analysis was their intention to find those features of turn taking that are context-free but at the same time context sensitive. This means that they assumed that turn taking happens according to certain rules that are the same for every conversation (i.e. they are context-free) but that these rules still are adaptable to the specific requirements of individual instances of conversation (i.e. they are context sensitive).

Turn construction and turn allocation

For Sacks et al. (1974: 266-268) the ‘simplest systematics’ of turn taking consists of two components and some basic rules: The first constituent is the turn constructional component. It refers to the syntactical construction, which the turn consists of. This can be a sentence, a clause, a phrase or a word. When a speaker finishes his/her turn, s/he reaches a so-called ‘transition-relevance place’ (henceforth also referred to as TRP). At this point, turn taking becomes necessary, i.e. a next speaker needs to continue talking. The second component of the turn taking system concerns turn allocation. Turn allocation means that a subsequent speaker is appointed to say something. This can happen in two ways. On the one hand, the current speaker can choose the next speaker. On the other hand, the subsequent speaker can self-select, i.e. s/he appoints him/herself as the next speaker.

There are basic rules in turn taking that regulate the construction and allocation of turns in a conversation. They can be summarized as follows: If the current speaker reaches a TRP (i.e. s/he finishes his/her turn), s/he can either select the subsequent speaker or the subsequent speaker self-selects. However, if neither selection nor self-selection takes place, the current speaker might decide to continue talking. This means that the current speaker formulates an additional turn and when s/he reaches a transition-relevance place again, the possibilities for selection or self-selection reoccur. Turn construction and turn allocation contribute to the fact that conversation develops in a systematic and smooth way. As a consequence, gaps and overlaps of speech are minimized.

Turn taking features of conversation

Sacks et al. (1974: 265, 269f.) investigated various instances of conversation. The result of their analysis is provided in the form of a list of 14 basic features of conversation, which are claimed to be common to every conversation.

1. Speaker change recurs: No speaker can talk incessantly. Each speaker eventually reaches a TRP where another speaker may continue to talk. Speaker change happens according to the system of

turn allocation. However, this does not imply that speaker change is automatic. At each transition-relevance place, the interlocutors have to work out anew the possibilities at hand: current speaker selects next speaker, next speaker self-selects or current speaker continues to talk.

2. One party talks at a time: Only one speaker talks at a time for two reasons. First, turns are allocated only to single persons and never to more than one person. Therefore, only one speaker has the right to speak. Secondly, turns are allocated at the event of a transition-relevance place. This implies that the current speaker has finished his/her utterance and that a subsequent speaker gets the right to talk. The TRP thus regulates an orderly transition from one speaker to the next.

3. Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief: Overlaps in speech usually occur at transition-relevance places. An example for such an overlap at a TRP is when the subsequent speaker is appointed by self-selection. There is possibly more than one speaker who competes for the right to talk and thus they might start to speak simultaneously. Another possibility for overlap is provided when the interlocutors perceive a current speakers' turn to be finished due to the speaker's articulation although the speaker him/herself does not intend to finish the turn. Lowering the voice, for instance, might lead to the impression that one has finished the utterance already although one plans to add something further. This misunderstanding between the speakers can be circumvented by using forms of address when one really has finished the turn (e.g. 'What do you think, Paul?'). It thus is clearer that one has finished the turn. In addition to that, one prevents overlaps due to self-selection. The option of self-selection is eliminated because one openly selects the subsequent speaker by addressing him/her.

4. Transitions from one turn to a next with no gap and no overlap are common: The majority of transitions from the current to the next speaker are smooth thanks to the systematic turn constructional and turn allocation components as well as the rules for how these components are enacted. In short, turn taking is a systematic procedure that limits the frequency of gaps and overlaps.

5. Turn order is not fixed: There is no rule defining that after speaker A, speaker B takes the turn or that after speaker C, speaker A has the right to talk. At each transition-relevance place, the speakers decide anew who takes the turn.

6. Turn size is not fixed: The size of a turn, i.e. the length of the utterance formulated by one speaker in one go, is not predetermined. A speaker can choose freely between different unit-types, such as for example a word, a phrase or a sentence. Additionally, speakers occasionally get the chance to produce more than one of these unit-types within one turn. This is the case when a speaker decides to continue talking despite reaching an assumed TRP.

7. Length of conversation is not fixed, specified in advance: The length of a conversation is closely linked with the conversational closing because finally, the latter determines the length of the exchange. Turn taking has no influence on the length of conversation but there are other, conversationally internal, factors that define it. For example, the topic of a conversation might be a factor. As soon as the interlocutors feel that they have reached a common understanding of the topic or that the topic is exhausted, they might close the conversation.

8. What parties say is not fixed, specified in advance: In contrast to debates, interviews or ceremonies, conversation does not consist of predetermined contents or organizational principles. Speakers in a conversation generally can say whatever they feel is relevant to the conversation and turn taking has no influence on the content of the

speakers' utterances. However, there are some restrictions regarding the sequences of turns. For example, a 'first turn' (e.g. a question) can require a specific 'next turn' (e.g. an answer). The system of turn taking, however, does not have an impact on the types of sequences. Thus, one can say that turn taking is independent of the types of sequences and the topic in conversation.

9. Relative distribution of turns is not fixed, specified in advance: Relative distribution of turns refers to potential next speakers. At a TRP, each of the speakers present has the chance to get the right to speak. One can thus say that turn taking in this respect is not subject to manipulation. The turn could be allocated to anyone of the interlocutors.

10. Number of parties can change: As the turn taking system only provides for the orderly change of speakers, it is not directly related to the number of participants in a conversation. What one can say is that the system is compatible for both small and large groups although it favours a small number of speakers. Even though there is no interdependence between the number of speakers and the system of turn taking, the size of the group of interlocutors is an important factor with regard to turn allocation. For example, if there are only two speakers, it is clear that the speakers take turns alternately. Thus, there is no difference between next speaker selection and self-selection because it is obvious who the subsequent speaker will be. However, if there are three or more participants, turn allocation becomes more complex. The turn sequence is not predetermined because there is more than one potential next speaker.

11. Conversation can be continuous or discontinuous: A conversation is continuous when turns are constructed and allocated according to the overall rules of selection, self-selection etc. Minimal gaps are common and normal in continuous talk. However, if there is a silence between two turns that is longer than a usual gap, one speaks of discontinuous

speech. The space between the talks is called ‘lapse’. A lapse occurs when neither selection nor self-selection of the subsequent speaker takes place and when the current speaker has finished his/her turn. The latter has reached a transition-relevance place but the speakers choose none of the possibilities they have at hand to continue the conversation. Another instance of a longer silence between two turns is a ‘pause’. In this case, the current speaker has selected a next speaker but the latter fails to continue within reasonable time.

12. Turn allocation techniques are used: As has been explained already, the two basic principles of turn allocation are the selection of the next speaker by the current speaker and the self-selection by the subsequent speaker. These two major categories contain various different sub-groups of how turn allocation takes place. Yet, it is not my intention to give a detailed account of these techniques, as this would go into too much detail.

13. Different turn-constructional units are employed: Turns consists of syntactical units, such as sentences, clauses, phrases and words. The current speaker can make use of any of these units and at the end of the respective unit, s/he reaches a TRP. What is noteworthy with regard to syntactical turn categories is that intonation plays an important role. For example, the word ‘what’ can either be used as the beginning of a question or statement (i.e. a sentential turn unit) or as a one-word unit (i.e. a lexical turn unit). The speaker’s intonation indicates which of the two types of units s/he intends to generate.

14. Repair mechanisms are available to deal with turn taking errors and violations: Repair will be discussed in one of the following chapters in more detail but one thing should be noted here: the system of turn taking has two features, which are important for repair in conversation. Firstly, the turn taking system itself already incorporates some norms for how the speakers deal with turn taking violations. For example, one rule permits the current speaker to continue when no other speaker

sets in at a transition-relevance place. Thus, the system already indicates how speakers deal with problems of turn transfer. Secondly, the turn taking system is the basic principle according to which speakers act in the case of problems during a conversation. This means that when speakers have troubles during an interaction, they use turn taking principles to solve them. An example will clarify what this second aspect exactly means. If, for example, one speaker does not understand what the other person tried to say in the previous utterance, s/he can ask for clarification. Consequently, the first speaker is expected to provide an explanation or the like to resolve the difficulty in understanding. This process of asking for clarification and explaining is enacted with the help of the interlocutors' successive turns. The speakers thus use turn construction and turn allocation as a means to repair the conversational trouble.

In the above listing of the fourteen major features of turn taking in conversation, some issues have been brought up but they probably have not been explained in sufficient detail. In addition to that, some aspects have been excluded altogether although Sacks et al. (1974) have dealt with them in their article. Because of this, the remaining sub-chapters on the structure of conversation will provide some additional input on the features of turn taking (silence, overlap, and repair), but they will also include additional input on adjacency pairs because the latter is a large area in the description of conversation.

Silence

It has already been indicated in section 11 of the turn taking features of conversation that there are three different types of silences that can occur between speakers: lapses, gaps and pauses. The three cases, however, might need some more detailed description. To begin with, a lapse occurs when no selection or self-selection takes place at a TRP and when the current speaker does not intend to continue to speak either. Under these circumstances one can say that the conversation lapses. A gap is somewhat different as in this case, a speaker has self-selected himself or herself

already but s/he has not yet started to talk. Usually, a gap is a very short silence, not exceeding 1 second. Quite a distinct type of silence, namely a pause, occurs within a speaker's turn itself. A pause can arise due to three reasons. The first reason is that the current speaker pauses within a turn without having reached a TRP, for example because of distraction or because of the lack of the right words. Another reason for a pause is that the current speaker reaches a transition-relevance place and that no other speaker is selected or self-selects to speak. The current speaker consequently decides to continue and thus the silence between the two separate turns of this speaker in retrospect is considered a pause. Finally, a pause also appears when the speaker selects the subsequent speaker at a TRP but when the latter fails to continue within reasonable time. (cf. Nofsinger 1991: 94-96)

Overlap

An overlap means that two or more speakers talk at the same time. As does silence, an overlap occurs at the event of an assumed transition-relevance place. It is the result of an "evidence of an incoming speaker's failure to take notice of whether the current speaker has or has not finished" (Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998: 54). Although one might think that overlapping speech shows the speakers' non-observance of turn taking rules, it in fact proves that they comply with them. The reason for this is that both the beginning as well as the ending of overlapping speech takes place in a very orderly way. Thus, it would be inappropriate to say that overlap in general is an instance of disorderliness in the organization of conversation. Speakers may have three motives for producing an overlap. Thus, one can differentiate between three different types of onset of an overlap: transitional onset, recognitional onset and progressional onset. The first instance, the transitional onset, means that the speaker, who produces the overlap, assumes a TRP and that s/he thus wants to continue to speak. It is this type of onset, which might be perceived to be disruptive because the current speaker could consider the other's verbal onset as an interruption to his/her own talk. Despite this, the transitional onset is still an orderly place for a next turn to begin because the speaker has the right to appoint him/herself as the next speaker. The

recognitional onset refers to overlaps in which one speaker can predict what the other one wants to say. Thus, the speaker produces an overlap because s/he wants to say something with relation to the current speaker's utterance. S/he formulates a related utterance even though the current speaker has not yet finished. The progressional onset finally means that an interlocutor assists the current speaker in providing a completion to his/her utterance. The latter might have difficulties with the formulation or with the fluency of his/her speech and thus the interlocutor helps him/her in such a way that s/he can complete the current utterance. The aim of the speaker who interrupts the interlocutors is to keep the conversation going and to avoid a breakdown in communication. The important aspect concerning all three types of onset lies in the fact that none of them represents an infringement of the turn taking rules. Overlapping speech rather shows that the speakers conform to these rules and thus it can be even regarded as the result of the turn taking system. (cf. Hutchby & Woffitt 1998: 54-57)

Repair

Although speakers generally stick to the basic rules of conversation, violations of these principles still occur. The result is what Cheepen (1988: 84) calls a 'disruption' in the conversation. The conversation does not flow smoothly or there are interruptions etc. Cheepen (1988: 84f.) defines two types of disruptions, which she calls 'practical troubles' and 'interactional troubles'. The former stem from the basic processes that are required for a conversation so as to proceed successfully, such as that one speaker makes sure that the interlocutor has understood an utterance correctly. Practical troubles need to be solved so that the conversation does not break down and that no misunderstandings arise between the speakers. As soon as the troubles are eliminated, the conversation returns to its initial progress. In contrast to this, interactional troubles are not solved that easily. It is impossible to devote only some utterances to the interactional troubles but they require more intense repair work. The whole conversation is taken up by the efforts to repair the troubles and a possible consequence might be that the topic changes completely. A reason for interactional troubles can be the difference in status between the participants in a conversation. One

speaker might have more right to speak than others. This inequality can lead to troubles with regard to the progress of the conversation.

However, speakers tend to instantly ‘repair’ these faults, meaning that they try to correct the errors they have made. They replace the faulty pieces with correct ones. Concerning the way in which a repair is initiated, Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) argue that there are repairs that are initiated by the producer of the error and others which are initiated by another participant in the conversation. In addition to that, repair either means the repair of ones own error or the error produced by an interlocutor. Due to the different possibilities of who initiates the repair and who carries out the repair, one can distinguish between four repair types. Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998: 61) have summarized these as follows:

- *Self-initiated self-repair*: The repair is both initiated and carried out by the speaker of the trouble source.
- *Other-initiated self-repair*: The repair is carried out by the speaker of the trouble source but it is initiated by the recipient.
- *Self-initiated other-repair*: The speaker of a trouble source may try and get the recipient to repair the trouble – for instance if a name is proving troublesome to remember.
- *Other-initiated other-repair*: The recipient of a trouble-source turn both initiates and carries out the repair. This is closest to what is conventionally understood as ‘correction’.

The outcomes of self- or other-initiated repairs can be the successful repair of the error but also a failure. A failure appears when the producer of the error is incapable of correcting or clarifying the mistake. Consequently, the initiation of a repair and its subsequent completion (successful or unsuccessful) can differ significantly from each other as the intention to repair the problem cannot always be satisfied. (cf. Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks 1977: 361f.)

Although one might assume that problems in conversation, which require repair, are an obstacle to the overall communication situation, Andersen (2001: 85) believes this to be false. He argues that working out communicational problems does not hinder the effectiveness of the

conversation itself. Solving problems demands additional language use because speakers need to identify and work out the problems through talking. This excess of language use, however, might even be used as a resource for the conversation as such.

3.2.3 Adjacency pairs

Adjacency pairs are in a close relationship to the notion of turn taking because of the assumption that utterances in a conversation usually come in pairs. Tsui (1994: 7) defines a 'pair' in conversation as being "made up of two turns made by two different speakers". Therefore, one can say that adjacency pairs are pairs of utterances. Probably the most typical adjacency pair consists of a question and an answer. It is noteworthy that the term 'sequence' is used in order to refer to a similar notion to 'pair'. Whereas an adjacency pair means that there are exactly two turns, a sequence is less clearly defined. It can consist of two turns but also of more than only two. Generally, one can say that a sequence embraces the notion of adjacency pair but it also covers larger units of utterances. (cf. Tsui 1994: 7-8)

As regards the principles according to which adjacency pairs function, one can identify five aspects. Clark (1996: 197) summarizes them as follows:

1. Adjacency pairs consist of two ordered utterances – the *first pair part* and the *second pair part*.
2. The two parts are uttered by different speakers.
3. The two parts come in types that specify which part is to come first and which second: If one considers for example the adjacency pair 'question-answer', the expected order of the two turns is that the first pair part is the question and that the second pair part is the answer and not vice versa.
4. The form and content of the second part depends on the type of the first part: This means that the first pair part "set[s] constraints on what should be done in a next turn" (Sacks et al. 1974: 281). For example, when the first speaker asks a question, the second pair part is expected to be an answer to this question.

5. Given a first pair part, the second pair part is *conditionally relevant* – that is, relevant and expectable – as the next utterance: Here again, if the first pair part is a question, the second pair part needs to provide an answer to exactly this question and not, for example, to any other question.

Preference organization

The fact that a first pair part always sets the conditions for a specific second pair part is closely connected to what commonly is called ‘preference’ or ‘preference organization’. This does not only mean that for example an invitation can be followed either by the acceptance or decline of this invitation. It also refers to the fact that these two options are not equivalent in preference. One of these two possibilities, the acceptance, is more expected than the other by the speaker who formulates the invitation. This seems logic at considering that an invitation normally is not made with the intention to get a decline because then there would not be any reason for making the invitation at all. Preferred and dispreferred second pair parts are not only different in content. They also vary in design and sequential properties. The most noteworthy difference is that preferred second pair parts usually are verbalized immediately, i.e. without any hesitation and they are provided right at the beginning of the response and with the help of short and direct formulations. In contrast to this, dispreferred actions are formulated in a response turn that is delayed and the dispreferred action often includes sounds such as ‘uh’ or ‘well’ or expressions of hesitance such as ‘I’m not sure’. In addition to that, dispreferred actions often occur with accounts or explanations. (cf. Asher 1994a: 751-753)

Insertion sequence

Although the preference organization sets the condition that a first pair part should be followed immediately by an adequate second pair part, this is not always the case. Sometimes speakers produce sequences in which utterances are positioned in between the first pair part and the second pair part, a phenomenon that is called insertion. For example, a speaker produces a first pair part but the addressee formulates an additional first pair

part instead of a desired second pair part. Therefore, the whole exchange does not consist of only two turns but probably four. Hence, the term ‘sequence’ (The concept of ‘sequence’ was explained with relation to the term ‘adjacency pair’ above). There is no longer an adjacency pair but two pairs that are interconnected. If we assign the symbols A1 and B1 to two distinct first pair parts and the symbols A2 and B2 to the corresponding second pair parts, such a sequence may take the form A1 – B1 – B2 – A2. The adjacency pair B1-B2 is incorporated in the adjacency pair A1-A2. The speaker who formulates the first pair part B1 “initiates an ‘insertion sequence’” (Asher 1994a: 752) and only as soon as this insertion sequence B1-B2 is completed, the first pair part A1 will be completed by the second pair part A2. The reason why insertions function is that the final utterance still is ‘conditionally relevant’ to the initial first pair part. Thus, the speakers still know what previous utterances contained and so they all know that the second pair part A2, even though it is delayed, belongs to the first pair part A1. (cf. Asher 1994a: 752)

This chapter has been devoted to the elucidation of two major aspects of conversation analysis. First, the structure of conversation was highlighted with a focus on turn taking. Second, adjacency pairs were discussed with special attention to preference organization and insertion. In order to complete the theoretical input on conversation, the following chapter will provide information on phatic communion, which is a special category of conversation. The intention of this section is to explain what phatic communion means, i.e. to discuss its major characteristics.

4 Phatic communion

The term ‘phatic communion’ was introduced in 1923 into the study of language by Bronisław Malinowski, a Polish-British anthropologist. Phatic communion refers to

> [l]anguage used more for the purpose of establishing an atmosphere or maintaining social contact than for exchanging information or ideas: in speech, informal comments on the weather (*Nice day again, isn’t it?*) or an enquiry about health at the beginning of a conversation or when passing someone in the street (*How’s it going? Leg better?*); […] (McArthur 1992: 765)

Therefore, language does not always have to be used in order to transfer a certain amount of meaning but it is also a means to establish or uphold contact between people.

Malinowski chose the term ‘phatic communion’ in order to describe “the creation of ‘ties of union’” (Asher 1994a: 3006) between speakers, which are created with the help of speech. Thus, one can speak of a “sociable use of language” (Asher 1994a: 3006) because the meaning inherent to these utterances itself has little or no relevance. What counts is that people establish contact or make the contact persist with the help of language. Everyone uses phatic communion daily and it is essential for people in order to make living together possible. Individuals usually have the desire to interact with each other even though sometimes there might be nothing to talk about. So what do people actually communicate about in phatic communion if there is nothing that needs discussion? Weather-talk, for example, seems to be a universal theme. This topic is appropriate for almost every situation in every context, as it does not require any personal involvement from the speakers. They can safely talk about weather without revealing any private information, political views, religious attitudes or the like. However, one has to bear in mind that the subjects appropriate for phatic talk still can be very different from one culture or people to another. For example, it might be quite common to ask someone ‘How are you?’, ‘Where are you from?’ or ‘How much money do you earn?’ in one part of the world whereas it could be completely inappropriate, if not even offending, in

others. Consequently, one needs to be careful with these expressions because the addressee might perceive them as rude or indiscreet. Nevertheless, phatic communion is a stable aspect of every type of language and if someone has a good command of one language, it includes the knowledge about the principles of the phatic communion relevant to this language. (cf. Asher 1994c: 3006-3007)

In relation to Malinowski's approach to phatic communion, it might be interesting to consider Jakobson's account on the functions of language because in his model he includes Malinowski's phatic language use. Jakobson defined six functions of language, one of which is entitled 'phatic', and he related each of them to a factor that determines the corresponding function.

Table 1: Jakobson's model of language functions

Factor	**Function**
ADDRESSER	EMOTIVE
ADDRESSE	CONATIVE
MESSAGE	POETIC
CONTEXT	REFERENTIAL
CODE	METALINGUAL
CONTACT	*PHATIC*

(Schneider 1988: 24)

The first five factors and functions are not at the centre of interest here. The important aspect is that Jakobson, like Malinowski, considers a certain contact-establishing function of language as well. He entitles this function 'phatic' and thus it is a clear reference to Malinowski's approach. However, Schneider (1988: 24) notes that Jakobson uses the term 'phatic' in a different sense because he links phatic language use with a contact function. Thus, Jakobson seems to describe a physical channel rather than a social relation between speakers, the latter of which would correspond to Malinowski's approach. Therefore, Schneider (1988: 24) claims that Jakobson's use of Malinowski's terminology is an 'inappropriate reduction' of what Malinowski actually meant with 'phatic'.

Interestingly, theorists tend to use various terms for talking about phatic communion or about related issues. For example, Cheepen (1988: 14f.) replaces 'phatic communion' by the term 'chat' while Schneider (1988) uses

the term ‘small talk’. However, in this thesis, the focus will only be on phatic communion and thus other approaches will not be discussed here.

Phatic communion: meaningless and breaking the ice

Despite its varying interpretations, there still is common agreement concerning two basic features of phatic communion: It is said to be meaningless and its assumed basic function is to break the ice between interlocutors. Meaninglessness means that phatic talk does not convey important information but it rather consists of utterances that are not expressive. The actual sense of what a speaker says thus is not essential. The ice-breaking function of phatic communion refers to the fact that it is employed in order to get into contact with other people. It implies that speakers use expressions and utterances not in order to talk about something specific but rather to stop, for example, the silence between them. Because of the two basic features of meaninglessness and breaking the ice, phatic talk as a matter of principle is neither offensive nor aggressive. This seems logic at considering that the content of phatic communion is unimportant. Consequently, a speaker cannot insult or offend anyone else by using content-free expressions. Furthermore, it is unthinkable that a speaker starts small talk just in order to be offensive in the next second. Breaking the ice thus would not make sense if the initiator of the phatic talk were not seriously interested in being polite or at least in being communicative. (cf. Cheepen 1988: 16f.)

4.1 Phatic talk at the margins of conversation

In his article ‘Communicative functions of phatic communion’, Laver (1975: 216f.) argues that the creation of ‘ties of union’ in conversation probably is one of the most central functions of phatic communion. However, he claims that it is inappropriate to say that such ties are created only through the exchange of words. In contrast to that, they are achieved through much more complex processes. This assumption is the starting point for his discussion on phatic communion in which he tries to find the characteristic

features of phatic talk and to determine them, for example, with regard to where these characteristics appear within conversation. Laver starts by dividing conversation into three major parts, namely an ‘opening phase’, a ‘medial phase’ and a ‘closing phase’. He concentrates on the opening and the closing phase because according to him, it is only in these two parts, i.e. at the margins of conversation, that phatic communion appears. With regard to the functions of the opening and closing phase, Laver (1975: 218) states:

> the function of the behavioral activity that characterizes the opening phase is to lubricate the transition from noninteraction to interaction, and to ease the potentially awkward tension of the early moments of the encounter, “breaking the ice”, so to speak, before the main business of the encounter is embarked upon in the medial phase. The closing phase is once again a transitional phase, easing the transition from full interaction to departure.

This means that the opening and the closing of a conversation are used on the one hand to lead towards the centre of the conversation, i.e. the medial phase, and on the other hand to lead away from it. The marginal phases can thus be considered as transitional phases. They enable a smooth change between ‘proper’ conversation, which takes place in the main part, and no conversation at all. Thus, the margins initiate the conversation and they prepare for its ending. One can imagine that under ordinary circumstances it would be rather awkward to become engaged in a conversation in which the participants did not make any introductory remarks in order to prepare the topic of the conversation. Normally, it would be equally peculiar if a conversation stopped without any concluding words or without leave-taking.

Throughout his article, Laver defines several subcategories of the opening and the closing phases that are used in each part respectively. In the opening phase, such subcategories are for example the establishment of an initial contact or the agreement of the participants to turn towards the central topic of the conversation. In the closing phase, the speakers might make use of mimics or gestures to come to an ending of the conversation or they might slowly start to depart from each other physically. The discussion of these separate components of the opening and closing phases of conversation enables Laver (1975: 236) to draw one overall conclusion. He argues

> that phatic communion is a complex part of a ritual, highly skilled mosaic of communicative behavior whose function is to facilitate the management of interpersonal relationships.

Laver (1975) includes in his list of the central features of opening and closing phases not only verbal expressions but also body movements, facial expressions etc. He thus provides a comprehensive list of the processes taking place in phatic communion. However, as the purpose of this thesis is to give information specifically on language use in conversation, it is more interesting to focus exclusively on verbal features of the opening and closing phases. Therefore, the following two chapters will present what speakers actually say at the beginning or towards the end of a conversation.

Opening phase

Schneider (1988: 99f.) summarizes, extends and where necessary adapts the lists of the linguistic features of opening and closing phases in conversation that have been proposed by other theorists. He thus provides his own account of what he considers the central elements of the transitional parts in verbal interaction. For the opening phase, he lists the following eight utterances (Schneider explains them with the help of examples from a corpus he uses):

1. **Greeting**: Hi!
2. **Address**: Hello, John!
3. **Identification**: I'm Sally Purple.
4. **Initial evaluation**: How nice to see you.
5. **Initial apology**: (Ex)cuse me.
6. **Retrospect**: Well you were here a year ago.
7. **Direct approach**: How are you?
8. **Indirect approach**: Wintry morning again.

Closing phase

For the closing phase as well, Schneider (1975: 101f.) proposes a collection of typical features. He lists nine elements.

1. **Summary**: Summary is a very rare element in the closing phase because phatic talk is short and does not have any consequences. Hence, speakers normally do not need to summarize a short and insignificant sequence of utterances.
2. **Extractor**: Must move on, you know.
   Can't stay and talk any longer.
3. **Final apology**: Sorry for having disturbed you.
4. **Final promise**: I'll give you a ring.
5. **Final evaluation**: Nice to see you again.
6. **Prospec**t: Maybe see you again.
7. **Final thank**: Thanks for phoning.
8. **Final wish**: Have a good journey.
9. **Farewell**: Goodbye.

Schneider fails to give a detailed account of the nature of the different elements of the opening phases and closing phases but the examples seem obvious and self-explanatory. What Schneider, however, does is providing a list of pairs of elements of both phases that seem to match with regard to their function and content. These pairs of elements are 'greeting – farewell', 'initial evaluation – final evaluation', 'initial apology – final apology' and 'retrospect – prospect'. (cf. Schneider 1988: 104) One might thus argue that some parts of the opening phase and closing phase fulfil comparable or identical functions, such as evaluation or apology.

An important aspect of the component elements of the opening and the closing phase is that they often come in identical pairs. This means that, for example, at the beginning of a conversation the identical adjacency pair 'greeting – greeting' (e.g. 'Hi!' – 'Hello!') is common or that at the end of a conversation a 'final evaluation' is paired with a similar 'final evaluation' by the interlocutor (e.g. 'It was nice to see you again.' – 'And it's been a pleasure having you.')

Finally, Schneider (1988: 104) comments upon the ritualistic aspect of utterances used in phatic talk. Some of them are purely formulaic and thus need not correspond to the speakers' actual attitude. Others can be taken literally. This, however, depends on the closeness of the interlocutors.

Friends, for example, usually do care for each other's well-being and thus a question such as 'How are you?' probably has an honest intention. In contrast to this, distant acquaintances might ask for the other's well-being because of politeness. Their inquiry might not represent a serious concern.

4.2 Topic in phatic communion

The information provided in chapter 2.6 on 'topic in conversation' equally holds true for topic in phatic communion. The latter is part of conversation and therefore it functions according to the same principles. Like any kind of conversation, phatic talk is organized by rules. This does not only apply to how the speakers interact with each other but it also applies to how and which topics are selected and how they are linked within conversation. Normally, the speakers have a clear idea of what the current topic of the conversation, in which they are involved, is. They are not only capable of deducing the topic from the utterances in the conversation but they also do it intuitively. (cf. Schneider 1988: 83-84)

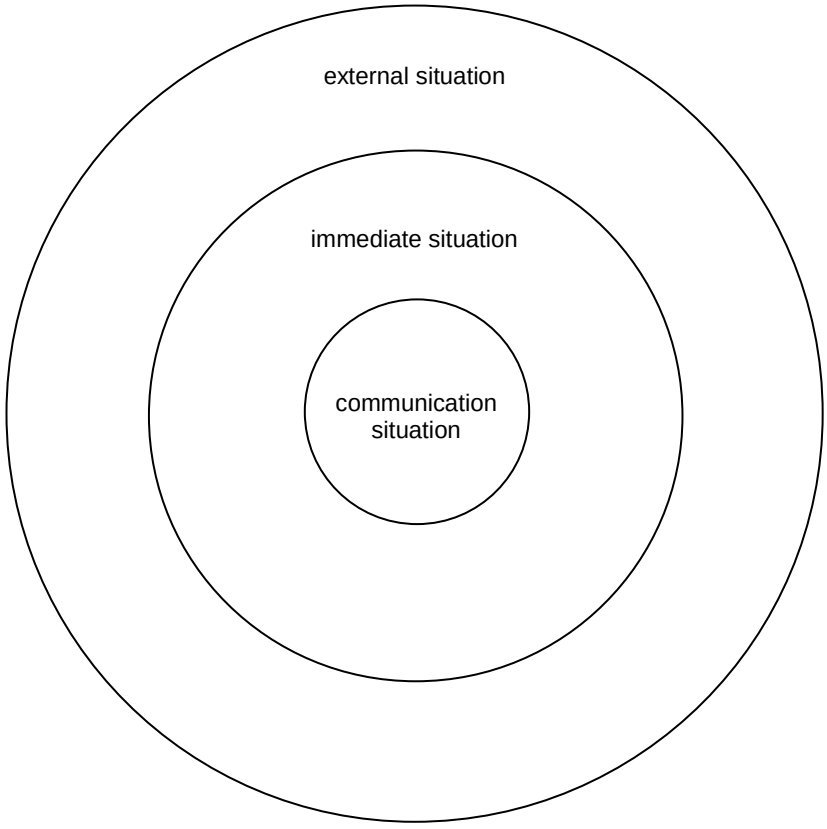
Yet, with regard to topic and topic selection, phatic communion has some specifications. The topic in phatic talk is said to be related to the situation in which it takes place. Laver (1975: 222) specifies this as follows:

> Apart from formulaic greetings, the tokens refer either to factors narrowly specific to the time and place of the utterance or, more widely, to factors in the context of situation in which the utterance occurs which are personal to the speaker or the listener.

This means that utterances in phatic communion always are related either to the speakers or to the situation. Concerning this, Schneider (1988: 84) raises the question of what the basic features of a situation are and how they become the topic of phatic talk. In order to explain this, Schneider uses the term 'frame' for referring to a mental concept of a stereotypical situation. This means that we have an idea in our minds of what a situation looks like and what is associated to this situation. Schneider gives the example of the frame 'party'. He asked students to write down what they associate with the term 'party' and he collected the words that were noted down most

frequently. The five most often named items were ‘atmosphere’, ‘drink’, ‘music’, ‘participants’ and ‘food’. Schneider found out that such associations correspond to the most probable as well as the safest topics of phatic talk. For the frame ‘party’ this means that phatic talk concerning a party or at a party most likely includes elements such as atmosphere, drink, music, participants and food. Therefore, there exists a congruency between the elements of a frame with the elements or topics of phatic talk. After having discussed the central topics – Schneider calls them ‘obligatory frame elements’ – the speakers can move on to talk about more personal or more impersonal topics. The topics, which the speakers can choose from, can be represented as three concentric circles:

Figure 2: The three circles of topics for phatic communion



1. Immediate situation: The immediate situation corresponds to the central frame elements. For the ‘party’ frame, this is ‘atmosphere’, ‘drink’, etc. This topic area is the least committing for the speakers and it is the most neutral of the three levels.

2. External situation: Schneider (1988: 86) calls the external situation ‘supersituation’ because it refers to the overall context of the situation in which phatic talk takes place. Speakers can talk about almost everything in the external situation and therefore there are almost no limits concerning the choice of topic.
3. Communication situation: The communication situation refers to the speakers themselves. It can be regarded as a subcategory of the immediate situation because the speakers belong to the immediate situation of the phatic communion as well. However, talking about each other probably is such a frequent level of communication, that it can be represented as an individual domain. On this level, speakers can talk about rather safe topics (e.g. jobs, hobbies) but also about taboo topics (e.g. sex, age).

Phatic talk always starts at the middle level, i.e. with the immediate situation. As we have seen before, the speakers initially discuss the situation by referring to obvious things or the atmosphere. Consequently, the speakers can turn either to the inner or to the outer circle. Both topics, i.e. topics about the external or the internal situation, reflect the relationship between the speakers. When talking about external elements to the situation, it shows that the speakers do not want to commit themselves to the conversation. When the speakers talk about the communication situation, however, i.e. about themselves, it proves that they are for example interested in each other or that they at least are interested in maintaining the conversation. (cf. Schneider 1988: 83-86)

PART II Sitcoms

5 Situation comedy

The previous chapters concentrated on discourse analysis, phatic communion and related issues. What will follow in this section and the one after that is not linked to these aspects. They will rather turn attention towards the second focus of this paper, namely situation comedy. The current chapter is dedicated to the definition of the general term situation comedy and in the following section, a specific situation comedy entitled 'The Big Bang Theory' will be presented. The information provided in these two parts will complement the theoretical input of this paper that is necessary for the practical application of conversation analysis to the television situation comedy 'The Big Bang Theory'.

5.1 Situation comedy defined

The term 'situation comedy' is made up of the two distinct terms 'situation' and 'comedy'. Therefore, it might be necessary to look at what these individual terms mean. The 'New Oxford dictionary of English' (1998: 1742) defines 'situation' as "a set of circumstances in which one finds oneself; a state of affair" or as "the location and surroundings of a place". This means that situation refers either to the persons who find themselves in a certain context or to the context itself. The term 'comedy' can be employed either as a mass noun or as a count noun. When it is used as a mass noun, it means "professional entertainment consisting of jokes and satirical sketches, intended to make an audience laugh" (Pearsall 1998: 366). When the term 'comedy' is used as a count noun, however, it describes either a film, a play or a broadcast programme or it describes the style or genre of these types of entertainment. In literature, comedy is considered as a specific genre that is contrasted with tragedy. (cf. Pearsall 1998: 366) In this thesis, 'comedy' will both be used in the sense of a distinct genre as well as to refer to productions that are classified within the genre of comedy.

Now that the individual terms have been clarified, it is necessary to combine these definitions. According to the 'New Oxford dictionary of English' (1998: 1742), a situation comedy is "a television or radio series in which the same set of characters are involved in various amusing situations". Situation comedy (henceforth also referred to as sitcom) may be considered a subgenre of comedy and it designates a sequential production that features a relatively constant group of characters. (cf. Pearsall 1998: 1742) As the definition nicely shows, the typical feature of sitcom is that the actors constantly blunder into funny situations or into situations that evolve into humorous complications.

5.2 Television programmes and genres

Hunt (1981: 12f.) argues that especially in the evening, television programmes are limited to two types: programmes, which aim at disseminating useful information and programmes, which simply try to entertain the audience. Amongst the first group, one predominantly finds various news programmes as well as documentaries. In the second group, one finds all types of sitcoms, action films, old films etc. The list of these broadcasts probably is endless. In his book, Hunt (1981) generally adopts a very critical point of view regarding television because he focuses on how language in television can be used to influence and control people. This attitude is also present when investigating the difference between the two types of programmes. For example, Hunt believes that light entertaining programmes have a different way of addressing the viewers than the more serious ones. Informative television programmes seem not to address the audience as if they were equals but they rather create an unequal relationship that is comparable to a classroom and the relationship between teachers and pupils. In contrast to this, entertainment programmes consider the viewers as equals and they do not intend to instruct them as a teacher would do. Entertainment broadcasts are much more an invitation to the audience to enjoy the show. If the viewers decide to refuse this invitation, they are free to change the channel. In addition to that, Hunt (1981: 13f.)

provides a number of other differences between entertainment programmes and programmes, which one might entitle 'serious'. Despite Hunt's interesting viewpoint, that demonstrates the way in which television programmes function and what influence they can have, it is not the purpose of this thesis to go into too much detail in this area. The major message for the reader should be that content, function and configuration of programmes are the basis for a possible distinction between two types of programmes: those which focus on entertainment and those which concentrate on the transmission of information.

Probably it is possible to provide a more concrete classification of television programmes – at least with regard to terminology – when consulting genre categories. The notion 'genre' initially was defined and discussed by Bakhtin and Kristeva, though in subsequent works the term was adapted and applied by numerous other theorists as well[3]. According to Marshall & Werndly (2002: 39f.), a genre is a group of textual media (e.g. in film, music or television) that share certain features. Thus, there are for example various film genres, music genres, television genres etc. The question, however, is: who are the people who decide which text belongs to which genre and based on which arguments do they make this decision? Concerning this, Marshall & Werndly (2002: 40) argue that there are different parties, which are involved in the categorization of individual texts into a genre and that such groups can be

> creative industries, such as film and television makers; broadcasters and distributors; cultural critics like 'arts' reviewers in magazines and news-papers; and the readers and audiences of popular fiction, film, music and television.

As a rule, one might say that genres are unstable categories. Titles of genres (e.g. comedy, punk rock) as well as their decisive features may change over time. Due to this, there is the danger that individual texts are assigned to the wrong genre. This might happen, for example, because the title of a genre is misleading. Consequently, "[i]t is perhaps more important to be able to describe the features that groups of texts share than to try to

[3] cf. e.g. Asher, R.E. (ed.-in-chief) (1994b: 1408) and Holquist, Michael (1990)

‘fit’ texts into ‘correct’ genres” (Marshall & Werndly 2002: 40). This means that one should not blindly rely on existing genres but rather look at the characteristics that each genre has in common. Only if one knows what is typical of the individual genres, is it possible to rightly allot a film, a piece of music etc. to one of them. The genre title alone does not always help in doing so.

Television programmes usually are divided into categories according to their genre. Marshall & Werndly (2002: 44) list six different genres: “drama, comedy, light entertainment, arts, documentary, news and current affairs”. The large genre of drama includes several subcategories and it reaches from highly literate productions to crime drama to lighter domestic issues and soap opera. Comedy embraces all forms of humorous productions, including sitcom. Concerning sitcoms, Marshall & Werndly (2002: 45) note that one might consider them “as half-hour comic dramas”. However, saying that sitcoms are part of drama would be inappropriate, as drama, in contrast to comedy, generally has no typical comic form. Light entertainment predominantly refers to all sorts of shows, such as quiz shows, game shows and chat shows. Arts programmes are broadcasts of (classical music) concerts, ballets, operas, etc. Thus, their content is less light-hearted. Documentaries refer to factual productions in which information about specific issues or people is transmitted to the audience. News as a genre refers to information about daily events that is provided in a distinct broadcast. Current affairs is a very similar genre but it is different to news in that it may provide more detailed and longer discussions of general topics. Current affairs thus rather go into the direction of reportages.
The consideration of different genres shows according to which features (e.g. content, length, transmission of information) television programmes are grouped into distinct categories. In addition to that, it becomes obvious which relative place comedy and sitcom have within the context of the most common television genres.

5.3 Domestic comedy vs. workplace comedy

In the previous sections, it was demonstrated that comedy is a genre that comprises amongst other things the subgenre ‘sitcom’. However, it is necessary to approach sitcom from a more general point of view. First, we will look at workplace and domestic comedy because this will help to understand how sitcom relates to comedy in general. Only after that, we can turn to the consideration of sitcom in specific.

The general division of comedy into domestic comedy and workplace comedy, which is provided in the ‘Encyclopedia of Television’ (Newcomb 1997: 404f.), shows that the setting can be a factor to subdivide comedy into distinct categories.

Workplace comedy is characterized by a rather unstable set of cast. If one character leaves, another character can easily be introduced into the series by taking over the job position of the one who left. Additionally, there are numerous possibilities for featuring guest characters that leave the show again after one or several episodes. This type of comedy profits from the tension between characters of all different kinds of background. Race, ethnicity, gender, ancestry and class differentiate them but there is still a common goal they try to achieve due to their professional alliance. This common goal usually wins over the discrepancies between the characters. The disadvantage of workplace comedy is that the characters are similar in age and therefore there is no humour arising from clashes between different ages. This, however, would be typical for sitcoms and domestic comedies.

The first domestic comedies were set in homely surroundings and the main characters were members of the family. However, domestic comedies changed throughout time. For example, the strict necessity disappeared that required the characters to be in a family relationship. Co-workers or friends could have similar “ersatz familial relationships” (Newcomb 1997: 405). Consequently, it became evident that domestic comedies do not only depend on the homely setting. In addition, domestic comedies at one point started to develop into various hybrids. Today, they often are closely related to domestic melodrama, sitcom and family melodrama.

Newcomb (1997: 404) notes that there is a clear distinction between domestic comedy and sitcom. Whereas in domestic comedy the characters are responsible for the humour, sitcom is said to be funny because of a "series of confusions or complications" (ibid). In addition to that, domestic comedy seems to focus more on "warmth, familial relationships, moral growth and audience inclusiveness" (ibid).

One might criticize Newcomb's approach towards the classification of comedy for two reasons. First, it is unclear why Newcomb contrasts domestic comedy with sitcom in such an explicit manner. Obviously, the two categories have the same structure and the difference only lies in the source of humour and the content or themes. Therefore, I agree with Lindorfer (1998: 31) when she says that the difference between domestic comedy and sitcom is only minimal. Second, Newcomb's classification into domestic comedy and workplace comedy seems illogical and arbitrary with regard to the fact that he makes an additional differentiation between domestic comedy and sitcom. It is thus unclear whether Newcomb sees domestic comedy, workplace comedy and sitcom as three equal subgenres or whether, as I would argue, sitcom is a completely distinct class, as it is a genre that could show features both of domestic comedy and of workplace comedy. However, it is not dependent on its setting (domestic or workplace) but it is rather determined by the funny aspect of the events in which the characters are involved. Therefore, domestic comedy and workplace comedy are subcategories of sitcom, rather than vice versa. As Holzer (1999: 28) rightly says, one must not overestimate the importance of the setting. Therefore, sitcom is a distinct generic category that needs to be separated from classification attempts based on the setting.

5.4 Sitcom and its subcategories

According to the constellation of the characters, Rick Mitz (1980: 5, quoted in Holzer 1999: 30-31) divides sitcoms into seven subcategories:

1. **Domcoms**: sitcoms about family life
2. **Kidcoms**: sitcoms which focus on the children of a family
3. **Couplecoms**: sitcoms in the centre of which there is one couple and their relationship
4. **SciFiComs / Magicoms**: sitcoms that are determined by magic and fantastic aspects
5. **Corncoms**: sitcoms concerned with rural folks
6. **Ethnicoms**: sitcoms featuring a specific ethnic group
7. **Careercoms**: sitcoms about the professional lives of the characters

Because Mitz made this classification some decades ago, Holzer (1998: 31) argues that one needs to extend the list of subgenres with **Singlecoms** and **Singleparentcoms**. These categories represent those sitcoms that developed due to the rise of the number of single parents, singles, divorcés etc. In view of the fact that Holzer's claim for an extension of the categories was made more than a decade ago as well, today there probably is the need for additional genre classifications again. What one needs to annotate is that the nine types of sitcoms quoted above are not strictly separated from each other. The borders between the groups are sometimes blurred and therefore it might be difficult to classify a specific sitcom amongst one of them. Multiple affiliations, therefore, are possible.

5.5 The structure of sitcoms

In order for a sitcom to be successful, each episode does not only need to get the attention from the audience from the first second on but it also requires a specific structure. On the one hand, the story needs to become more complex and more complicated in the course of the episode. On the other hand, however, the episode has to end in a clear and satisfactory way for the audience to be pleased.

An episode can be classified according to its dramatic structure and according to its technical structure. The former refers to a division into beginning, middle and ending, whereas the latter implies that an episode is interrupted by commercials.

Dramatic structure

Concerning the dramatic structure, one can say that drama and comedy generally consist of three acts: a beginning, a middle part and an ending. This structure stems from Greek theatrical conventions and it is still used today. At the beginning of an episode, the aim of which is to attract the audience's attention, the audience sees an initial situation that is the departing point for the story. One of the characters carries out a certain action, either by choice or because it is enforced. Because of the initial, usually funny action, the viewer can already anticipate the complications that will follow and s/he gets curious. The first scenes are a decisive factor for whether the viewer desires to watch the episode or to change the channel. Therefore, the beginning needs to be appealing. Time must not be wasted with longish introductions because then the audience would see no reason for watching the episode until the end. In the middle part the central feature are complications. The characters need to overcome various obstacles to achieve their goals. As a rule of thumb, one might say that there need to be at least three to four obstacles, which lead to a general escalation of the situation. The ending of an episode obligatorily re-establishes the initial situation. The problems are solved and thus the finale is a logical result of the preceding events. What is important is that the ending needs to fit the characters, i.e. their personality, and that it is suitable for the sitcom as a whole. However, the characters usually do not achieve what they tried to achieve throughout the whole episode but they make other important personal experiences. These experiences frequently transmit a certain message to the characters and therefore they represent an equally satisfying outcome to them. Such endings, obsolete as they appear, are still common today but in contrast to sitcoms of previous decades, there is no longer such a strong moral tendency. Consequently, the endings of the individual episodes have a lighter tone and they are not intended at teaching the audience.

Technical structure

The tripartite organization of the dramatic structure is opposed by two acts of the technical structure. Each of the two parts consists of three to four

scenes, both of which last around twelve minutes. A whole episode thus is about twenty-four minutes long and in the middle of it, there is a break for commercials. The question, however, is where exactly this break is scheduled. One has to look at this problem from a profit-oriented point of view. A break should not be put at the end of a boring scene because then the viewer might decide to zap to a different channel. S/he is not curious enough about how the story continues to stay tuned. Therefore, the break needs to be at a thrilling point, most suitably in the middle of the main act. In this part, the actions become more and more intricate. However, at this point the main act is not yet finished, meaning that there are still further complications that will follow. After the break, the situation has not yet reached its peak and therefore the tension will still be built up afterwards. The audience knows that there is still something to come after the break and therefore they are motivated to endure several minutes of commercials.

One could say that the twenty four minutes of an episode can be divided into four equally long parts of six minutes. The first six minutes correspond to the beginning of the episode that contains the catalyst for the consequent actions. The next six minutes represent the first half of the main act in which several complications arise. This sequence is followed by the break. After that, the second part of the main act leads to the climax of the action. Finally, the last six minutes release the problems and the story returns to its starting point. The classification presented here seems very strict and imperative but it should only provide an approximate insight to the internal as well as to its profit-oriented structure. Sitcoms usually are set up according to this pattern but this does not necessarily mean that sitcoms rely on a minute-by-minute organization that has to be followed meticulously. (cf. Wolff 1997: 31f.)

5.6 Plots and characters

The main plot of a sitcom is entitled A-plot. It is divided into the tripartite dramatic structure and the two-act technical structure that has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, an episode does not only

consist of one single storyline. There can be one or more smaller stories that develop parallel to the A-plot. The sum of them is called subplots and the individual stories are numbered as B-plot, C-plot etc. The function of the subplots is to diversify the episode because they create additional levels to the main plot. In addition, if the A-plot is rather demanding or complex, the subplots contribute to the overall light heartedness of the episode. Without them, the A-plot might transmit too serious a mood that is inappropriate for a sitcom. Generally, one can say that the technical and the dramatic structure provide the basis on which the different plots can develop. The structure and the plots together might be considered as the framework for the action in the episode. The individual scenes can unfold on this framework, meaning that the scenes are always in relation to the structure and the plots.

The term ‘sitcom’ might suggest that this genre is predominantly concerned with the comic aspect of situations. However, Holzer (1998: 23) argues that it is not the situations but rather the characters, which are at the centre of the individual episodes. The figures are in a certain relationship to each other and these relationships are the sources for numerous conflicts and consequently the source for laughter. Those relationships need to be clearly defined because only this way the viewers can easily follow each episode and grasp the conflict as well as the humour of the series in general. Regarding the constellation of the characters, one can divide between two types of sitcoms. Some of them are established around one protagonist whereas other sitcoms feature a group of equal characters. With regard to the individual characters, one can say that each of them has typical ways of acting and thinking, i.e. every figure has a distinct personality and their behaviour always needs to conform to this personality. The audience knows the characters, i.e. their personality, and therefore they need to be able to know and understand how the figures think, feel and how they behave in difficult situations. In short, the characters need to be stereotypical, transparent and their behaviour needs to be predictable. (cf. Holzer 1998: 22f.)

5.7 The language of television

After having discussed specific features of sitcoms, let us now turn to a more general aspect, namely the forms of language that are used in television. Although written language often is part of television productions, spoken language is the most common form of language use. Furthermore, Marshall & Werndly (2002: 61) claim that

> [t]elevision is a medium organised around the rhythms of speech, not writing, and around accompanying visual signification such as the gesture, appearance and demeanour of speakers.

This shows that the focus on speech implies that there are various important visual aspects such as body language as well. Generally, one can say that these visual aspects are related to the persons (e.g. actors, presenters) who are speaking. As has been mentioned already, they for example have the possibility to employ body language. In addition to that, the individuals' general appearances and their behaviour might be considered, too because they are in some way related to spoken language as well. (cf. Marshall & Werndly 2002: 61)

Represented talk vs. live talk

According to the nature of the spoken language that is used, one can distinguish between two types of television programmes. On the one hand, there are programmes that contain "dialogues, monologues and narrative voice-overs in dramatic forms" (Marshall & Werndly 2002: 62). Due to the dramatic form, one can say that it refers to 'represented talk', i.e. predetermined speech. Examples for these programmes would be soap operas or sitcoms. On the other hand, there are programmes featuring "scripted or spontaneous 'talk' in non-dramatic forms" (ibid). This type of talk might be called 'live talk'. It is based on facts and it contains productions such as news, documentaries as well as magazine-like programmes.

Live talk is mainly characterized by the fact that there are one or more individuals present who are talking to the camera. Therefore, the audience gets the impression as if they were addressed directly. Live talk can be strongly influenced by the context in which it is recorded or presented. For

example, the forms of address might change according to which audience the programme aims at. Chat shows might thus have a more personal and intimate style (e.g. frequent use of ‘I’ and ‘you’) whereas presenters of news programmes commonly talk in a more neutral or more formal way. Live talk between different persons, such as between a host and his/her guests in a talk show, can be classified as conversation. However, it differs from naturally occurring talk in that it is intended to be public. The speakers know that there is an audience listening to them and therefore one needs to mention that live talk conversation on TV does not work in the same way as natural talk would do. The speakers need to observe different, possibly stricter, regulations as concerns what they say and how they interact with each other. For example, the interlocutors might be required to use more formal forms of address than those they would use in private conversations or they might need to use standard language instead of dialect. In addition to that, live talk conversation is more guided with regard to the content. In a talk show, for example, the host needs to make sure that a conversation goes into the ‘correct’ direction and that the speakers do not digress to a different topic. (cf. Marshall & Werndly 2002: 61f.)

Marshall & Werndly (2002: 77) define represented talk “as scripted dialogue which is performed by actors who utter the words in character” which means, that the speakers take on roles and that what they say when they are in their roles is not natural but predetermined. As a viewer one thus needs to bear in mind that unimportant how realistic conversation in drama, comedy etc. might appear, it still is represented talk. What makes it possible to distinguish represented talk from natural conversation is that the latter generally is much less coherent. Natural conversation usually includes a higher number of hesitations, interruptions etc. as in real life, speakers interact with each other spontaneously rather than by using notes or memorized utterances. In addition to this distinction according to the coherence of talk, natural conversation and represented talk can also be differentiated due to their purpose. In real life, people talk in order to listen to each other and to exchange information whereas represented talk has a different function. It is there to create atmosphere, to further the action and to contribute to the characterization of the individual figures. In short,

represented talk is meant to be overheard by the audience. The information that the viewers receive from the individual conversations is crucial for the understanding of the plot. (cf. Marhsall & Werndly 2002: 77f.)

Represented talk and realism

In the previous section, attention has been drawn to the fact that represented talk is unnatural. It is speech that is designed and intended to be heard by an audience. At the same time, however, represented talk needs to appear as if it were natural. The viewers have to get the impression that they "are eavesdropping on a real private conversation" (Marshall & Werndly 2002: 83). Programmes featuring represented talk therefore create the illusion of live talk. In media studies, this illusion commonly is called 'realism', meaning that people perceive something to be authentic because, as in the case of television, for example the language used creates the idea that it must be natural. Actors, who are playing in dramas, soaps, sitcoms etc., are not only provided with scripts that they need to learn by heart. They usually also get concrete instructions concerning mimics, gestures and related aspects. Therefore, there is little space for improvisation. The difficulty for the actors lies exactly in the contradiction between the prescribed texts and the stage directions on the one hand and the creation of realism on the other hand. They need to enact represented talk as if it were the most natural thing in the world. A good actor is able to perform his/her character in such a way that the audience gets the impression that what they see is real. (cf. Marshall & Werndly 2002: 82f.)

One question may arise from the above consideration of represented talk and realism: *How* do producers of programmes such as sitcoms achieve it that the audience perceives talk as natural although it is prescribed? Quaglio (2009: 10f.) argues that there generally is a lack of concrete indications of how to write successful scripts that transmit the impression of realism. However, he provides various tips for writing natural screenplays. For example, one could watch people and tape actual interactions amongst individuals. Observing real people in natural surroundings may help to write conversations and dialogues that are similar to reality because only if one knows how people talk and behave in real life, can one transfer this

knowledge into useful TV screenplays. The aim of realistic scripts and dialogue is that the audience can identify with them. They feel that what they see is similar to their own lives and therefore realistic TV productions meet their personal needs and desires. With regard to this, Quaglio (2009: 11) notes that there are four primary needs of the viewers, which TV characters address: “universal emotions, new information, conflict resolution, and completion”. This means that the viewers want to experience emotions, get information, they want the conflicts they see to be resolved and finally they want the stories to be completed in a satisfactory way. If the needs are satisfied, i.e. if the audience gets what it expects from watching a certain programme, the viewers start to identify with the characters, which eventually contributes to the success of a production.

The issues discussed in this chapter are crucial for the practical analysis of the sitcom ‘The Big Bang Theory’ because the starting point will be the question, in how far conversation in this sitcom takes place in a natural way. The sitcom will thus be critically analyzed with regard to whether the basic principles of natural talk-in-interaction are realized in a plausible way or if there are great discrepancies between natural conversation and represented talk.

6 The sitcom ‘The Big Bang Theory’

This chapter is devoted exclusively to the presentation of the sitcom ‘The Big Bang Theory’ (henceforth also referred to as TBBT). It will provide general information on the production and the episodes of the series, its major themes and settings as well as on the characters. As the sitcom will be the object of the analysis of the research, the information given in this chapter establishes the knowledge that is necessary to comprehend what exactly it is that will be investigated. This means that knowing the sitcom TBBT is the pre-condition to be able to look at the language use and the mode of conversation that is typical for the series.

6.1 Production and episodes

TBBT was created by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady. Lorre is well known for productions such as ‘Cybill’, ‘Grace under Fire’ and ‘Dharma & Greg’. His most successful production, however, is the series ‘Two and a Half Men’ that started in 2003. Prady initially worked as a computer programmer and salesperson before starting to write for series such as ‘Dharma & Greg’. In addition to that, Prady ran for the post of Governor of California in 2003. The whole crew producing TBBT, including Prady and Lorre, consists of 22 writers and eight directors.

In the United States, TBBT is distributed by the Warner Bros. Television company and it runs on the channel CBS.
(cf. http://the-big-bang-theory.com/about/;
http://the-big-bang-theory.com/episodeguide/crew/Chuck%20Lorre/;
http://the-big-bang-theory.com/episodeguide/crew/Bill%20Prady/, 22 March 2011) In Austria, TBBT currently airs on ORF eins. It is part of the Saturday afternoon programme.

In 2010, TBBT won the ‘People’s Choice Award’. It was selected the ‘Favourite TV Comedy’. In the same year, Jim Parsons (playing Sheldon Cooper) was awarded an Emmy in the category ‘Outstanding Lead Actor in a Comedy Series’. After the ‘Television Association Critics’ award (2009), this was the second prize he received for TBBT. Most recently (2011),

Parsons also won the Golden Globe for the ‘Best Performance by an Actor in a Television Series - Musical or Comedy’. (cf. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0898266/awards, 22 March 2011)

TBBT premiered on September 24 in 2007. Some months later, in February 2008, the series was extended by a second season. One year after that, in March 2009, it was decided that TBBT should continue for two more seasons. Consequently, the fourth season ended in spring 2011. The success of the sitcom, however, entails another extension that guarantees the production of three more seasons. This means that at present, the predictable ending of the series will be in 2014. (cf. http://the-big-bang-theory.com/about/, 22 March 2011)

The following overview shows the number of seasons produced so far, the time spans when each season was aired in the United States as well as the number of episodes that each season consists of.

Table 2: Overview of the seasons of TBBT produced up to the present

Season	*Original Run*	*Number of episodes*
Season 1	September 24, 2007 to May 19, 2008	17
Season 2	September 22, 2008 to May 11, 2009	23
Season 3	September 21, 2009 to May 24, 2010	23
Season 4	September 23, 2010 to April 7, 2011	20

(http://the-big-bang-theory.com/episodeguide/, 22 March 2011)

6.2 Themes and setting

TBBT centres on four physicists in their mid-twenties, including Sheldon Cooper, Leonard Hofstadter, Howard Wolowitz and Rajesh Koothrappali. All of them are hyper-intelligent and very successful in their jobs at Caltech (California Institute of Technology). However, what they are unable to do simply is ‘being normal’. Their extreme social incompetence and their awkward behaviour constantly trap them in precarious situations. For example, nobody else has bigger problems with doing small talk, sensing

sarcasm or with showing sympathy than Sheldon. One of Rajesh's major handicaps is his selective mutism – he cannot talk to women unless he is drunk. Howard, still living with his mother (he claims that his mother lives with *him*), is the only one without a PhD. He is sex driven and, though always unsuccessful, he does not miss any single possibility to seduce every woman he meets. Finally, there is Leonard. He seems to be the one who bridges the gap between his geeky friends and the normal world. Although he is highly intelligent as well, he is also interested in everyday activities, making new friends and finding a girlfriend. This is where Penny comes in. She moves in across the hall of Sheldon and Leonard's apartment and Leonard instantly falls in love with her. The problem is that Penny is a common waitress and her only ambition is to become an actress and have as much fun in her life as possible. These five main characters and their individual personalities contribute to constant complications, misunderstandings and conflicts. The main themes probably are science, love, friendship, and a whole list of related or additional themes. Generally, however, one can sum up these themes by saying that the overall issue is the discrepancy between the geeky universe of Leonard, Sheldon, Howard and Rajesh as opposed to the ordinary world. It is the starting point for every theme that develops in the course of the series.

As regards the setting, one can say that the majority of the scenes either takes place in the homes of the characters or at their work places. The homes include Sheldon and Leonard's apartment, Penny's apartment as well as sometimes Raj's apartment and the house of Howard's mother. The characters' work places are indicated by the cafeteria, in which the scientists tend to have lunch together. Sometimes, one also sees their laboratories and bureaus. Penny works at the Cheesecake Factory. This setting becomes central to the series because Leonard, Sheldon, Howard and Rajesh start to have a weekly dinner there. Other sceneries appear less frequently. These include for example places in parks or in the street, clubs, bars and restaurants, various cars, the laundry, the bookstore, the cinema, lecture halls etc.

6.3 The characters

6.3.1 The main characters

Leonard Hofstadter

Leonard's full name is Leonard Leaky Hofstadter. He is an experimental physicist at Caltech and his IQ amounts to 173. Although he is equally intelligent and equally into computer games, Star Wars, super heroes and comic books as his friends are, he is the character who tries hardest to connect with other people outside the geeky world. (cf. http://the-big-bang-theory.com/characters.Leonard/, 23 March 2011) He is more open to other, new things in life and he depends least on the strict routines that he shares with his nerdy friends.

Leonard came to live with Sheldon because of a coincidence and although they sometimes have big issues, they probably are best friends, possibly because Leonard is the only one who is able to cope and live with the eccentric Sheldon. (cf. http://www.bukisa.com/articles/397015_the-big-bang-theory-character-biographies, 23 March 2011)

Sheldon Cooper

Sheldon is a theoretical physicist and he tends to despise all other fields of business activity. He originally is from Texas but now he works at Caltech. Sheldon has two PhDs, the first of which he received at the age of sixteen and his approximate IQ is 187. He likes to live according to rules and routines, including amongst other things eating the same food on each weekday, sitting on the same spot on the couch and doing the laundry on Saturday nights. Sheldon seems to live in his own small world of formulas, calculations and theories and so he has no sense for ordinary things such as showing feelings. Moreover, he has great problems in understanding irony and sarcasm. Sheldon shows no interest either in women (or men). He appears to be asexual.

Howard Wolowitz

Howard is the only one amongst his friends not to own a PhD, a fact that he is especially mocked for by Sheldon. He is an engineer at Caltech and still

lives with his mother, although the viewer never sets eyes on her. She stays an off character. Howard, although he denies it, seems to enjoy still being mama's boy. Additionally, his whole life, excluding his geeky interests, seems to turn around women. He constantly tries to flirt with them and seduce them. However, this never works unless he pays for it.

Rajesh Koothrappali

Rajesh, commonly called 'Raj', originally is from New Delhi, India and now he works as an astrophysicist at Caltech. Raj does not like India, including Indian food, but still sometimes he is very sensitive about being victim to racism. His biggest problem, however, is what the characters tend to call 'selective mutism'. He cannot talk to members of the female sex (except for his family members) unless he is intoxicated. The running gag as concerns Howard and Raj is that people frequently believe that they are a couple, which in fact is not true and which both deny vehemently. Still, sometimes one gets the feeling as if they were related by a special bond.

Penny

At the beginning of the first season, Penny moves in across the hall of Leonard and Sheldon. She is 22 years old and she came there from Omaha, Nebraska to have greater chances to make her career as an actress. Meanwhile, she works as a waitress at the Cheesecake Factory. Penny does not fit into the world of her geeky friends. Her love of life, spontaneity and straightforwardness contradicts what Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj are and how they behave. However, Penny succeeds in bonding with them and in showing them what life outside science, comic books and computer games can offer.

(cf. http://www.bukisa.com/articles/397015_the-big-bang-theory-character-biographies, 23 March 2011)

6.3.2 The side characters

Bernadette

Bernadette works with Penny at the Cheesecake Factory in order to fund her formation in the area of microbiology. In the course of the series, she becomes a couple with Howard.

Stuart

Stuart owns the comic book store where the friends like to spend many hours a week.

Dr. Beverly Hofstadter

She is Leonard's seemingly cold-hearted mother who despises her son for his lack of success. Beverly Hofstadter is very close to Sheldon because they share many character traits, including their despise for feelings and their focus on science.

Mary Cooper

In contrast to Leonard's mother, Sheldon's mother Mary Cooper is a loving, caring and religious person. Sheldon envies Leonard for his mother whereas Leonard would have wanted a mother like Mary Cooper.
(cf. http://www.bukisa.com/articles/397015_the-big-bang-theory-character-biographies, 23 March 2011)

Leslie Winkle

Leslie works at Caltech and has a temporary, unserious affair with Leonard. Additionally, she constantly engages in small word fights with Sheldon as the two of them consider each other as bad scientists.

Other side characters are featured less frequently. Some of them appear only once and therefore they will only be presented in this paper where relevant.

PART III Data Analysis

7 Conversation and phatic communion in the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*

7.1 Research question

As the title of this thesis already indicates, its aim is to find out whether conversation and phatic communion take place in a natural way amongst the characters of the sitcom TBBT. The sitcom has been selected for two major reasons. First and most importantly, the choice relies on a personal interest in the sitcom. Second, though doing the research without any prejudices and expectations influencing the work, my assumption before doing the analysis was that the series TBBT might differ even more remarkably than other series from natural conversation as it features a group of socially retarded, yet highly intellectual, characters. Thus, I anticipated finding language use and conversational structures that deviate strongly from everyday talk. The research is based on the comparison between natural conversation and scripted conversation in the series. By the end of the analysis, therefore, I intend to answer the following question: Are patterns of natural conversation realized in the sitcom TBBT and if so, how? In addition to that, I will try to find instances where this might not be the case, i.e. cases in which sitcom conversation does not function correspondingly to natural talk and find reasons for these divergences.

7.2 Corpus and methods

For the analysis of the series TBBT, the first three seasons have been consulted. The fourth season was out already at this point of time but it was not yet available on DVD. Consequently, the data comprises three seasons. The first season consists of 17 episodes, the second includes 23 and the third season comprises 23 episodes. Overall, there are hence 63 episodes amongst which different excerpts have been chosen to exemplify various

aspects of conversation and phatic communion. In this respect, it is important to note that the choice of the excerpts partly is based on coincidence and partly on the fact that these excerpts proved to be utile for the presentation of specific characteristics of the series.

The sitcom TBBT will be analyzed according to its congruence with everyday communication. To be more specific, the study will investigate the series according to whether it shares features with naturally occurring talk. In order to be able to do so, the input provided in chapter 3.2 concerning the structure of natural conversation and in chapter 4 concerning phatic communion will be exemplified with the help of transcripts of parts of the series. This means that these chapters will be reconsidered with relation to the data gained from the sitcom. As the theoretical framework will be applied to represented talk, the analysis represents a shift of application of conversation analysis to a different area of language usage. In doing so, it is possible to find out whether the generalities for naturally occurring talk equally hold true for represented talk as can be found in TBBT. Only if this is the case for all aspects (turn taking, adjacency pairs, phatic communion and related phenomena), can one claim that conversation in TBBT is natural.

7.3 Transcription conventions

In order to be able to analyze spoken language, one needs to transcribe the oral data first. What follows, is an overview of transcription conventions that will be used in this paper. The symbols are taken over from Nofsinger (1991: 167-169) unmodified – except for one minor change concerning the symbol for silence shorter than one second – as they are simple as well as easily understandable. Most importantly, however, this system seems to meet the purposes of the investigation. On the one hand, there are for example sufficient symbols for indicating pauses, overlapping speech and non-verbal features and sounds. On the other hand, there is no exaggerated focus on intonation and phonetics, which is reasonable because they will not be at the centre of interest here.

Table 3: Transcription symbols and their meanings

Symbol	*Meaning*
…	Ellipses indicate talk omitted from the data segment.
[ ]	Square brackets between lines or bracketing two lines of talk indicate the beginning ([) and end (]) of overlapping talk.
(0.4)	Numbers in parentheses represent silence measured to the nearest tenth of a second.
(.)	A dot enclosed in parentheses indicates a short, untimed silence, [shorter than one second.]
end of line = = start of line	Equal signs are latching symbols. When attached to the end of one line and the beginning of another, they indicate that the later talk was 'latched onto' the earlier talk with no hesitation, perhaps without even waiting the normal conversational rhythm or 'beat'.
Wait a minute	Underlining shows vocal stress or emphasis.
STOP	All-uppercase letters represent noticeable loudness.
Oh: no:::	Colons indicate an elongated syllable; the more colons, the more the syllable or sound is stretched.
Wait a mi-	A hyphen shows a sudden cutoff of speech.
This is a (rehash)	Parentheses around words indicate transcriber doubt about what those words are, as in the case of softly spoken or overlapped talk.
This is a ( )	Empty parentheses indicate that some talk was not audible or interpretable at all.
((coughing))	Double parentheses enclose transcriber comments.
When? 'ats all right. Well, I don't know,	Punctuation marks are generally used to indicate pitch level rather than sentence type. The apostrophe (') indicates missing speech sounds and normal contractions. The period indicates a drop in pitch; the question mark shows rising pitch (not necessar-ily a question); and the comma represents a flat pitch or a slight rising-then-falling pitch. When used, the exclamation point (!) shows 'lively' or animated speech.
.hh	The h preceded by a period represents an audible inbreath. Longer sounds are transcribed using a longer string: .hhhh
hh st(h)upid	The h without a leading period represents audible exhaling, sometimes associated with laughter; and laughter itself is transcribed using 'heh' or 'hah' or something similar. When laugh tokens are em-bedded in a word, they are often represented by an h in parentheses.
pt	The letters pt by themselves represent a lip smack, which occasionally occurs just as a speaker begins to talk.
Didjuh ever hear uv 'im	Modified spelling is used to suggest something of the pronunciation.
9 A: 10 B:	For ease of identification in the discussion, speakers are identified by letters, and each line is numbered.

The above grid with transcription conventions provides a good basis for a clear transcription. However, one needs to bear in mind that the work with spoken data and its transcription carries with them various problems.

As regards transcriptions, Schneider (1988: 131f.) identifies two types of problems. Firstly, there is one major theoretical issue, which implies that transcriptions are influenced by the transcriber's perception of the data. For example, some features of the data may be incomprehensible to the transcriber and therefore s/he might need to ask the speaker's help to be able to correctly transcribe what they said. Yet, there are areas in which transcriptions to some extent remain disputable because different transcribers might not agree on how certain features need to be noted down. Secondly, transcription carries with it two practical problems concerning time and the readability of the final transcripts. Transcribing is a protracted activity. Depending on the aim of the analysis, one may devote different amounts of time to the transcription of the same speech segment. For instance, focussing on a limited area of linguistic aspects understandably is less time-consuming than transcribing additional aspects of prosody, phonetics and body language. Consequently, one can say that the transcription system accounts for how much time and devotion the transcription will require. In addition, the transcriber's routine is an important factor because an expert in the field will surely be able to transcribe the same speech segment in a fractional amount of time as compared to a layperson. The question of how detailed a transcription is goes hand in hand with the readability of the transcripts. If one notes down every single aspect that one can detect in the spoken data, one will end up with an incredibly detailed transcript. Possibly, this will hinder the analysis rather than facilitate it because the transcription no longer is easy to read. A good transcription includes relevant aspects regarding the objective of the analysis rather than an overload of information.

What the above discussions of difficulties concerning transcription shows is that a transcription or analysis made by a human being cannot be impeccable. Mistakes and misinterpretations do occur but as long as one is aware of them, one probably is less at risk to believe that the transcription one has made is flawless. A transcriber needs to be open for discussion as

concerns his/her transcription but at the same time s/he needs to have a clear focus in mind with regard to what the transcription should serve for and what the aim of the analysis of the transcripts is.

Concerning the transcriptions in this thesis, there is to say that they are for a large part based on the subtitles of the series. Therefore, ordinary punctuation, such as commas and question marks, for a large part has been taken over. However, although the sitcom is an American production and although the subtitles consequently are in American English, the transcription is based on British English spelling.
The five main characters of the series are identified with the first letters of their names. These symbols remain constant throughout the paper:

S……Sheldon
L……Leonard
P……Penny
H……Howard
R……Rajesh

Other speakers will be identified where necessary in the context of each transcript respectively.

8 Turn taking

8.1 Turn construction and turn allocation

Turn construction

The basic components of turn taking are turn construction and turn allocation, the first of which will be shortly discussed here. The turn constructional component in conversation refers to the syntactical structures that the speakers produce. Such structures can be comparatively long, i.e. they can consist of sentences. However, they can also be shorter, e.g. when consisting of clauses, phrases or individual words. (cf. Sacks et al. 1974: 266-268)

Generally, in the sitcom TBBT one cannot observe any deviation from the turn constructional principles of natural talk. Even in short excerpts of conversations such as (1), the speakers may use all different types of syntactical structures.

(1) [season 2, episode 9, minute 12]

1	S:	May I come in?	*sentence (question)*
2	P:	No:	*word*
3	S:	Ye-	*sound*
4		(1.7)	
5	S:	I see. Apparently, my earlier inquiry regarding you and Leonard	
6		crossed some sort of line. (.) I apologize.	*clause, sentence (statement), clause*
7	P:	Oh, thank you.	*sentence*
8	S:	So, have you and I returned to a social equilibrium?	*sentence (question)*
9	P:	Yes.	*word*
10	S:	Great. New topic.	*word, phrase*
11	P:	Mhm.	*sound*
12	S:	Where are you in your menstrual cycle?	*sentence (question)*

On the sentence level, both questions (line 1, line 8 and line 12) and statements (lines 5-6) are employed. Clauses, as in this example (line 5, line 6), may consist of sentences featuring only a subject and a predicate. The phrase in this excerpt (line 10) represents a noun phrase, though all other

types of phrases (e.g. verb phrases) are equally frequently used. Concerning the word level, one can say that *yes*- and *no*-answers are common (line 9 and line 2 respectively) although turns consisting of adjectives (e.g. line 10), nouns and names are equally prevalent. In addition to that, though no syntactical structure, turns oftentimes consist of sounds (e.g. *ehm, mhm*) such as in lines 3 and 11.

What is noteworthy as well, is that a turn in conversation need not be an individual syntactical structure, meaning that it does not necessarily have to consist of only one sentence, clause, phrase, word or sound. Turns can be formed from combinations of different structures. For example, Sheldon's turn in lines 5 and 6 consists of two clauses and one sentence. The sum of these syntactical structures forms one turn. This shows that regardless of the size of the turn a speaker produces, s/he eventually reaches a transition-relevance place (TRP).

To sum up, it can be stated that the series TBBT does not show any differences to naturally occurring talk with regard to turn construction. Turns can and do appear in the same syntactical structures as are common in inartificial conversation.

Turn allocation

The following two transcripts are representatives for the way in which turn allocation takes place in the series TBBT. They will show that in most respects, conversation in the sitcom complies with the principles defined for naturally occurring talk, meaning that the basic rules for turn taking are obeyed.

(2) [season 3, episode 20, minute 10]

1 P: Well, good.
2 S: I'm also pleased to report that he's all cried out over you.
3 P: He's been crying?
4 S: Oh:: I believe that was something else I wasn't supposed to
5 mention.
6 P: Oh: God. I feel terrible.
7 S: Do you have stomach ache too?
8 P: No. Why? Do you?
9 S: No.

(3) [season 3, episode 9, minute 10]

1 L: Okay, so Kripke played a joke on you.
2 S: It wasn't funny.
3 R: I thought it was funny.
4 L: RAJ.
5 (1.2)
6 R: You laughed.
7 S: Did you laugh?
8 L: I fell on the floor.

Transcript (2) is a representative for conversation between two speakers. There is a tendency in TBBT for this type of conversation, i.e. in the majority of the scenes two people talk to each other. In these conversations, the sequence of turns is fixed, meaning that the speakers form turns alternately. It is a matter of logic that in a conversation between two speakers, the next speaker will be the person who is not the current speaker. Therefore, next speaker selection for the most part is not employed. Transcript (3) shows that in conversation between more than two speakers – in this case between Leonard, Sheldon and Raj – speaker change does not automatically imply which participant is going to be the next speaker. Therefore, turn order is less fixed and more dependent on the possibilities of selection and self-selection. For example, the utterance in line 2 does not contain either a next-speaker selection or a question. Consequently, the floor is open for anyone of the interlocutors (Leonard or Raj) to take the turn. In this case, it is Raj who appoints himself to be the next speaker. However, in conversations consisting of more than two interlocutors such as (3), next speaker selection is equally used. Sheldon's turn in line 7, for example, represents a clear selection that appoints Leonard to be the next speaker. Sheldon asks him a question, which Leonard answers in the following turn (line 8). The consideration of transcripts (2) and (3) shows that although the number of speakers in conversation can vary, turn allocation in the series TBBT usually takes place without frequent pauses and overlaps. As this is the case for natural talk as well, it is legitimate to claim that concerning turn allocation, both natural talk and represented talk work according to the same principles.

Before continuing with a more detailed consideration of silence, overlaps and repair in conversation, attention will be drawn to next speaker selection and self-selection. As a matter of principle, both selection and self-selection take

place and contribute to a smooth progression of conversation without overlaps and silence.

The following excerpts (4), (5) and (6) contain explicit next speaker selection that is indicated by the use of the first name of the desired next speaker. Consequently, the current talker deliberately chooses the next speaker although more than one possible next speaker is present.

(4) [season 3, episode 10, minute 4]

1	P:	Hey, Sheldon, can I talk to you for a second?	*selection*
2	S:	It's not about shoes:, is it?	
3		(1.4)	
4		I don't think I could go through that again.	
5	P:	It's not about shoes:	
6	S:	Then speak.	

(5) [season 2, episode 5, minute 6]

1	L:	Sheldon, I told you I only have access to the free-electron laser	
2		at night.	
3		I can't drive you for the next few weeks.	
4	S:	No:: You said you couldn't drive me <u>to</u> work. This is <u>from</u> work.	
5		(1.0)	
6	L:	Howard, help me out here.	*selection*
7	H:	No: just for the fun of it, I'm gonna take his side.	

(6) [season 3, episode 20, minute 4]

1	L:	So you guys wanna do something tonight?	
2	H:	No, I can't: I gotta pick up my mom from her water-aerobics	
3		class.	*self-selection*
4		…	
5	L:	What about you, Raj?	*selection*
6	R:	Oh, there it is. (.) Now that you don't have a girlfriend you	
7		wanna hang out with me again.	

Additionally, excerpt (6) contains an instance of successful self-selection performed by Howard (line 2). Although Leonard poses a question to all persons present (line 1), Howard appoints himself as the next speaker without producing either an overlap or silence.

Another instance of self-selection is contained in transcript (7). In this scene Leonard, Sheldon and Leonard's mother Beverly are in a car. From the context of the conversation, it is clear that in line 4, Beverly addresses Leonard. However, Sheldon appoints himself as the next speaker in line 5.

Though the interjection being undesired for Leonard (line 6), turn transfer in this situation takes place without an overlap and it is thus in line with what is common and possible in turn taking.

(7) [season 3, episode 11, minute 6]

1 L: You must be very happy.
2 B: Why? I'm not marrying her. .hh
3 (1.9)
4 So how about you? (.) Are you seeing anyone interesting?
5 S: Well, I'm not sure about interesting, but:=
6 L: =Not the time, Sheldon.
7 S: Very well.

As the following excerpt will show, self-selection can also take place in order to move the conversation forward and to avoid a breakdown in communication. In line 3 and 4 of segment (8), Leonard tries to ask Leslie a question though he seems to have problems with its formulation. This is indicated by the frequent cut-offs of speech and the sustained pronunciation of various words. In line 5, Howard interferes with Leonard's turn in providing a possible ending of the sentence that Leonard is trying to formulate. Howard self-selects although it does not represent an overlap to Leonard's current turn.

(8) [season 1, episode 13, minute 10]
(note that in this excerpt Leslie Winkle is identified by the letter A)

1 L: Hey, Leslie.
2 A: Hi, guys.
3 L: So- Leslie, I have a: question for you and it might be- a little
4 awkward, you know, given that I::
5 H: Hit that thing.

Finally, one may consider an example for the failure of next-speaker selection. In line 1 of transcript (9), Leonard poses a question to all the characters present, which are Raj, Howard, Sheldon and Penny. As in transcript (6) (line 1) as well, in this segment the current speaker (Leonard) formulates a question to the whole group. Therefore, each of the characters theoretically has the possibility to self-select. In example (6) above, Leonard is content with Howard's self-selection. They continue the conversation in a normal manner. In contrast to this, Sheldon's self-selection in (9), line 2,

seems to annoy Leonard, who therefore reacts by shouting *Not you. I wasn't asking you.* This shows that Leonard intended to get an answer to his question from line 1 by anyone else but Sheldon. However, as he did not use any means of next speaker selection that would have appointed a specific person to speak, it is entirely legitimate that Sheldon takes the turn in line 2. He appoints himself as the next speaker and this entirely corresponds to what the system of turn taking allows in the case of the lack of next speaker selection. Despite this, Leonard realizes that it was not his intention to leave the floor to Sheldon and therefore he repairs his initial question (line 1) by adding a next speaker selection in line 3. He explicitly addresses Penny in order to avoid any additional next speaker self-selection.

(9) [season 2, episode 18, minute 10]

1 L: Okay, what's wrong with it?
2 S: What's <u>wrong</u> with it?=
3 L: =NOT YOU. I wasn't asking <u>you.</u> (.) Penny?
4 P: eh: well, it's a little juvenile. I mean- it kind of looks like the
5 MySPace page of a 13-year-old girl.

The overall consideration of next speaker selection and self-selection in TBBT not only demonstrates that both possibilities are equally employed but also that both ways of turn allocation are means of contributing to an orderly progression of conversation without disproportionate quantities of overlaps and silence. The instances of next speaker self-selection represented in the transcripts (7), (8) and (9) might let assume that self-selection frequently leads to unsuccessful turn allocation, in that it is not the intended next speaker who takes the turn. However, turn allocation in these instances does not fail at all. The system of turn taking implies that in the case of self-selection each of the persons present has the right to be the next speaker. What happens in (7), (8) and (9) is that the speakers make use of this right and therefore these examples validate rather than undermine the overall applicability of the system of turn taking.

Sacks et al. (1974: 266-268) define the 'simplest systematics' of turn taking in natural talk as consisting of turn constructional and turn allocational components. In view of the fact that in the sitcom TBBT all possible syntactical structures of turn construction are employed and that turn

allocation happens both according to next speaker selection and next speaker self-selection, one can say that the ‘simplest systematics’ of turn taking in natural conversation is represented in the series in comparable ways.

8.2 Silence

As discussed in chapter 3.2.2 on turn taking, there are three types of silence that occur in natural talk: lapses, gaps and pauses. In the following, these types will be referred to by giving examples from the series TBBT. The respective transcripts will show that all forms of silence appear in the sitcom although in unequal proportions.

Lapses

A lapse implies that a conversation shortly breaks down due to the lack of next speaker selection and next speaker self-selection. Therefore, no speaker takes the turn although the current speaker has reached a transition relevance place. In TBBT, only few lapses occur. The following excerpt is one of the rather rare scenes in which the conversation lapses.

(10) [season 1, episode 15, minute 2]

1 L: So how do you two- know each other?
2 M: Oh: he once spent nine months with my legs: wrapped around
3 his head:.
4 (3.7)
5 L: Uh- excuse me?

In this scene Leonard, Howard and Raj get to know Sheldon’s twin sister Missy. Leonard does not yet know who Missy is and asks her about why she knows Sheldon (line 1). In the consecutive turn (lines 2-3), Missy makes a joke about being Sheldon’s twin sister, which Leonard seems not to grasp. There is a particularly long silence between this turn and Leonard’s inquiry that shows that he has not understood Missy’s ambiguous utterance (line 5). The silence (3.7 seconds) can be considered a lapse as throughout this time,

none of the speakers present chooses to be the next speaker and there is no next speaker selection performed by Missy either.

From the overall rarity of lapses in TBBT, one may conclude that they probably are omitted because it would be senseless to feature unsuccessful speech exchanges. The genre sitcom operates under great time pressure and thus this might be the reason for avoiding silences that do not contribute to the progression of conversations and to the advancement of the action. Nevertheless, as can be seen in the transcript quoted above, lapses can be valuable sources of humour and so they do play a crucial role in causing amusement on the part of the audience.

Gaps

A gap is a silence between two turns, appearing when a speaker who has self-selected him/herself to be the following speaker slightly delays the onset of his/her utterance. In chapter 3.2.2, it was mentioned that a gap usually does not exceed one second. Silences of such length appear frequently within speech encounters as consecutive speakers automatically produce short silences at transition relevance places. It is rare that successive turns are uttered without any silence separating them. Still – as is shown in the following transcript (11) – this can happen. In this scene Penny and Leonard discuss where to spend the night. In line 5, Leonard produces an immediate response to Penny's utterance from line 4, indicated by the equals sign.

(11) [season 3, episode 3, minute 17]

1 P: Well, my new bed got delivered. If you come over and put it
2 together, you can stay at my place.
3 L: Really? That's a lot of work and it's kinda late.
4 P: Yeah, but if we stay there we won't have to be quiet=
5 L: =Let's go.

As such events of continuity of turns without silence is the exception rather than the rule, attention should be drawn to the common occasion in which next speaker self-selection at a transition relevance place leads to the production of a gap. Transcript (12) is an example for how brief such gaps can be, namely lasting only 0.3 seconds. Leonard reaches a transition relevance place after having said *So Penny is a little messy* and Sheldon

replies *A little messy?*. These two utterances, however, are separated by a short silence.

(12) [season 1, episode 2, minute 6]

1 S: Great Ceasar's ghost, look at this place.
2 (2.8)
3 L: So Penny is a little messy.
4 (0.3)
5 S: A little messy? …

As gaps as short as one second or less are considered normal to conversation in this thesis, it is only done here that a gap is actually measured to illustrate that such brief silences are common in the sitcom TBBT and that thus it is not worth the effort to time it whenever they occur. What is more interesting to investigate is the occurrence of gaps that exceed one second because, though uncommon in natural talk, they frequently occur in the series. This investigation, however, will be postponed to the last stage in the analysis of silence as it is closely connected to the occurrence of laughter between individual utterances. Before taking a closer look at this, let us turn to pauses in speech encounters in the series.

Pauses

Pauses are silences within turns of speakers. As discussed in chapter 3.2.2, pauses occur due to three reasons. Thus, the three types of pauses will be shortly exemplified with the help of segments taken from TBBT in order to illustrate that all of them are present in the series.

Transcript (13) features a short pause within Leonard's turn in line 1, indicated by the symbol (.). This type of pause implies that the current speaker has not yet reached a transition-relevance place but that s/he hesitates for some reason. In this example, Leonard produces a pause due to problems with its formulation, after which he restarts the sentence. A different reason for producing this type of pause is that the current speaker may be distracted by an outer event, such as by the unexpected appearance of a person.

(13) [season 1, episode 6, minute 9]

1 L: I wanna get to know Penny's friends. I just- (.) I don't know how
2 to talk to these people.
3 S: Well, I actually might be able to help.

Speech segment (14) incorporates two further types of pauses. First, in lines 5 and 7, Sheldon and Penny perform a next speaker selection respectively. However, these two next speaker selections – both in the form of questions – are not met with immediate responses. In both instances, the speaker who has been selected to be the next talker fails to continue within reasonable time. The result is that pauses arise between the questions. The corresponding answers that are provided in line 7 and 9 respectively are both delayed.

Lines 12 to 14 are an example of how a speaker produces a pause within his/her own turn. Sheldon provides an answer to Penny's inquiry in line 12 by saying *Just making polite dinner conversation*. At the end of this sentence, he reaches a transition-relevance place. Nevertheless, his interlocutor Penny does not intend to provide a corresponding utterance and thus, Sheldon decides to formulate a sentence in addition to his previous contribution from line 12. In retrospect, the pause extending over 1.9 seconds between these two utterances (lines 12 and 14) thus represents a pause within one turn.

(14) [season 3, episode 20, minute 10]

1 P: He's been crying?
2 S: Oh:: I believe that was something else I wasn't supposed to
3 mention.
4 P: Oh: God, I feel terrible.
5 S: Do you have stomach ache too?
6 (1.5)
7 P: No. Why? Do you?
8 (1.3)
9 S: No.
10 (2.1)
11 P: Why did you ask if I had one too?
12 S: Just making polite dinner conversation.
13 (1.9)
14 Your turn.

Overall, the three types of pauses are not equally represented in the series TBBT. There is a tendency for the first type – pauses produced without

having reached a transition-relevance place – to be less frequent than the two remaining types. However, all of them can be detected in TBBT and it appears as if they are featured in naturalistic manners, i.e. they correspond to pauses produced in everyday conversation.

After having argued that the different types of silence (lapse, gap and pause) are at least to some extent featured in the series, attention should now be drawn to a specific purpose of gaps and pauses, which is to provide time for laughter.

Laughter

In this chapter, gaps and pauses will be reconsidered for one major reason, which is that these types of silence in scripted language are where laughter from a fictitious audience or from an audience that is present at the set occurs. The following consideration of transcripts taken from TBBT will show that silence appearing at speaker changes (gaps) and silence within turns (pauses) can be notably long in order to provide temporal space for audience reaction in the form of laughter. Silence in such cases is unnaturally long so as to avoid overlaps between the characters' texts and the sounds of levity. The following four transcripts will exemplify in what respect laughter is incorporated in TBBT either between turns or within turns.

The measured silences in transcripts (15) and (16) are examples of gaps in conversation that provide time for laughter. Those featured in segments (17) and (18) are pauses that have the same function.

(15) [season 1, episode 13, minute 10]
(note that in this excerpt the letter A represents Leslie Winkle)

L: So- Leslie, I have a: question for you and it might be: a little awkward, you know, given that I::
H: Hit that thing.
(2.0) ((laughter))
A: Leonard, there's no reason to feel uncomfortable just because we've seen each other's faces and naked bodies contorted in the sweet agony of coitus.
(2.0) ((laughter))
L: There's not?: Gee, because it sure sounds like there should be.

(16) [season 1, episode 17, minute 4]

P: I really thought Mike was different. I thought he was .h sensitive

2 and smart. I mean, not you: smart. Normal, non-freaky smart.
3 (1.2) ((laughter))
4 L: Yeah, no sure.

(17) [season 3, episode 18, minute 3]
1 S: They expect me to give a speech at the banquet. (.) I can't give
2 a speech.
3 H: Well- no, you're mistaken. You give speeches all the time.
4 (3.0) ((laugther))
5 What you can't do is shut up.

(18) [season 2, episode 23, minute 0]
1 L: Okay, how's that?
2 S: .hh You actually had it right in the first place.
3 (2.1) ((laugther))
4 Once again, you've fallen for one of my classic pranks.
5 (1.6) ((laughter))
6 Buzzinga.

One major issue arises from the consideration of laughter within conversation in TBBT. It is to question whether the temporal dimensions of gaps, and probably those of pauses as well, are natural in the sitcom. Especially with respect to gaps, it becomes obvious that, while usually being shorter than one second in natural talk, they can amount to two seconds or more in the series (cf. transcripts (15) and (16)). Thus, I argue that at least gaps are represented in unrealistic manners. A reason for this is that silences exceeding one second would be bothering in natural conversation. Every speaker assumingly has made the experience that silence can lead to awkward situations. The reason for this is that one quickly perceives it as disrupting when nobody talks as one is accustomed to continuous speech without disproportionate amounts of silence. In the series, laughter in the background lessens the unpleasant feeling that nobody is speaking probably because this noise bridges the silence. Therefore, gaps and pauses long enough to incorporate sounds of levity would be unnatural in everyday conversation but they are not sensed as annoying in represented talk. Closely related to the issue of the extent of the gaps and pauses in the sitcom is why the silences that are filled with laughter are disproportionally long when compared to natural conversation. The major reason, as I would argue, lies in the purpose of conversation in the series. Commonly, the characters speak either to forward the plot or to transmit humour. The second

of these two reasons is why silences are prolonged. The audience should be able to grasp the jokes made by the characters and in order to be able to do so, they are granted additional time. Unlike natural talk, scripted conversation is aimed at an audience that follows the speech encounter and thus it would be senseless to overstrain them with a precipitate sequence of jokes. The viewers get some further time to reflect on what has been said in previous utterances as only then the most positive and most desired of reactions – laughter and amusement – can occur. This effect is strongly supported by laughter incorporated in the series. Laughter in the background contributes to the viewers perceiving the scenes as more funny than they would sense them without it and they are less reluctant to laugh themselves as they can join the sounds of levity.

8.3 Overlaps

General comments

Turn taking in natural conversation implies that the interlocutors utter their turns in an orderly way, i.e. one after the other, thus overlaps of speech only occur rarely. The investigation of overlaps in the sitcom TBBT allows for a similar reasoning. There are not only few overlaps to be found in general but it also appears as if in the sitcom there were even a smaller number of overlaps than in natural talk. In view of this, one may consider the question why it is the case that overlaps in the sitcom are underrepresented. The major reason might be that television talk needs to be easily understandable regarding acoustics and articulation. Overlaps may render speech encounters less clear and thus they may be more difficult to be followed and to be understood. In order for this not to happen, overlaps possibly are avoided completely. This aspect of clarity and ease of comprehension goes hand in hand with the major aim of the genre sitcom, namely that the audience should be entertained. If the latter had problems in grasping the conversations between the characters due to overlaps, they would need to concentrate more to be able to follow the series. The audience may be required to put too great an effort in understanding the conversations to be

able to enjoy what they see and to be entertained. Consequently, high numbers of overlaps, in rendering conversation less easily understandable, may inhibit the series to provide light amusement and to appeal to a wide audience.

Despite the overall rarity of overlaps in the sitcom TBBT, there is the need to point to an additional distinctive feature of the series. Although Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998: 54-57) have identified three different types of onsets of overlaps in natural conversation, it is striking that in TBBT only two of them seem to be represented. There are transitional and recognitional onsets but none of the overlaps is introduced by a progressional onset. Again – as has been done concerning the overall rarity of overlaps – it is crucial to try to find reasons for this fact. The most obvious explanation is that conversation in TBBT is an example of represented language. What the characters say is not decided within the scenes, meaning that it is not the result of a natural progression of verbal interchanges. It is rather a given text that the actors know by heart and reproduce. This implies that the actors do not need to look for words, to help other speakers with the formulation of their utterances etc. The progressional aspect of conversation and consequently the existence of progressional onsets of overlaps imply that all the participants involved in the speech encounter intend to move the conversation forward. However, this type of onset is not crucial for language in television as the structure and the progression of the conversations are devised in advance and because there is no need for the actors to contribute to them spontaneously. Furthermore, if progressional onsets of overlaps were included, it would be an additional feature to lower the acoustic intelligibility of conversation solely because it would represent another source of overlap that could impede the comprehensibility of the conversations. Despite that, if progressional onsets were present in the series, this would surely contribute to the realism[4] of conversation as they are common features of ordinary talk. The fact that they are not incorporated in the sitcom TBBT shows that in this respect natural conversation differs remarkably from represented talk.

[4] For detailed information on realism, see chapter 5.7on language in television.

Overlapping speech to make speakers stop talking

Although the instances of overlapping speech in the series TBBT in general are very limited, the majority of those that are featured in the sitcom share one common function, namely to end the current speaker's turn. As the following examples will show, all of the overlaps are disruptive to the current speaker, meaning that the latter stops talking abruptly due to the interlocutor's interjection. Each of the following transcripts represents an excerpt of a conversation in which one speaker tries to make the current speaker stop talking by interfering with his/her utterance. In this respect, it is important to note that only overlaps with recognitional onsets seem to serve this purpose.

Transcripts (19), (20), (21), (22) and (23) are examples of intentional overlapping speech that is employed to make the current speaker end his/her utterance. As has been noted before, the entirety of them additionally feature a recognitional onset of overlap.

(19) [season 3, episode 9, minute 7]

1 P: All right, you know, I will tell you why it's [wrong::
2 S: Excuse]
3 me, may I interject?
4 P: What?
5 S: Biologically speaking, Howard is perfectly justified in seeking
6 out the optimum mate for the propagation of his genetic line.

In the transcript above, Penny's intention with her current utterance (line 1) is to introduce a presumably longer explanation for why Howard should not judge women by their appearance. However, she cannot finish her turn as Sheldon interrupts her in line 2. By saying *Excuse me, may I interject* it becomes clear that he is aware of the fact that he does not only produce an overlap but also that it might be disruptive for Penny (he 'interjects'). Sheldon realizes that Penny intends to argue for why it is wrong to judge people by appearance and he wants to provide a counter-argument. Nevertheless, the rules of turn taking allow him to provide an overlap because he can predict what the current speaker (Penny) intends to say. The onset of this overlap is recognitional in nature and it is in accordance with the turn taking system.

(20) [season 3, episode 2, minute 3]

1 P: What are they talking about?
2 L: hh I don't know:
3 S: I know. As I'm [sure you're aware
4 L: [Dut! Dut-dut-dut-dut:::
5 S: If that's Morse code, that's terrible. (.) As I was saying, you and
6 Leonard had a disappointing sexual encounter, or earlier this
7 evening, Leonard characterized it as-'just fine'. So what you're
8 seeing is a continuation of the mocking that followed.

(21) [season 2, episode 4, minute 0]

1 S: Baby wipe?
2 P: Why do you [have-
3 H: [No, don't ask.
4 L: [No, don't, don't.
5 (2.4)
6 S: I'll tell you why:

The excerpts (20) and (21) above are similar in that in both cases the speakers performing the overlap can predict what the current speaker (Sheldon and Penny respectively) intend to say and that they try to make them stop because of the anticipated content of the current turn they are uttering. In (20), Leonard tries to prevent Sheldon from telling Penny what he has said about his sex life with her (line 4). However, this interjection fails and Sheldon completes his intended utterance in lines 5 to 8 anyway. In (21) a similar situation occurs. Penny wants to ask Sheldon why he uses baby wipes. Howard and Leonard anticipate what Penny wants to ask and therefore they want to prevent her from doing so, possibly because they already know what the answer will contain. Again, Sheldon obviously does not feel disrupted by the overlapping speech performed by the interlocutors and consequently he utters his willingness to tell Penny why he uses baby wipes (line 6).

(22) [season 3, episode 3, minute 3]

1 P: Okay, so, Kim, the night manager, went on maternity leave and
2 her husband's name is Sandy, right? So get this, her
3 replacement is a woman named Sandy whose husband's name
4 is Kim.
5 (4.3)
6 Hehe
7 L: Wow::=
8 P: =I know. What are the odds. hh
9 S: Easily calculable. We begin by identifying the set of married

10 Couples with unisex names. We eliminate those unqualified for
11 restaurant work, the aged, the imprisoned and the limbless, for
12 example. Next, we look at
13 [the ( )-
14 L: [SHELDON.
15 It's an amazing coincidence. Can we leave it at that?

In transcript (22), Leonard performs an overlap in line 14. Sheldon is about to explain how to calculate the frequency of an event that Penny became witness of (lines 1-4). From what Sheldon said so far (lines 9-12), Leonard anticipates that Sheldon will produce a seemingly endless turn and therefore he wants to stop him. In contrast to overlaps in previous transcripts of this chapter, this recognitional onset of an overlap occurs not so much because the interruptive speaker (Leonard) can predict *what* the current speaker wants to say. He rather performs the overlap because he can predict that Sheldon's turn will not only be extremely long but also inappropriate regarding Penny's comment *What are the odds* (line 8). Hence, Leonard can predict the length of Sheldon's turn rather than its content. As anticipating the extent of a turn represents a sort of recognition, an onset of an overlap produced in such a context is recognitional in nature.

(23) [season 2, episode 14, minute 5]
1 L: Hey, Penny. How was work?
2 P: Great:: I hope I'm a waitress at the Cheesecake Factory for my
3 whole life.
4 S: Was that sarcasm?
5 P: No:
6 S: Was that sarcasm?
7 P: Yes.
8 S: Was that [sarcasm?
9 L: [STOP] it!

Similarly to transcript (22), excerpt (23) represents an instance in which Leonard provides an overlap due to his anticipation that Sheldon is not going to stop talking. In this case, however, the current turn (line 8) which Leonard interrupts, is not lengthy in itself but it is rather the constant repetition of Sheldon's question *Was that sarcasm?* that leads Leonard to make him stop talking. Thus, Leonard can predict the infinity of the question-answer play between Sheldon and Penny concerning sarcasm.

One can say that in the series TBBT recognitional onsets commonly appear when characters try to stop talking current speakers. The overlaps are performed due to the prediction of the characters of how the current turns are going to continue. In this respect the prediction can concern the content, the length or the iteration of the current utterances.

When drawing the comparison between overlaps in TBBT and in natural talk, it appears as if they were not equally represented in the two areas. In everyday communication, recognitional onsets of overlaps probably do not primarily serve the purpose of stopping someone's turn. They might be used for more varied reasons, such as to provide an addition to the current utterance of a speaker. As this is not the case in the series TBBT, this area of overlaps represents a major divergence from naturally occurring conversation.

Conventional usage of overlaps

Apart from the conspicuous production of overlaps with the explicit purpose to make speakers end their current turns, overlaps are also produced without the intention to do so. The following three examples represent overlaps in speech taken from the series TBBT that are closest to how they would occur in natural conversation, i.e. they are realized in ways comparable to everyday communication.

transitional onset

(24) [season 1, episode 17, minute 7]

1	L:	Just roll the dice.
2		(4.6) ((Raj rolls the dice and moves the piece on the
3		backgammon board))
4	R:	((reads what it says on backgammon board)) Enslaved by
5		warlocks. Stay here till you roll two, for or
6		six.
7		She was MAD at him!

Segment (24) is an excerpt from a scene in which Leonard, Sheldon, Howard and Raj play a board game. Leonard is upset because he has just unintentionally helped Penny to solve her problems with her boyfriend. Actually, he tried to achieve the opposite in order to have chances with Penny himself. In this scene, Leonard vents his anger concerning his failure

to come closer to Penny. In lines 4 and 5 Raj reads the instructions provided on the backgammon board. In the same moment, Leonard seems to explode. He is so frustrated because of the previous encounter with Penny that he can no longer remain silent and thus he interrupts Raj by making a comment that is related to his foregoing conversation with Penny. Consequently, he produces an overlap that is in no way related to Raj's current turn. The incoherence of the overlapping turns implies that the onset cannot be recognitional and progressional and therefore it must be transitional.

recognitional onset

(25) [season 1, episode 17, minute 9]

1	L:	I was just going off your comment about the nice guy=
2	P:	=No:: I know, I [got that. Yeah, totally.
3	L:	[And honest- (.)
4		So but it's no big deal=
5	P:	=Yes.

The above segment is an excerpt from a conversation between Penny and Leonard. The onset of the overlap is recognitional because Leonard intends to say something that is related to Penny's current utterance. However, Leonard stops after having said *And honest*, which shows that he repairs the overlapping speech. He waits until Penny has finished her turn (line 2) and only after that, he provides another contribution (line 4). The overlap is subject to instant repair and therefore it does not impede the progression of the conversation.

recognitional onset

(26) [season 2, episode 9, minute 15]

1	L:	OW:: (.) [Ow:: ow::
2	B:	[Oh my God,
3		are you okay?
4	L:	Uh, eh: no, I'm not. I'm bleeding.
5	S:	Like a gladiator.

The final example shows an overlap of sounds and speech. Leonard has just cut his finger, the related pain being represented by sounds (*ow*). His current girlfriend Stephanie Barnett (abbreviated as B in the transcript), instantly asks him if he is okay (line 3). The onset of this overlap is recognitional because,

even though the current turn (line 1) solely consists of sounds, Stephanie's utterance in line 2 still is a reaction to this turn. She hears Leonard moaning and she formulates a related turn.

Excerpts (24), (25) and (26) are examples of overlaps that one can frequently encounter in natural talk as well. However, such overlaps are rather rare in the series TBBT and therefore one can say that they are underrepresented.

Considering the outcomes of the investigation of overlaps in TBBT, one can conclude that the majority of recognitional onsets of overlapping speech serve the purpose of making somebody stop talking. The overrepresentation of this type of onset, as well as the overall rarity of overlaps, indicate an unnatural implementation of overlaps in the series. Although ordinary types of overlaps occur as well, they appear too seldom to say that TBBT features overlaps in a realistic manner.

8.4 Repair

Within conversation analysis repair refers to the correction of errors produced by speakers. Repair becomes necessary when, for example, the system of turn taking fails and when thus overlaps or silence occur. (cf. chapter 3.2.2. on turn taking in this thesis) Overlaps and silence have already been discussed at length in the previous section and therefore they will not be incorporated in this chapter again. What is noteworthy, however, with regard to overlaps is that the speakers involved in the production of overlapping speech instantly react in order to repair the error. This means that usually one of the two speakers stops talking so that s/he no longer violates the basic rule concerning 'one speaker at a time'. In the case of silence as well, speakers normally tend to quickly react. Silence is a comparable type of infringement to the system of turn taking that demands correction. Repair, however, is not only necessary in the case of silence and overlapping speech. Example (27), which has already been discussed in the chapter on turn allocation, shows that repair may also be required when turn taking fails due to next speaker self-selection. In this case, Leonard is annoyed by Sheldon because the latter selects himself as the next speaker. Leonard

utters his dissatisfaction in line 3 and adds the reparative element *Penny*, which clarifies from whom he expects to get an answer to his initial question (line 1).

(27) [season 2, episode 18, minute 10]
1 L: Okay, what's wrong with it?
2 S: What's wrong with it?=
3 L: =NOT YOU. I wasn't asking you. (.) Penny?
4 P: eh: well, it's a little juvenile. I mean- it kind of looks like the
5 MySPace page of a 13-year-old girl.

In addition to problems with next speaker self-selection, other failures in communication may require repair as well. Some of them will be discussed below with regard to the four repair types as defined by Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998: 61). As these have been elucidated already in the chapter on turn taking, they will only be recalled here: self-initiated self-repair, other-initiated self-repair, self-initiated other-repair, other-initiated other-repair;

Self-initiated self-repair

The three excerpts quoted in this section are instances for self-initiated self-repair. In (28), Penny corrects her own utterance in line 2 by saying *I mean, not you smart. Normal, non-freaky smart*. Thus, she reformulates the initial part of her turn (line 1-2) because she feels that what she has said was ambiguous.

(28) [season 1, episode 17, minute 4]
1 P: I really thought Mike was different. I thought he was .h sensitive
2 and smart. I mean, not you: smart. Normal, non-freaky smart.
3 (1.2)
4 L: Yeah, no sure.

Similarly to (28), transcript (29) shows how a speaker, namely Leonard, both initiates and repairs an error himself. He is in the middle of discussing his relationship with his girlfriend Stephanie. In line 6, he starts a sentence by saying *I ju-* but he recommences and formulates it differently.

(29) [season 2, episode 10, minute 13]
1 L: But: .hh Okay. Um: I have feelings, right?
2 S: Uh-huh.

3 L: Okay, and it's perfectly okay to express those feelings, right?
4 S: Of course. Honey, why don't you tell me what it is you're
5 feeling?
6 L: Okay, well, I ju- I think it's important to remember that we: .h
7 move: at a: pace that is our: speed and: .h
8 (2.1)
9 Oh, shoot, I had it.

In line 1 of segment (30), Sheldon starts to narrate something about his life as a teenager. After a short pause at the beginning of line 2, he conducts a self-repair by explaining what *summa cum laude* means (line 2). Although none of the characters present has asked for clarification, Sheldon provides a translation of the Latin expression. The fact that nobody has asked for it is indicated by Penny's successive turn *I just love how you always skip over the part where no one asks*.

(30) [season 3, episode 18, minute 4]
1 S: I was fourteen and graduating summa cum laude from college.
2 (.) Summa cum laude is Latin for 'with highest honours'.
3 P: I just love how you always skip over the part where no one
4 asks.

Other-initiated self-repair

Transcript (31) contains a repair in line 13. Leonard initiates this repair by saying *Howard* (line 12). The latter has made an insinuating remark in the previous turn (line 11) and he repairs this ambiguous utterance himself by noting that what he has said was inappropriate.

(31) [season 1, episode 15, minute 0]
1 L: What's going on?
2 H: Shh:: Hot girl in Sheldon's office.
3 (1.0)
4 L: Sheldon's office?
5 (2.5) ((they watch the woman))
6 L: Is she lost?
7 (1.0)
8 H: I don't think so. I followed her here from the parking lot.
9 (2.7)
10 L: Maybe she's his lawyer.
11 H: Well, she's free to examine my briefs.
12 L: Howard.
13 H: I know, I'm disgusting. I should be punished. (.) By her: Oh look,
14 I did it again.

The following segment shows that repairs in TBBT are also frequently carried out because of other characters' questions for clarification. In line 4, Leonard uses the word *fear* but it seems not to be clear to Stuart what is meant by this word. Therefore, Stuart repeats the word in a questioning manner in the consecutive turn (line 5). This represents an initiation for a repair, which consequently is carried out by Leonard in line 6.

(32) [season 2, episode 22, minute 8]

1 L: You know, guys come on to her all the time, so you need to,
2 like, set yourself apart, you know? Be a little shy:: And don't
3 make too much eye contact. And you know- treat her with, like
4 cool detachment. And and and, you know (.) <u>fear</u>.
5 S: Fear?
6 L: Yeah: Like ya you're afraid that if you <u>touch</u> her, she'll <u>break</u>.

The final example of an other-initiated self-repair shows how repair can fail. In lines 6 and 7 Sheldon asks for clarification. Thus, this excerpt is similar to segment (32) as in both cases a word is unclear for an interlocutor. The difference between (32) and (33), however, is that in the latter example, the demand for repair is not met by Leonard, who solely responds *Never mind*. For Leonard it probably is too obvious what *date* in the current context means to bother with providing a response to Sheldon's request for clarification.

(33) [season 3, episode 9, minute 2]

1 S: I have something to announce but out of respect for convention,
2 I will wait for you to finish your current conversation. What are
3 You talking about?
4 L. The cultural paradigm in which people have sex after three
5 dates.
6 S: I see: (.) Now, are we talking about '<u>date'</u> the social interaction
7 or '<u>date'</u> the dried fruit?
8 (3.1)
9 L: Never mind. What's your announcement?

<u>Self-initiated other-repair</u>

While at first having been unable to detect instances of self-initiated other-repair in TBBT, a very limited quantity of them was found after an additional investigation of the series. The following two excerpts contain repairs that are activated through the producer of the error him/herself but which consequently are carried out by an interlocutor.

(34) [season 1, episode 16, minute 13]

1 H: Excuse me.
2 N: Fill this out and have a seat.
3 H: No, listen. See, we're throwing my friend a surprise party and
4 I'm supposed to keep him out of his apartment for two hours.
5 N: Aha, fill this out and have a seat.
6 H: No, see, the only way I could get him to leave was to tell him
7 I ate a peanut, because I'm allergic to peanuts.
8 N: Oh (.) well, in that case, fill this out and have a seat.
9 (1.8)
10 H: Look, all I need from you is to take me in the back and give me
11 a band-aid so that I can pretend I had a shot of epinephrine and
12 then you tell my friend you need to keep me under observation
13 for about an hour, an hour and a half.
14 N: Is that all you need?
15 H: Yes.
16 N: Get out of my ER.

In the scene from which segment (34) has been taken, Howard talks to a nurse (indicated by the capital letter N) in an emergency room. As he is trying to make Leonard believe that he has an allergic reaction to a peanut, which he in fact has not eaten, Howard requires the nurse's help in order to uphold his ruse in front of his friend. Howard's initial utterance *Excuse me* is immediately replied by the nurse's standard statement *Fill this out and have a seat*. As this is not the intended reaction that Howard tries to induce, he initiates a repair in lines 3 and 4, which obviously should support him in receiving a more desirable response from the nurse. As the latter, however, does not provide such an acceptable second pair part in the following turn (line 5) either, Howard initiates another repair in lines 6 and 7 again. The same response *fill this out and have a seat* given in line 8 still is not a satisfactory one, leading Howard to the initiation of yet another repair (lines 10-13). The turn uttered by the nurse in reply in line 14 raises Howard's hope as it is a sign of a finally successful repair performed by the nurse. Nevertheless, as the speech exchange between the characters ends in the nurse dismissing Howard from the ER (line 16), the repair work eventually fails. This scene features a sequence of three self-initiated repairs from the point of view of Howard. Still, his interlocutor (the nurse) does not perform satisfactory repairs in either of the adjacency pairs and thus, this sequence needs to be interpreted as an example for the failure of self-initiated other-repair.

(35) [season 1, episode 4, minute 14]

1 M: You know, you two make a cute couple.
2 ((Leonard and Penny both laugh))
3 L: I- no, no. No, we're not- we're not a couple. We're singles. Two
4 singles. Like those (.) individually wrapped- slices of cheese:
5 that-
6 (2.7)
7 Or friends.
8 (2.0)
9 M: Did I pluck a nerve there?
10 H: Oh, yeah.

In the example quoted above, Sheldon's mother Mary (abbreviated with the capital letter M) makes an unthought-of comment concerning Leonard and Penny being a nice couple (line 1). Their laughter as well as Leonard's comment (lines 3-5, line 7) clearly signals the unsuitability of Mary's comment, who consequently initiates a repair to her initial question in line 9. Thereupon, Howard repairs the error in line 10 by affirming that the utterance made in line 1 was inappropriate. I would argue that Mary's question in line 9, whether the issue of being a couple is a sore point with Leonard and Penny, is both caused by the reactions of the latter (lines 2-7) as well as by Mary's own utterance from line 1. Thus, as the initiation of the repair is not performed directly after the erroneous utterance, it could be stated that the repair and its initiation are delayed, yet they still are related to the utterance to be corrected (line 1).

Despite showing features of failure and delay, segments (34) and (35) are valuable instances of self-initiated other-repair. Thus, although in very limited amounts, this repair type is featured in TBBT as well.

Other-initiated other-repair

Other-initiated other-repairs are less frequent than other-initiated and self-initiated self-repairs. However, the following two transcripts will show that they still are part of the sitcom.

Excerpt (36) is taken from a scene in which Penny insults Howard because he constantly tries to flirt with her. She can no longer accept his behaviour and she vents her anger. In lines 3 and 4 Sheldon, though not directly involved in the conversation, provides a repair to Penny's utterance. Thus,

Sheldon both initiates and carries out the correction himself. Penny agrees with Sheldon's objection, which she shows in consecutive turn by saying *Yeah, you might be right.*

(36) [season 2, episode 12, minute 4]
1 P: Look, normally, I can just ignore you. I mean, I get it. You're a
2 little peculiar. Like Sheldon.
3 S: Yeah, excuse me, Penny, but in this room, you're the one who's
4 peculiar.
5 P: Yeah, you might be right. .hh

The last example contains an other-repair that is initiated by Leonard. Sheldon reacts in an unacceptable manner to Leonard's initial turn (line 2). Leonard would have expected Sheldon to show some interest and he clearly states which question he would have expected to gain from Sheldon (line 4). Despite that, the latter shows no interest in Leonard's reproach (line 5). Thus, Leonard carries out the repair although it leaves Sheldon, the producer of the error, unaffected.

(37) [season 1, episode 17, minute 16]
1 L: I don't think I can go out with her tonight.
2 S: Then don't.
3 (1.8)
4 L: Other people would say <u>why not</u>:
5 S: Other people might be interested.

In summary, one can say that all types of repair are contained in the sitcom TBBT. However, there is a tendency for self-repairs to prevail. Repairs occur due to various reasons, such as failure of intended next speaker selection, silence and overlaps. In addition, the examples provided in this section show that repairs oftentimes are also required due to the content of a turn. One speaker – intentionally or unintentionally – says something or fails to say it. Consequently, the speaker him/herself or the interlocutor is annoyed by the content of the current turn and thus either of the two parties initiates a repair. Based on the observation that repairs in most cases are both initiated and carried out in successful ways, conversation in this respect shares basic features with non-represented speech encounters.

8.5 Conclusion

The analysis of turn taking in the series TBBT leads to revealing results. Whereas turn construction and turn allocation appear to be realized in comparable manners to natural talk, differences can be detected in the areas of silence, overlaps and partly in the domain of repair. Regarding silence, one can say that lapses are very rare and that gaps and pauses are longer than in real conversation, which has to do with the incorporation of sounds of levity. Overlaps generally appear seldom for reasons of sustaining clarity of speech and those that occur often have the function to cause a speaker to cease his/her turn. Overlaps with progressional onsets are not featured in the series whereas the remaining types of onsets (transitional and recognitional) do appear. In the area of repair, one can observe an underrepresentation of one type of error correction that is self-initiated other-repair. Otherwise, this domain of turn taking in TBBT is realized similarly to naturally occurring talk.

In conclusion, one can say that except for turn construction, turn allocation and repair, turn taking in the sitcom TBBT shows unrealistic characteristics. Some aspects, such as gaps and silence, are represented in exaggerated manners whereas others (e.g. specific types of overlaps and repairs) are underrepresented or not featured at all. Thus, these domains where conversation in TBBT clearly differs from everyday speech encounters are evidence of the represented nature of television talk.

9 Adjacency pairs

9.1 Ordinary adjacency pairs

In chapter 3.2.3, adjacency pairs in natural conversation have been discussed with regard to Clark's (1996: 197) list of their basic features. The following examples both of question-answer pairs and of pairs of statements will show that these principles are implemented in conversation in the sitcom TBBT as well.

(38) [season 3, episode 12, minute 12]

1	L:	How can I go out with a woman who believes in psychics?	*first pair part*
2	H:	.hh hey, ya I once dated a girl who believed she was abducted	
3		by aliens.	*second pair part*
4	L:	And that didn't bother you?	*first pair part*
5	H:	Au contraire, it meant she was gullible and: open to a little	
6		probing.	*second pair part*
7		(1.8)	
8	L:	What am I supposed to do:? (.) Pretend I believe something I	
9		don't when I'm with Penny?	*first pair part*
10	H:	hey: .h I'm sure Penny fakes all kinds of things when she's with	
11		you.	*second pair part*

(39) [season 3, episode 4, minute 16]

1	P:	.hh are we terrible people?	*first pair part*
2	L:	I don't know::(.) What do you want me to do:?	*second pair part, first pair part*
3		(1.4)	
4	P:	Hh get him. Bring him back.	*second pair part*
5	L:	You sure?	*first pair part*
6	P:	Yeah:	*second pair part*

Transcripts (38) and (39) exclusively contain question-answer pairs. In (38) it is Leonard who poses several questions, which corresponds to the formulation of first pair parts. His interlocutor Howard provides answers to each question, i.e. he produces related second pair parts. In (39), the conversation progresses similarly in that the questions asked equalize first pair parts and that the answers to these questions represent the respective second pair parts. The only difference between segments (38) and (39) is that in the latter both characters at least once produce both a first pair part as well as a second pair part. Whereas in (38) it is always Leonard who asks a question and Howard who gives an answer, in (39) Leonard and Penny seem to have equal access to the production of both elements of adjacency pairs. In line 2, Leonard produces a second pair part (*I don't know*) and a first pair part (*What do you want me to do?*) within one turn and therefore in the consecutive turn, Penny provides the second pair part, i.e. an answer, to the preceding question. Despite proofing that in conversation the responsibility for one of the two elements of an adjacency pair can either be constant or change, the segments also exemplify that question-answer adjacency pairs are a common linguistic device for the progression of conversation in TBBT.

In addition to the frequent question-answer type of adjacency pairs, pairs of utterances also occur as consecutive statements.

(40) [season 2, episode 22, minute 8]

1	S:	Well, tonight's my date with Penny and since we haven't been	
2		able to connect by phone=	*first pair part*
3	L:	=Yeah, I'm sorry. It's been broken.	*second pair part*
4	S:	Or e-mail=	*first pair part*
5	L:	=Yeah, that's broken too. Everything's broken.	*second pair part*

(41) [season 1, episode 17, minute 14]

1	S:	You see, people hear the word year and they think duration.	
2		Foot pound has the same problem. That's a unit of work, not of	
3		weight.	*first pair part*
4	P:	Right, thanks.	*second pair part*
5	S:	Hm it's a common mistake.	*first pair part*
6	P:	Not the first one I've made today.	*second pair part*

In (40), Stuart and Leonard discuss Stuart's date with Penny. However, Leonard is reluctant to do so due to his jealousy of Stuart because the latter has got the chance to go out with Penny. Both turns uttered by Stuart (lines 1-2, line 4) represent the first pair parts. In the consecutive turns (line 3, line 5) Leonard provides respective contributions that are related content-wise to the first pair parts. In excerpt (41), Sheldon instructs Penny with regard to common mistakes related to the use of physical units. Sheldon's utterance extending over lines 1 to 3 is met with a second pair part in which Penny thanks him – though sarcastically – for the information (line 4). The second adjacency pair in this excerpt extends over lines 5 and 6. Sheldon continues the conversation in providing a comment on the commonness of wrong uses of units to which Penny reacts in providing a related turn on a comparable mistake that she has made that day (Penny refers to her regret that she has engaged in this discussion with Sheldon at all, as she is not interested in the subject matter).

What the four excerpts (38), (39), (40) and (41) show is that first and second pair parts in the series TBBT frequently consist of question-answer sequences and pairs of statements. In addition, these examples are evidence of the fact that the five principles of adjacency pairs as defined by Clark (1996: 197) are respected. This means that speech encounters in TBBT,

similarly to those in natural talk, can be divided into adjacency pairs, consisting of first pair parts and second pair parts. These two components are commonly uttered by different speakers. Furthermore, adjacency pairs show a certain structure. This implies that speakers utter the first pair parts and the second pair parts successively and that one can clearly identify which of the two turns in an adjacency pair the first element is and which the second. The structure of adjacency pairs also refers to the fact that the first component – be it a question, a statement or any other type of syntactical structure – defines the content and the form of the second component. This means that a speaker who utters a first pair part sets the conditions for what is going to follow in the second element of the adjacency pair. For example, in the second adjacency pair (lines 5 and 6) of transcript (41), the second pair part is related to the preceding turn as it contains a reference to the notion of making mistakes, which was already mentioned in the first pair part. Thus, the second element is conditionally relevant and expectable because of its related content. As adjacency pairs in the sitcom TBBT comply with the basic principles that Clark (1996: 197) defined for pairs of utterances in natural conversation, one can claim that in this respect TBBT shows realistic characteristics.

9.2 Preference organization

In the following section, attention will be drawn to a specific aspect of adjacency pairs, i.e. preference organization. In conversation, second pair parts are not equally expected or valued by the speaker who formulates the first pair part. This means that, from the point of view of the producer of the first pair part, a second pair part can either be preferred or dispreferred.

In the sitcom TBBT, preferred second pair parts are the most common phenomena. They appear in similar ways and structures as in the following excerpt:

(42) [season 2, episode 23, minute 13]
1 P: Hey, Leonard, can I talk to you for a sec?
2 L: Sure, but let’s go out here where there’s a little- less yelling and
3 guilt.

One can see that Penny's inquiry to talk to Leonard (line 1) is paired with a preferred positive answer in lines 2 to 3. From the point of view of Penny, who is the producer of the first pair part, Leonard's response is desired and expectable.

What is noteworthy with regard to adjacency pairs in TBBT is that preferred second pair parts frequently are sources of laughter. The following two excerpts will show in what respect the second parts of utterance pairs are used to convey humour.

(43) [season 2, episode 17, minute 7]

1 L: Can we please change the subject?
2 R: Sure. Tell us again how you screwed up and got Penny back
3 together with her old boyfriend?

(44) [season 1, episode 7, minute 7]

1 S: Your head goes on the other end.
2 P: Why?
3 S: It's culturally universal. A bed, even a temporary bed, is always
4 Oriented with the headboard away from the door. It serves the
5 ancient imperative of protecting oneself against marauders.

In transcript (43), one can see how a question for changing the subject (line 1) is answered with a preferred response (*Sure*). It is clear from the context as well as from the formulation of the first pair part (e.g. the prominent stress is on *please*, indicating certain urgency) that the positive response provided in line 2 is the preferred one to the question. This means that Leonard asks *Can we please change the subject?* with the intent to really change it. Consequently, Raj changes the topic indeed, which would be the expected and desired consequence of Leonard's inquiry. However, Raj changes to a topic that represents a sore point with Leonard, which is that he unintentionally helped Penny to get back her boyfriend. Therefore, though the second pair part is preferred, the consequence is dispreferred. This disagreement between preferred second pair part and dispreferred implication is why the audience perceives this adjacency pair as funny.

In segment (44), a similar development in the conversation takes place. Penny's question in line 2 concerning why her head should go on the other end of the couch is met with a preferred answer (lines 3-5) by Sheldon.

Penny asks for clarification (*Why?*) and thus Sheldon's second pair part is expected in that it provides an explanation for why Penny's head should go on the other end. However, Sheldon's explanation is to some extent inappropriate as it gives too detailed an account of why Penny should change her position on the sofa. Nevertheless, similar to the second pair part in extract (43), the second part of the adjacency pair in transcript (44) is the source of humour. Although the second pair parts in both examples are preferred, they are not satisfying for the producer of the first element in terms of the implications and the content of the responses.

In contrast to the preferred second pair parts, dispreferred second pair parts by principle are formulated less clearly, meaning that the speaker formulating a dispreferred utterance makes use of hesitation markers such as *um* or *well* and s/he pauses frequently. Thus, s/he gains time to rethink and reformulate his/her turn. In the series TBBT, this speaking behaviour can be observed as well. The following excerpt is an exemplary instance for how characters in the series formulate dispreferred second pair parts.

(45) [season 2, episode 10, minute 13]

1	S:	Okay, why don't you just tell me what it is you have to tell me?
2	L:	Okay (.) um:::: Well- (.) look it's just that- (.) things: between you
3		and me have been going pretty quick.
4		(1.4)
5	S:	And?
6		(1.2)
7	L:	It's just a little scary.
8	S:	Well, yeah:: but scary <u>good</u>, right?
9	L:	Sure::
10		(2.5)
11		When is scary <u>not</u> good?

In this segment, Leonard discusses his relationship with Stephanie, his current girlfriend. He has problems in finding the right words to formulate a second pair part to her initial question (line 1) that violates her feeling as little as possible. Thus, Leonard not only uses expressions of hesitance (*um*, *well*, *it's just that*) and makes frequent pauses in line 2, but he also lengthens the pronunciation of the words *um* and *things*. All these measures supply him with more time to formulate his turn. In line 8, Stephanie formulates another first pair part. Leonard responds in saying *sure* but it is clear from the

pronunciation of the word (exaggerated length) as well as from his body language that he does not mean it. Leonard lies in order to avoid the production of a dispreferred answer. Nevertheless, it is clear to the viewers that he actually wants to say the opposite and they can laugh about it. What is noteworthy in this respect is that the characters, in this case Leonard, try to conform to the convention to provide preferred replies. Therefore, they formulate the dispreferred elements in as polite a way as possible. On a linguistic level, Leonard formulates a preferred utterance in order not to hurt Stephanie's feelings although it is obvious that the honest answer would have been dispreferred in nature. Overall, extracts such as (45) quoted above are frequently employed and thus conversation in TBBT in this respect corresponds to natural speech encounters.

However, the following transcripts will show that dispreferred second pair parts in the series oftentimes are not formulated as hesitantly as is common for ordinary talk. The characters often blatantly ignore the convention to be cautious with the production of dispreferred second pair parts and they are strikingly direct.

(46) [season 1, episode 4, minute 6]

1 S: Hey, you wanna hear an interesting thing about tomatoes?
2 P: pt No: No, not really. Listen, didn't you say you needed some
3 eggs?

(47) [season 2, episode 9, minute 12]

1 S: May I come in?
2 P: No.
3 S: Ye-
4 (1.8)
5 S: I see. Apparently, my earlier inquiry regarding you and Leonard
6 crossed some sort of line. (.) I apologize.

As one can see in line 2 of transcript (46) and in line 2 of transcript (47), the second components in these adjacency pairs are dispreferred in nature as they are neither expected nor desired by the character producing the first pair parts. In the first segment, Penny denies Sheldon's intent to tell her something about tomatoes. In the consecutive excerpt, it is again Penny who negates a question posed by Sheldon and who thus produces a second pair part that is not anticipated by him. Although both examples are taken from

speech encounters between Sheldon and Penny, this has no significance with regard to which characters most frequently produce dispreferred utterances. At times, all of them make use of abrupt and overt dispreferred turns. As it is the case with the majority of the segments that have been discussed with regard to adjacency pairs, unhesitatingly formulated dispreferred second pair parts frequently serve the purpose of adding to the humour of the series as well.

9.3 Sheldon and dispreferred second pair parts

With regard to dispreferred second pair parts, especially one of the four highly intelligent physicists in TBBT attracts attention: Sheldon. His tendency to take things literally, his disrespect for politeness as well as his despise for conventions in conversation in general hinder him to utter expectable and desired utterances. What follows are some extracts from conversations in which Sheldon is involved in the production of dispreferred second pair parts. Either he formulates them himself or he senses other speakers' utterances as inappropriate and he demands a correction. The following transcripts solely are a small collection that should enable to grasp Sheldon's overall incapability of producing conventionally accepted adjacency pairs.

The following segment contains a first pair part uttered by Penny in line 3 (*I need some guinea pigs*). Sheldon takes the expression *guinea pigs* literally and consequently, he provides an over-informative utterance on where best to find real guinea pigs (lines 4-7). This second pair part is dispreferred from Penny's point of view as she used guinea pigs in a symbolic way. Therefore, Sheldon's utterance is conditionally irrelevant to Penny's first pair part.

(48) [season 1, episode 8, minute 6]

1 P: Hi, guys.
2 L: Oh, hey.
3 P: I need some guinea pigs.
4 S: Oh: okay, there's a lab animal supply company in Reseda you
5 could try. But if your research is going to have human
6 applications, may I suggest white mice instead. Their brain
7 chemistry is far closer to ours.
8 (2.3)

9 P: I swear to God, Sheldon, one day I'm gonna get the hang of
10 talking to you.

In excerpt (49), Penny politely asks Sheldon whether she could ask him a question. The second pair part to this question (line 2) provided by Sheldon, however, is partly dispreferred as he openly articulates his disinterest to talk to Penny. Sheldon is outspoken about his tendency to provide a dispreferred answer (*I would prefer that you not*) but at the same time he clarifies that his utterance is not to be taken as a decline to Penny's inquiry (*I won't go so far as to forbid it*). This second pair part thus has a dispreferred onset though it entails a preferred consequence – Sheldon agrees to talk to Penny. The implication is preferred also because Penny ignores Sheldon's resentment and because she interprets his utterance as an agreement to listen to her question (line 4).

(49) [season 2, episode 1, minute 4]
1 P: Sheldon, (.) may I ask you a question?
2 S: I would prefer that you not, but I won't go so far as to forbid it.
3 (1.9)
4 P: All right, I heard <u>yes</u>, (.) so-
5 (1.7)
6 Okay, here's my question (.) Has Leonard ever dated- (.) you
7 know, a <u>regular</u> girl?

The following segment is an example for a dispreferred second pair part (line 2) that Sheldon utters during a conversation with Leonard. The latter talks about his concerns about his date with Penny and he expects a more active participation rather than the incurious *Then don't* that Sheldon provides in response. As in excerpt (49), Sheldon uses the second pair part to inform his interlocutor – though in this case in a less outspoken manner – about his lack of interest into the subject of the conversation. In this example, however, Leonard clearly informs Sheldon about the latter's failure to formulate an expected second pair part by noting that *Other people would say 'why not'*. Thus, Leonard initiates a repair (line 4). The latter, however, is not carried out successfully by Sheldon as he only replies in an indirect way that he is not interested in providing a preferred second pair part (line 5).

(50) [season 1, episode 17, minute 16]

1 L: I don't think I can go out with her tonight.
2 S: Then don't.
3 (1.8)
4 L: Other people would say 'Why not:'.
5 S: Other people might be interested.

The final example is different to the preceding excerpts in that it is Sheldon himself who perceives a second pair part produced by another speaker as undesirable. In line 4, Leonard replies *Interesting*, though Sheldon obviously expects a different response. Similarly to (50), the lack of a preferred answer leads the producer of the first pair part (in this case Sheldon) to initiate a repair. In excerpt (51) this is done by saying *Ask me why* (line 6). Thus, when comparing the speech segments (50) and (51) one can detect a high degree of congruence. The only difference between these two excerpts is that in the first one it is Sheldon who produces the dispreferred second pair part, whereas in the one quoted below it is Leonard who fails to provide a satisfying second pair part.

(51) [season 2, episode 14, minute 5]

1 S: You know, I've given the matter some thought- and:: I think I'd
2 be willing to be a house pet to a race of super-intelligent aliens.
3 (3.3)
4 L: Interesting.
5 (1.1.)
6 S: Ask me why.
7 (2.0)
8 L: Do I have to?
9 S: Of course, that's how you move a conversation forward.

The examples of dispreferred second pair parts quoted in this section prove that Sheldon is the most noticeable character with respect to the failure of producing satisfactory paired elements. This observation is in alignment with Sheldon's overall tendency to ignore conversational principles.

9.4 Insertion sequence

Insertion sequences are employed in realistic manners in the series. The following two examples will show that there is no noteworthy difference to

how insertions, either successfully or unsuccessfully, are handled in natural conversation.

Excerpt (52) contains a successful insertion sequence. Penny produces a first pair part (A) in line 1, which is not met with a corresponding second pair part (A) until the insertion sequence consisting of a first pair part (B) and a second pair part (B) is complete. Thus, the adjacency pair (B) is successfully inserted into the adjacency pair (A).

(52) [season 3, episode 10, minute 4]

1	P:	Hey, Sheldon, can I talk to you for a second?	*first pair part (A)*
2	S:	It's not about shoes:, is it?	*first pair part (B)*
3		(1.3)	
4		I don't think I could go through that again.	
5		(1.1)	
6	P:	It's not about shoes:	*second pair part (B)*
7	S:	Then speak.	*second pair part (A)*

Transcript (53) shows that if the inserted elements are more numerous than a single adjacency pair, the insertion possibly fails. In this scene, Penny mourns her bad luck she has with men and Leonard dares to ask her out for the first time in the series. Penny does not answer the first pair part (A) uttered in line 1 (*What about if you went out with me?*) with a corresponding second pair part before line 13 and this is too late for Leonard to grasp that this second pair part belongs to his initial inquiry. The three inserted adjacency pairs (B), (C) and (D) cause the insertion sequence to fail. Leonard does not know what Penny's answer *yes* in line 13 refers to and thus they are confronted with a communicational problem that they need to solve in lines 15 to 17. Thus, the failure of the insertion leads to the necessity to repair the error.

(53) [season 1, episode 17, minute 9]

1	L:	What about if you went out with <u>me</u>?	*first pair part (A)*
2		(3.6)	
3	P:	Are you asking me out?	*first pair part (B)*
4		(1.8)	
5	L:	Ehm: yes, I am (.) asking you out.	*second pair part (B)*
6		(2.0)	
7	P:	Wow.	*first pair part (C)*
8		(2.6)	
9	L:	I was just going off your comment about the nice guy=	

second pair part (C)

10 P: =No:: I know, I [got that. Yeah, totally.
11 L: [And honest (.)
12 So but it's no big deal.= *overlapping first and second pair part (D)*
13 P: =Yes. *second pair part (A)*
14 (1.9)
15 L: Yes, what?
16 (1.6)
17 P: Yes, I wanna go out with you.

Unimportant whether insertion sequences succeed or fail, the instances of insertions featured in the series correspond to how speakers proceed in natural conversation. In both natural and represented talk insertions are successful as long as the inserted adjacency pairs are related to the initial first pair part and as long the inserted adjacency pairs are not too numerous. The failure of insertions in TBBT, as is shown in (53), leads to repair and therefore one can say that in this respect communicational problems are dealt with in realistic manners.[5]

9.5 Conclusion

From the analysis of adjacency pairs in TBBT, one can conclude that generally, adjacency pairs are realized similarly to those in natural conversation. Differences to natural talk, however, can be detected in the preference organization. First, in the sitcom there is an unexpected high frequency of direct formulations of dispreferred second pair parts as this is rather uncommon in everyday communication. Moreover, Sheldon is the most remarkable of all characters in this respect due to his prevalent incapability of providing conventionally acceptable adjacency pairs. Second, preference organization in TBBT is different to natural conversation in that in the series preference organization oftentimes serves a specific function, namely to create humour. This means that assumingly both preferred and dispreferred second pair parts are deliberately employed in comic ways in order to amuse the audience.

[5] For detailed information on the notion of repair in the series TBBT see chapter 8.4.

10 Phatic communion

As previous discussions in this paper have shown, phatic talk appears at the margins of conversation (cf. chapter 4.1.). Therefore, the following practical discussion of phatic communion contains transcripts of openings and closings of conversations from the series TBBT. With respect to this, there is the need to point out that the series generally contains a higher number of conversational openings than endings. This disproportionate relationship is also represented in the following discussion as opening phases are more frequently cited than closing phases.

10.1 Openings and closings – general remarks

Concerning the marginal phases of conversation in TBBT, one major observation can be made. In the series, conversations are not always shown from the very first moment where the characters meet until the end where they take their leaves again. In the majority of cases, the characters are already assembled at the setting and frequently, they are already involved in a verbal interaction. This means that the scenes tend to set in at the middle part, i.e. the main part, of the conversation. The opening part as well as the closing part prevalently is left out. Consider the following example, in which Penny, Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj have assembled in Sheldon and Leonard's apartment to have dinner together. The scene starts in the middle of distributing the food (line 1-5). At this moment, the characters are already in the middle of a conversation. The ending of the scene (line 7-11) is noteworthy as well. At this point of time, Leonard, Howard and Raj have left already but the conversation between Sheldon and Penny about a girl whom Penny dislikes is still in progress. Yet, the scene ends and thus there is no proper ending of the conversation, i.e. there is no closing phase that would allow for the conversation to fade smoothly.

(54) [season 2, episode 19, minute 13]

1 L: Gee, thanks Penny for buying us dinner.
2 P: Mhmm.
3 H: Yeah, what's the occasion?

4 P: No occasion. Just felt like getting some Chinese chow for my
5 peeps.
6 …
7 P: I'm telling you, that girl is a user, skating through life on her
8 looks, taking advantage of innocent weak-willed men, getting
9 auditions for stupid network shows. It just creams my corn.
10 S: May I interject something here?
11 P: Please.
12 S: You got the wrong mustard.

What becomes obvious from scenes such as the one quoted here is that the series primarily features only the main parts of conversations. The scenes set in with central phases and they end as soon as the content of the conversation of each scene no longer seems necessary or relevant for the plot. Concrete examples of the elimination of the marginal phases are the beginnings of the episodes. The majority of them – 59 out of the 63 episodes under investigation to be more precise – omit the opening phases of the first scenes. Only four times does an episode start with phatic talk. These episodes are part of the second season (episode five and nine) and of the third season (episode three and twenty). In three of these cases, (episodes five and nine of season two, episode three of season three), the characters either greet each other in some way or make use of casual conversational topics. In one of these openings, it is remarkable that Sheldon uses phatic communion in an openly exaggerated way. He runs into Penny when getting his mail and asks her *What is shaking?* because, as he puts it *It's colloquial. A conversation opener.* This shows that Sheldon, despite the fact that he is unaccustomed to making use of phatic talk, is aware of the need of it for beginning a conversation. One of the four episodes that I claim to commence with phatic talk, however, is a disputable case. Although starting with an accidental encounter between Sheldon and Penny, they neither greet each other nor employ any other typical linguistic element of phatic talk. Sheldon is embarrassed to meet Penny because lately she broke up with his best friend Leonard.

(55) [season 3, episode 20, minute 1]
1 S: Uh-oh.
2 P: What?
3 S: I was going to get my mail.
4 P: Okay.

Sheldon seems to provide an excuse for why he has run into Penny (line 3) and thus it could be interpreted as an initial apology. As initial apologies are common elements of conversation openers, one could classify this speech encounter as phatic talk. However, as the scene proceeds, Sheldon seems not to know how to behave vis-à-vis Penny and he instantly notes *I just wasn't sure of the proper protocol now that you and Leonard are no longer having coitus.* This example shows that, although the episode begins with an encounter between two characters, they do not make use of phatic talk in appropriate amounts. They instantly engage in a conversation, the topic of which is very private and embarrassing for Penny, namely her past sex life with Leonard. As in the opening quoted above, in which Sheldon overuses phatic phrases, in this example again it is Sheldon who hinders ordinary small talk.[6] He minimizes the opening phase of conversation and immediately utters his personal concerns about Penny's relationship to Leonard. Despite this, I tend to argue that traces of phatic communion are present. Therefore, this scene is to count amongst the four opening scenes, which contain phatic talk.

The initial argument that phatic talk is frequently omitted from the scenes in the series TBBT was supported with a concrete example, i.e. it was demonstrated that phatic communion generally is absent in the opening scenes. The general lack of phatic communion that is represented in the series implies an unequal proportion between the marginal phases and the central phases of conversation in this sitcom, the latter being dominant. Before moving on to the discussion of concrete instances of phatic communion in the series under investigation, one might turn to a question that arises from the lack of phatic talk in TBBT: *Why* is it that there is a disproportional relation between phatic talk and 'proper' conversation (i.e. conversation taking place at the centre of a speech encounter)? Answering this question, however, can only be an attempt to provide a cause for thought rather than presenting profound arguments. The chapters about the structure of sitcoms in general and the dramatic structure in specific (cf. chapter 5.5) showed that the television genre sitcom is required to conform to stiff time restrictions. It has around twenty minutes in which the plot needs

[6] For more information on clumsy phatic communion, see the last section of this chapter.

to be forwarded and rounded up. From the very first moment onwards, tension has to be built up in order to attract the viewers' attention. With view of this time pressure under which sitcoms operate, it seems logic that unnecessary talk is omitted wherever possible. Otherwise, the audience would get bored. In addition, it would be impossible to narrate a fully-fledged story within the limited amount of time available. Another factor that surely plays a role when it comes to the omittance of the marginal phases of conversation is entertainment. Sitcoms by definition try to amuse the audience and the elimination of phatic talk may be a means to succeed in doing so. It is easily understandable that conversations beginning or ending in a conventional way, which is by opening and closing with phatic utterances, would not be appealing to an audience that is expecting to be entertained. The redundancy of greetings and leave-takings, asking for others' well-beings etc. would lead to the viewers' boredom and they might consider stopping to watch the episode or the series in general. As previous discussions have shown, phatic communion is meaningless, which means that it carries no important information. Consequently, phatic communion is no possible means of conveying jokes and humour and therefore sitcoms might refrain from including them. Unless, as is the case in the two opening scenes (54) and (55) referred to above, phatic talk is deliberately misused or misunderstood to add a funny aspect to small talk, it usually is worthless to feature it in sitcoms. Therefore, one should always bear in mind that if phatic talk is included, it is done for a certain reason. From this point onwards, however, the analysis will not concentrate on why phatic utterances are included in the series and what is achieved in doing so. It will rather focus on which linguistic elements they contain and if they are comparable to natural phatic communion.

To sum up, one might say that the answer to the question why phatic communion is rather rare in the series TBBT lies in the nature of the genre sitcom itself. Sitcoms obligatorily have a specific length and their major aim is to entertain. These basic principles probably are the main reasons why there is only limited space for phatic talk. It is shown only where relevant for achieving the purpose of transmitting humour and where it does not hinder the compliance with the predetermined limitations of the genre.

10.2 Linguistic elements in openings and closings

Having discussed the overall rareness of phatic communion in the series TBBT, one can now move on to the analysis of those scenes that do contain them. The marginal phases will be considered with regard to Schneider's (1988: 99f.) lists of linguistic elements that tend to appear in phatic talk, which have been discussed already in chapter 4.1. The following list summarizes them once again.

Table 4: Linguistic elements in the opening and closing phases of conversation

Opening	Closing
Greeting	Summary
Address	Extractor
Identification	Final apology
Initial evaluation	Final promise
Initial apology	Final evaluation
Retrospect	Prospect
Direct approach	Final thank
Indirect approach	Final wish
	Farewell

To begin with, the majority of conversation openers in TBBT contain at least two of Schneider's list of linguistic elements. The most common elements are greeting, address and direct approach. Consider the following extracts:

(56) [season 1, episode 16, minute 8]

1	H:	Hey:::	*greeting*
2	L:	Hey.	*greeting*
3	H:	How's it going?	*direct approach*
4	L:	Fine.	
5	H:	So listen, the Nuart is showing the revised, definitive cut of	
6		Blade Runner.	

(57) [season 2, episode 22, minute 3]

1	P:	Hey, Leonard.	*greeting, address*
2	L:	Oh, hi.	*greeting*
3	P:	How's it going?	*direct approach*
4	L:	Good, good. You?	*direct approach*
5	P:	Fine. (.) Oh, yeah, hey, can I ask you something?	
6	L:	Sure.	

(58) [season 1, episode 7, minute 1]

1	L:	Hey Penny. Come on in.	*greeting, address*
2	P:	Hey guys.	*greeting*
3	H:	See a Penny, pick her up, and <u>all</u> the <u>day</u> you'll <u>have</u> good	
4		<u>luck</u>.	
5		(3.4)	
6	P:	No you won't.	
7		(1.0)	
8		Can I hide out here for a while?	
9	L:	Sure: What's going on?	

(59) [season 1, episode 3, minute 11]

1	P:	Oh, hey Leonard.	*greeting, address*
2	L:	Good afternoon, Penny. So hi, hey. Eh:	*greeting, address*
3		(2.1)	
4		I was wondering if you had plans for dinner.	

What these transcripts show, however, is not only that greeting, address as well as direct approach are the most frequently used phatic utterances in opening phases but that they also tend to come in identical pairs as has been suggested for natural talk in chapter 4.1. An initial greeting by one character is replied by a similar element (e.g. (57), line 1-2: *Hey Leonard – Oh, hi*.) or an identical element (e.g. (56), line 1-2: *Hey::: – Hey.*). For closing phases, one can observe the same fact. Segment (60) contains a final wish (*have a nice walk*) uttered by Howard in line 6 and it is paired with a similar final wish (*have a nice scoot*) formulated by Sheldon (line 7). Transcript (61) contains an identical pair of elements in lines 3 and 4 (*Bye – Bye*).

(60) [season 3, episode 20, minute 7]

1	…		
2	H:	Do I smell hot dogs?	
3	S:	<u>No</u>. I mean- I have no idea what you smell.	
4	H:	Well, I definitely smell <u>raw</u> hot dog.	
5	S:	Perhaps you're getting a brain tumour.	
6	H:	All right, have a nice <u>walk</u>.	*final wish*
7	S:	I shall. Have a nice scoot.	*final wish*

(61) [season 2, episode 14, minute 16]

1	…		
2	P:	We're having dinner tomorrow night. And I get to wear my new	
3		beret. Heh heh. (.) Bye, guys.	*farewell*
4	L:	Bye.	*farewell*

Hence, as concerns the occurrence of paired phatic utterances, the series TBBT corresponds to naturally occurring speech encounters. However, this concordance is limited. Schneider (1988: 104) claims that the reciprocity of utterances in openings and closings is a matter of universal validity in natural talk and this is not the case for phatic communion in TBBT. There are numerous conversations in which phatic utterances do not appear in pairs. In this respect, the usual case is that one character starts the conversation but that the interlocutor does not reply in formulating a reciprocal utterance but any other element of phatic talk. Examples for this are transcripts (62), (63) and (64). In all three excerpts, an initial greeting is not answered by a reciprocal move but the interlocutors use various other elements (direct approach, initial apology and initial evaluation) to contribute to the phatic talk.

(62) [season 2, episode 7, minute 12]

1	S:	Oh-	
2		(2.7)	
3		Hello.	*greeting*
4		(2.4)	
5	P:	Time to do your laundry, huh?	*direct approach*
6	S:	Saturday night. Saturday is laundry night.	

(63) [season 1, episode 10, minute 9]

1	L:	Oh, hey Penny. Wow:, look at <u>you</u>, all ready for your	
2		showcase. You look <u>great</u>.	*greeting, address, initial evaluation*
3	P:	<u>Thanks</u>. (.) I just wanted to come by (.) and wish you guys luck	
4		(.) with your: <u>symposium</u>.	*initial apology*
5	L:	Oh. Well- thank you.	

(64) [season 3, episode 2]

1	L:	Hi guys.	*greeting*
2	H:	What are <u>you</u> doing here?	*initial evaluation*
3	L:	What do you mean? It's new-comic-book night.	
4	R:	Yeah but since you and Penny finally hooked up we thought	
5		you two	
6		would be having <u>bouncy naked yum-</u>yum night.	
7	L:	There's more to life than sex, Raj.	

Especially because it is commonly the greeting that is not answered with a respective greeting, it appears that phatic communion in TBBT is unusual.

However, as other elements of phatic talk are used, the lack of replied greetings is not disruptive – at least when watching the series and when not paying special attention to this aspect. Merely when looking at the transcripts it becomes obvious that they are absent.

When it comes to leave-taking in conversation, it is even more noticeable that the sitcom omits the second parts of paired phatic utterances. The following conversation between Leonard and Penny is an example. Leonard has just invited Penny to dinner and he tries to be funny and casual to hide his excitement. The closing phase consists of repeating and assuring the arranged time. Penny, however, does not grasp the final joke about the chisel and consequently, Leonard ends the conversation by saying *I'll see you at six-thirty* (prospect). The scene closes without Penny having given any response.

(65) [season 1, episode 3, minute 12]

1	L:	Great.	
2		(1.4)	
3		Did we say a time?	
4	P:	Six-thirty.	
5	L:	And that's still good for you?	
6	P:	It's fine.	
7	L:	It's not carved in stone:	
8	P:	No, six-thirty's great.	
9	L:	I'll get my chisel. heh	
10		(2.0)	
11	P:	Why?:	
12		(3.2)	
13	L:	To-	
14		(1.1)	
15		carve the- ye okay, I'll see you at six-thirty.	*prospect*

Despite all that, in the examples (56) to (65), the characters exchange some conventional phrases before engaging in a proper conversation and before closing the whole speech encounter. Therefore, the divergence between phatic talk in TBBT and natural phatic communion must not be overrated.

However, there are instances of closing phases in which the elimination of phatic utterances is even more radical than in excerpt (65) in that they do not contain a closing phase at all. For example, in excerpt (66), Leonard and Penny are discussing Penny's date with Stuart. The conversation, however,

stops in the middle of the main part because Penny slams the door shut in front of Leonard's face due to her anger. Consequently, there is no possibility for the conversation to fade in a conventional way. The reason for this, however, is that the characters are disputing and thus such a conversational ending might be considered to some extent natural. Despite the fact that Penny does not formulate her intention to close the conversation, she makes it clear that she no longer wants to talk to Leonard by closing the door. Therefore, the progression of the conversation still seems authentic. However, when looking only at the verbal aspect of this speech encounter – and this is the intent of this analysis – the lack of the closing phase still indicates a departure from what is common for closing a conversation. The general tripartite structure of conversation would require a closing phase, which, however, is not present in this example. Therefore, this conversation can be considered a deviation from the norm.

(66) [season 2, episode 22, minute 11]

1 P: I said I don't wanna talk about it.
2 L: Okay, I just kinda feel [res-] =
3 P: [LOOK,] =
4 = Leonard, what goes on between me and Stuart is
5 none of your business. So just leave it alone, okay?
6 ((Penny shuts the door))

Greeting and leave-taking are crucial linguistic moves in everyday speech encounters. For that reason one might assume that they are not only part of the conversations in the series TBBT as well but also that the phatic utterances occur in pairs. As this is not always the case with TBBT, it is legitimate to claim that in this respect phatic talk in TBBT differs noticeably from naturally occurring talk.

10.3 Transition to and from central phases

The previous section has been dedicated to the opening and closing phases of conversations in the sitcom TBBT themselves. Now, the focus will be on the transitions from the openings to the central phases on the one hand and on the digression from the central parts to the closing phases on the other hand.

In many opening phases such as represented in (67), the transition from the marginal phase to the central part of the conversation is signalized by the use of explicit phrases or words. In (67), for example, the change happens in line 5 when Howard says *So listen*. Thus, one can say that the speakers usually perform the transition from phatic talk with caution. In saying *So listen* or the like, they prepare the interlocutors for the event of change from the opening phase to the central phase. Therefore, one can argue that phatic talk usually can be clearly separated from the central topic of the conversation and that the transition takes place smoothly.

(67) [season 1, episode 16, minute 8]

1 H: Hey:::
2 L: Hey.
3 H: How's it going?
4 L: Fine.
5 H: So listen, the Nuart is showing the revised, definitive cut of
6 Blade Runner.

However, despite such careful transitions as in (67), TBBT contains a large number of instances in which transitional phases do not occur in such a smooth way. There are frequent occasions where the change from the opening phase towards the main part as well as the change from the main part to the closing phase is abrupt. Consider the following examples:

(68) [season 1, episode 13, minute 1]

1 P: Hi: Can you help me? I was writing an e-mail and the A key got
2 stuck. (.) Now it's just going a::::::
3 (1.5)
4 L: What'd you spill on it?
5 P: (.) Nothing.
6 (1.3)
7 Diet Coke.
8 (2.3)
9 And yogurt. (.) And a little nail polish.
10 L: I'll take a look at it.

(69) [season 3, episode 20, minute 7]

1 …
2 H: Do I smell hot dogs?
3 S: No. I mean- I have no idea what you smell.
4 H: Well, I definitely smell raw hot dog.
5 S: Perhaps you're getting a brain tumour.

6 H: All right, have a nice walk.
7 S: I shall. Have a nice scoot.

(70) [season 2, episode 14, minute 16]
1 …
2 P: We're having dinner tomorrow night. And I get to wear my new
3 beret. Heh heh. (.) Bye, guys.
4 L: Bye.

In (68), the first two lines show that the speaker (Penny) instantly moves from an initial greeting towards a direct approach, which introduces the main topic of the conversation: the problem with her computer keyboard. Penny does not wait until anyone replies her greeting and she does not leave space for any other phatic utterance either. In her haste, she immediately passes on to the central phase of the conversation. Concerning the change from the central phase towards the closing phase, one generally can observe the same pattern. In excerpt (69) (line 1-5), Howard and Sheldon are engaged in a discussion about hot dogs but this comes to an abrupt ending in line 6 when Howard initiates the closing phase by saying *All right, have a nice walk*. The closing phase in line 6 and 7 itself proceeds in a normal way through exchanging final wishes (*All right, have a nice walk – I shall. Have a nice scoot*) but still, the digression from the topic 'hot dogs' appears to be overhasty. In (70), the conversation progresses similarly. While in lines 2 and 3, Penny talks about her upcoming date, she leads over to the closing phase in the same turn (line 3). As in (69), this digression happens quickly and to some extent unexpectedly. Here again, although the closing phase (*Bye, guys. – Bye.*) features a conventional structure, the transition from the topic of the conversation to the ending of the speech encounter seems rash.

Generally, the observations discussed above imply that the tripartite structure of conversation more often than not is maintained in TBBT. However, the transitions between the individual conversational phases often are abrupt and therefore the progression of the conversations in the sitcom is more rapid than of those in everyday talk.

10.4 Clumsy phatic communion

In view of the fact that the series TBBT rests upon the four geeks Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj, it is worthwhile considering some scenes that clearly are evidence for the fact that the main characters (except for Penny) in the majority of cases are incapable of complying with the underlying rules of phatic communion. Moreover, the following examples will show that it is commonly Sheldon who struggles with phatic talk. In extract (71), Leonard and Sheldon meet Penny, who is about to move in across their apartment, for the first time. This scene might be considered exclusively phatic in nature, as there is no clear progression towards a topic of conversation. What is most noticeable, however, is that this speech encounter is characterized by frequent repetitions of the same phatic utterances. To be more precise, lines 1 to 7 as well as lines 15 to 19 only contain the word *hi.* Additionally, from line 23 to 26 the speakers alternately repeat the evaluative comment *great*. The ending of the conversation (line 28-31) exclusively comprises the item *bye*. In all these sequences, there is limited variation in the intonation of the respective words. In line 7, Penny says *hi* in a questioning manner and in lines 23 and 24 Leonard and Penny lengthen the word *great* a little. Despite that, the characters make no noticeable use of voice modification to contribute to some diversification of the overall conversation. Leonard and Sheldon unnecessarily repeat the utterances *hi*, *great* and *bye* and therefore they create an awkward atmosphere, especially for Penny.

(71) [season 1, episode 1, minute 3]

1 P: Oh, hi.
2 L: Hi.
3 S: Hi.
4 L: Hi.
5 S: Hi.
6 (2.3)
7 P: Hi?
8 (1.6)
9 L: We don’t mean to interrupt. We live across the hall.
10 P: Oh:, that’s nice.
11 L: Oh- eh no. We don’t live together. I mean- we live together but
12 in separate (.) heterosexual bedrooms.
13 P: hh okay, well, guess I’m your new neighbour. Penny.
14 L: Leonard. Sheldon.
15 P: Hi.

16 L: Hi.
17 S: Hi.
18 P: Hi.
19 L: Hi.
20 (3.1)
21 Well, eh (.) oh, welcome to the building.
22 P: Oh, thank you. Maybe we can have coffee sometime.
23 L: Oh, great:
24 P: Great:
25 S: Great.
26 L: Great.
27 (3.2)
28 L: Well- eh: bye.
29 P: Bye.
30 S: Bye.
31 L: Bye.

A strikingly similar scenario to (71) is shown in segment (72). A new neighbour, Alicia, is about to move into the same building in which Leonard, Sheldon and Penny live. In this conversation, Leonard and Sheldon again seem not to understand the conventional behaviour in conversational openers as they repeat the greeting formula several times.

(72) [season 2, episode 19, minute 4]
1 A: Hello?
2 L: Hello?
3 S: Hello.
4 A: Hello:
5 L: Hello:?
6 S: Hello:
7 A: I'm Alicia. I'm moving in upstairs.
8 L: That is so great.

What should become clear from transcripts (71) and (72) is that Sheldon and Leonard in these scenes seem to be unaware of what, for example, may follow an initial greeting in a conversation. They probably lack knowledge of other phatic utterances that would be adequate for meeting strangers and due to this ineptness, they consistently repeat identical utterances.

What follows is a more detailed account of Sheldon's behaviour in phatic communion. The entirety of these examples demonstrates his tendency to instantly express every emotion or reaction towards the situations he is confronted with. These scenes will foster the argument that Sheldon is

incapable of doing 'being ordinary' in the opening phases of speech encounters.

To begin with, (73) represents an encounter between Penny and Sheldon. Penny came to talk to Sheldon, which is an unusual event.

(73) [season 1, episode 16, minute 4]

1 S: Hello Penny, Leonard just left.
2 P: I know, I wanna talk to you.
3 S: What would we talk about? (.) We have no overlapping areas
4 Of interest I'm aware of. As you know, I don't care for chitchat.
5 P: Can you just let me in?
6 S: Well, all right:, but I don't see this as a promising endeavour.

Sheldon's negative reaction towards Penny's intent to speak to him is clearly stated in lines 3 and 4 as well as in line 6. Additionally, these utterances demonstrate that Sheldon shows no interest in phatic talk. It becomes obvious that he is well aware of the conventions of the proceedings of phatic communion but he feels no need to hide his despise for small talk.

The following transcript shows an encounter between Raj, Sheldon and Abby, a woman whom they meet at a party. Raj has just asked Sheldon to help him find a woman at the party with whom he could spend the night. Sheldon carries a lantern with him, which attracts Abby's attention and thus she starts the conversation.

(74) [season 3, episode 12, minute 7]

1 A: Hey, that's pretty cool: What is it?
2 S: It's a limited edition Green Lantern lantern. (.) My friend is
3 looking for someone to copulate with.
4 A: You're very funny. I'm Abby.
5 S: I'm Sheldon.
6 …

Abby provides a common opening to small talk in line 1. Sheldon, however, does not reply her greeting but instantly answers her question concerning what it is that he carries in his hand. After having done so, Sheldon informs her without hesitation about Raj's intent to spend the night with a woman (line 2-3). This shows that Sheldon is incapable of proceeding in a natural manner in the conversation. He blatantly utters what is on his mind.

Interestingly, the atmosphere does not seem to suffer from this utterance, possibly because Abby interprets Sheldon's comment as a joke. Nevertheless, this speech encounter proves that he is entirely ignorant of the conventions in phatic communion.

The final example represents small talk between Penny and Sheldon. They meet coincidentally when coming home and Sheldon notices the spaghetti sauce that Penny carries in her shopping bag.

(75) [season 3, episode 20, minute 2]

1 …
2 S: I see you bought Mama Italia marinara spaghetti sauce.
3 P: heh (.) yep.
4 S: That's the sauce my mother uses. She likes cooking Italian
5 Because according to her, that's what the Romans made Jesus
6 eat.
7 (2.6) ((Penny and Sheldon both unlock the doors to their
8 apartments))
9 P: Interesting. eh: I'll have to have you over for spaghetti some
10 night.
11 S: I'm hungry now.
12 …

This scene is representative of Sheldon's ignorance of how conversations are supposed to be closed. As indicated in lines 7 and 8, both characters are about to enter their apartments, which is an obvious sign that the conversation requires an appropriate closing. Penny makes an attempt in doing so by saying *I'll have to have you over for spaghetti some night* which represents a lose invitation, i.e. a final promise in terms of Schneider's (1988: 102) categories of linguistic elements in closing phases. However, Sheldon seems not to recognize this phatic utterance as a conventional closing move and he revives the conversation in that he invites himself for dinner.

10.5 Conclusion

The excerpts quoted in this section show that the main characters and Sheldon in particular, at times have immense problems with phatic talk. They

are unaware of the conventions concerning which elements appear in the marginal phases of conversations, concerning the progression from the marginal phases to the central parts of the conversations as well as concerning the common topics of small talk. The ways in which they engage in phatic talk frequently is clumsy and inept and consequently not corresponding to naturally occurring talk. Additional deviations from everyday communication were detected in the lack of reciprocal utterances in openings and closings, the general reduction or omittance of linguistic elements in the marginal phases and the quick transitions from the marginal phases to the central parts of the conversations. Still, phatic communion in the series TBBT serves the overall purpose of breaking the ice between the speakers and it is meaningless. This means that with regard to the overall functions of phatic talk, the conversations in the sitcom are identical to naturally occurring speech encounters.

11 Conclusion

The present analysis was conducted in order to find out whether communicational patterns in the sitcom TBBT correspond to those of natural talk. More specifically, turn taking, adjacency pairs and phatic communion were investigated with regard to whether these areas are implemented in realistic manners in the series. In this respect, realistic refers to whether there is a high degree of congruence between conversation in TBBT and natural talk. Analogies of the realizations of turn taking, adjacency pairs and phatic communion were assumed to evidence that TBBT features lifelike conversations. If certain areas differed from natural speech encounters, they were investigated with the intent to provide reasons for why they deviate from realistic communication situations. The analysis led to remarkable results, which will be summarized and discussed in the following section.

In the area of turn construction and turn allocation, it is noteworthy that the series TBBT shows no identifiable differences to natural talk. Turns are constructed by the use of all possible syntactical structures and the turn allocational component is equally represented. This means that the principles defined as the ‘symplest systematics’ of turn taking are employed in such a manner that conversations progress in orderly ways without significant amounts of silences and overlaps. As concerns silence it is to say that the three possible types of silence of natural talk – lapses, gaps and pauses – were detected in the sitcom as well. The difference, however, lies in the fact that lapses only occur very rarely and that gaps and pauses frequently are of exaggerated lengths. The reasons for the latter phenomenon assumingly are on the one hand that silences are commonly used for providing the audience with sufficient time to reflect on jokes and on the other hand to overtly highlight funny scenes and sequences of talk through the incorporation of laughter. Overlapping speech appears seldom in the sitcom, the progressional types of onsets not being represented at all. Additionally, overlaps most commonly are performed to effect the ending of the current speaker’s turn, which is rather uncommon for natural conversation. Finally, in terms of repair of conversational errors, natural talk and talk in TBBT in most

instances are identical. However, certain repair types are less frequently featured than others (e.g. self-initiated other-repair).

The investigation of the most common types of adjacency pairs in the form of question-answer sequences and pairs of statements showed that in TBBT, the principles defined by Clark (1996: 197) are accounted for. This means that adjacency pairs in the series as in natural talk consist of consecutive, conditionally relevant and related first pair parts and second pair parts that are uttered by different speakers. Moreover, insertion sequences are produced in identical ways in everyday conversation and in speech encounters in TBBT. This congruence equally holds true for successful and failed insertions and how speakers deal with these. Differences between TBBT and natural talk were located in the area of preference organization. Both preferred and dispreferred second pair parts frequently are the sources of laughter, which is not the case in reality. What plays a crucial role in this respect is the characters' personalities. Sheldon, for example, is outspoken about his despise for conventions in conversation such as politeness and he takes all utterances literally. Thus, more often than not he is incapable of producing preferred, acceptable and conditionally relevant second pair parts.

Regarding phatic talk one can say that when compared to realistic conversation, it generally is underrepresented in the series TBBT. This has been exemplified by the fact that the vast majority of the openings scenes of the episodes (59 out of 63) commence with central phases of conversation rather than with small talk. The major reasons for the frequent elimination of marginal phases is that the latter only rarely contribute to the progression of the plot and that they do not transmit crucial information to the viewers. Thus, they are the conversational phases least crucial to the sitcom and their absence has no impact on the plot development. Furthermore, an interesting observation concerns the fact that more often than not, TBBT does not contain paired utterances (e.g. *hi – hey*) which, however, would be a feature of realistic talk. Still, as the characters employ sufficient (though less than in reality) amounts of other phatic elements, the lack of paired utterances must not be overrated. In addition, explicit attention was drawn to the movements from opening phases to the central parts of conversations as well as to the digressions from central phases to the closings of speech encounters

because these transitions proved to be unnaturally abrupt. The speakers in TBBT rarely spend time on doing small talk but they initiate quick changes to and from the central phases of conversations. Assumingly, this is due to the time pressure under which sitcoms operate and because eliminating elements of marginal phases is a means to avoid redundant speech exchanges (e.g. *bye – bye*). The highly intelligent characters and Sheldon in particular in TBBT frequently comport themselves inaptly during phatic talk. This was exemplified by their ignorance of the conventional progression of phatic communion, of the choice of acceptable topics and of appropriate elements to be employed in small talk. This area of divergence from conventional talk represents an additional third characteristic of phatic utterance. This means that the latter does not only break the ice between the speakers and that they are meaningless – characteristics common for everyday phatic communion – but that they also create humour.

The results gained from the analysis of turn taking, adjacency pairs and phatic communion in the series TBBT allow making reasonable statements with regard to the research question. The intention was to find out whether conversation in TBBT is similar to natural talk and as the analysis revealed numerous areas in which talk in the series strongly deviates from everyday conversation, it is to argue that generally speaking, conversation and phatic communion in the sitcom are not realistic. Indeed, basic features of all areas (e.g. turn construction, turn allocation, silence, overlaps, repairs, principles of adjacency pairs, purpose of phatic communion, pairs of utterances in phatic talk) under investigation are identical in natural and scripted language but the differences detected in specific areas are too decisive to claim that both types of conversation are structured in entirely equal ways. In the series, silences are generally longer, overlaps occur more rarely and they are usually performed for a certain reason, preference organization is handled differently and phatic communion as well shows uncommon features. The argument that natural conversation and conversation in the sitcom TBBT are dissimilar is based on these major areas of disagreement and the research question guiding the conduction of this analysis thus has to be negated.

Still, it does not suffice to solely state this argument without providing reasons for why it is the case that television conversation differs from natural

talk. In the course of the analysis, approaches have been suggested regarding why various areas of turn taking, adjacency pairs and phatic communion are realized differently from realistic conversation. In summary, these suggestions concern the creation of humour, time pressure and the clarity or ease of intelligibility of talk. Concerning the generation of amusement and ease of intelligibility, it is for example through the incorporation of extended silences that humour is created and that utterances separated by the silence are easier to be understood. Thus, the occurrences of long silences enable scenes to fully develop. The audience has more time to reflect on them, to grasp their meanings and the laughter provided in the background contributes to the fact that the viewers perceive the scenes as amusing. In addition, humour is also created through uncommon realizations of preference organisation, including the occurrence of funny second pair parts and directly formulated dispreferred second pair parts. The prevailing purpose of phatic communion featured in the series as well is to create amusement. Though being non-informative, its abruptness, briefness and its general uncommon progression can be a means to transmit humour. Concerning time pressure, one can say that frequently, the margins of conversations (openings, closings) are eliminated or reduced to their crucial elements, a measure which probably is taken to save time. Furthermore, transitions between the conversational phases often are abrupt, which is an indicator for the overall quick progression of speech encounters. Finally, the overall rarity of overlaps implies economy of time as well because through smooth transitions without overlapping speech there is no need of repair, the latter of which potentially is time-consuming. Moreover, the absence of overlaps contributes to the clarity of conversations.

The creation of humour, the operation under time pressure and the need for a high degree of understandability of conversations are basic features of the genre sitcom. Thus, the discrepancy between natural and represented talk signifies that it is the genre conventions of sitcoms as a whole, which constitute the difference between real life speech encounters and conversation in TBBT. Certainly, the nerdy characters Sheldon, Leonard, Howard and Raj with their social ineptness are a factor contributing to

uncommon progressions of conversation as well but the major reason definitely was detected in the genre conventions of sitcoms.

The analysis conducted in this thesis hopefully contributes to a better understanding of the different realizations of conversation in natural speech encounters and in represented talk. It highlights the similarities between these two types of conversation, yet it focuses on the aspects in which they deviate from each other. This furthers awareness raising concerning the constructedness of television talk and consequently to a more critical perception of media productions. I am well aware of the narrowness of the analysis but the latter still is valuable with regard to the fact that it grants insights into an area of application of conversation analysis that so far has not been exhausted to its entirety. Conversation analysis has almost limitless potentials concerning which types of speech encounters one can apply it to, one aspect of which was demonstrated and highlighted in this thesis.

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13 Appendix

13.1 Abstract

This thesis discusses and applies conversation analysis in order to investigate conversational principles of naturally occurring talk in comparison with represented talk, the latter of which is exemplified through the American situation comedy *The Big Bang Theory*. Thus, through the shift of application of conversation analysis to unnatural speech encounters, the thesis contributes to the academic discourse not only in widening the application spectrum of conversation analysis but also in providing valuable insights into this area of application that has been neglected so far. In presenting both a theoretical framework of conversation, conversation analysis and phatic communion as well as information on television language usage and genre conventions of sitcoms from a media studies point of view, the thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach. On the one hand, such a comprehensive perspective allows drawing a linguistic comparison between the structure of realistic conversation and conversation in *The Big Bang Theory*. On the other hand, it permits a critical examination of the results gained from the analysis not only with reference to possible reasons for the similarities and differences between these two types of realization of language usage but also with respect to the implications of the findings, both of which are related to the genre conventions of situation comedy.

At the beginning of the first major part, theoretical information is provided concerning general features of conversation. This lays the foundations for and enables the transition to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, which is discussed with reference to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson. Consequently, a chapter comprising detailed information on phatic communion as defined by Bronisław Malinowski completes the theoretical framework.

The second major part elucidates television language usage, television genres and the structure, content, plots, characters and subcategories of situation comedy. These chapters lead over to the presentation of the series *The Big Bang Theory.*

The third large part is devoted to a detailed investigation of *The Big Bang Theory* in consideration of turn taking (turn construction, turn allocation, silence, overlaps and repair), adjacency pairs (preference organization, insertion sequences) and phatic communion. As divergences from realistic conversation can be detected in all three major areas, the results account for a rejection of the argument that natural and represented talk are realized in identical ways. In the sitcom, silences frequently are longer, overlaps occur less often and progressional onsets of overlaps are not featured at all. Additionally, preference organization mostly is employed to create humour, a characteristic that is uncommon in reality. As concerns phatic communion it is to say that unlike natural conversation, marginal phases of conversation are featured less frequently in the series than central phases and that transitions between individual conversational phases are abrupt. Finally, openings and closings frequently are reduced to a minimum or they are entirely eliminated. The overall discrepancies are too numerous to claim that conversation in *The Big Bang Theory* is structured identically to natural talk. Reasons for this can be detected in the genre conventions of situation comedy, meaning that the latter has limited time frames for its plot, that it aims to create humour and that it aims at reaching a high degree of understandability and clarity of speech encounters. As this is not the case for naturally occurring talk, it can be argued that these are the reasons accounting for the dissimilar realization of conversational structures.

In analysing television language usage, the thesis has a television user-oriented agenda. In other words, it tries to make television audience and experts in the field of linguistics aware of the similarities and differences between natural and represented talk and thus it enhances the critical perception of the constructedness of television productions.

13.2 German abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit behandelt Konversationsanalyse in der Theorie und in der Praxis. Das Ziel ist, einen Vergleich zwischen grundlegenden Prinzipien natürlicher Konversation und repräsentierten Gesprächen zu ziehen. Letztere werden der amerikanischen Situation Comedy *The Big Bang Theory* entnommen. Konversationsanalyse wird somit auf unnatürliche Gesprächssituationen appliziert, was eine Veränderung der konventionellen Anwendung von Konversationsanalyse bedeutet. Somit leistet diese Arbeit einen wichtigen Beitrag zum akademischen Diskurs, indem sie nicht nur den Anwendungsbereich der Konversationsanalyse erweitert, sondern auch indem sie neue Ansichten in diesem bis dato vernachlässigten Gebiet liefert. Da sie sowohl eine theoretische Abhandlung von Konversation, Konversationsanalyse und phatischer Kommunikation enthält, als auch Information bezüglich Sprachgebrauch im Fernsehen und Genrekonventionen von Situation Comedy aus Sicht der Medienwissenschaft liefert, entspricht die Arbeit einem interdisziplinären Ansatz. Solch eine fächerübergreifende Ansichtsweise ermöglicht einerseits einen linguistischen Vergleich zwischen den Strukturen realistischer Konversation und Konversation in *The Big Bang Theory*. Andererseits können die Ergebnisse der Analyse kritisch untersucht werden, wobei Bezug auf mögliche Gründe für die Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen beiden Verwirklichungsbereichen des Sprachgebrauchs genommen wird und die Auswirkungen der Ergebnisse berücksichtigt werden. Diese Untersuchung wird in Anbetracht der Genrekonventionen der Situation Comedy durchgeführt.

Den Beginn des ersten Großkapitels bilden allgemeine Aspekte von Konversation. Diese legen die Grundlage für die darauffolgende Diskussion von Ethnomethodologie und Konversationsanalyse, welche mit Hinblick auf Sacks, Schegloff und Jefferson erfolgt. Den Theorieteil beschließt ein Kapitel mit detaillierten Angaben zur von Malinowski definierten phatischen Kommunikation.

Das zweite Großkapitel erläutert Sprachgebrauch im Fernsehen, Fernsehgenres und Struktur, Inhalt, Handlung, Charaktere und

Unterkategorien der Situation Comedy. Diese Kapitel leiten in die Präsentation der Serie *The Big Bang Theory* über.

Das dritte große Kapitel besteht aus einer ausführlichen Betrachtung von *The Big Bang Theory* unter Berücksichtigung von Sprecherwechsel (Konstruktion von Äußerungen, Zuteilung des Sprecherrechts, Stille, Überschneidung und Korrektur), Äußerungspaaren (Präferenzorganisation und eingeschobene Sprechsequenzen) und phatischer Kommunikation. Da es in allen drei Hauptbereichen zu Abweichungen von realistischer Konversation kommt, lassen die Ergebnisse darauf schließen, dass natürliche und repräsentierte Gespräche nicht ident verlaufen. In der Serie ist Stille meist länger, Sprecherüberschneidungen passieren seltener und Überschneidungen mit fortlaufendem Ansatz sind nicht vorhanden. Außerdem wird Präferenzorganisation hauptsächlich dazu verwendet, um Komik zu erzeugen, was ein unnatürliches Charakteristikum ist. Bezüglich phatischer Kommunikation ist zu sagen, dass im Unterschied zu natürlicher Konversation Randphasen in Konversationen weniger häufig gezeigt werden als Hauptphasen. Außerdem gestalten sich die Übergänge zwischen den einzelnen Phasen abrupt. Zusätzlich werden die Randphasen häufig zu einem Minimum reduziert oder völlig eliminiert.

Die generellen Unterschiede sind zu zahlreich, um an dem Argument festzuhalten, dass Konversation in *The Big Bang Theory* gleichermaßen strukturiert sei wie in natürlichen Gesprächen. Die Gründe dafür liegen in den Genrekonventionen der Situation Comedy. Letztere hat limitierte zeitliche Möglichkeiten für die Handlung, sie versucht, Komik zu erzeugen und sie muss ständig ein möglichst hohes Maß an Verständlichkeit und Klarheit der Gespräche gewährleisten. Aus diesen Gründen werden Konversationsstrukturen unterschiedlich realisiert als dies in der Realität der Fall ist.

Mit der Analyse der Sprachverwendung im Fernsehen verfolgt diese Diplomarbeit ein benutzerorientiertes Ziel. Anders ausgedrückt wird durch sie das Fernsehpublikum und Experten im Bereich der Linguistik auf die Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen natürlicher und repräsentierter Konversation aufmerksam gemacht und somit wird deren kritische Wahrnehmung der Konstruiertheit von Fernsehproduktionen gefördert.

13.3 List of tables and figures

13.4 Curriculum vitae

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