

Overlapping Speech in Caryl Churchill's *Hot Fudge*: Constructing Interactional and Interpersonal Contexts

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Abstract: The script of Caryl Churchill's short play *Hot Fudge* (like several other plays by this author) contains detailed directions for overlapping conversation. At certain points in the play these may be contributing to a number of effects similar to those described for the naturally occurring 'collaborative floor', such as enthusiasm and mutual support. The importance of an interactive approach to constructed conversation is pointed out in the article, particularly that of analysing the overlapped speaker's response to appreciate the discursive significance of the overlapping turn. For instance, acknowledging and/or reusing the other speaker's overlapping formulations in a non-oppositional format can show an understanding of these contributions as collaboratively oriented. Therefore, such an interpretation of overlapping dialogue in a dramatic text will affect the reader's understanding of the interpersonal context (e.g. dominance-seeking/mutual support/collaboration between pairs of speakers). In particular, this approach is taken to show how certain kinds of overlapping similar to those described for the naturally occurring conversation can be used dramatically to supportive rather than conflictive ends. Overall, it is shown how the dramatic characters' interpersonal orientations become inferable from their use of certain dialogic options.

1. Introduction

In the following, I shall discuss how certain discursive features in a play script contribute to constructing interactional contexts characterized by the characters' dominance-seeking or by collaboration and enthusiasm – specifically, in Act 1 and 3 of *Hot Fudge* by Caryl Churchill. The use of these patterns is also relevant to constructing the interpersonal context of intimate relationships. It is particularly noteworthy in Caryl Churchill's *Hot Fudge* that collaborative sentence-building (most often described as a characteristic feature of multi-speaker settings in naturally occurring conversation) is used to create an effect of mutual support and understanding between pairs of speakers.

Ultimately, play texts are meant to be observed, in fact 'overheard', by a theatre audience (cf. Culpeper 2001: 39; also Culpeper & McIntyre 2010: 176; see Dynel 2011 and 2012 for a typology of recipients); yet the text may be the preferred object of study, for the reasons Culpeper & McIntyre (2006: 775) give following Short's (1998) exposition of problems related to studying performance. Although it was later shown by McIntyre (2008) that certain features of

performance may inform textual analysis, my principal focus here is on the play text itself. In my analysis of the play script I will assume that an adequate interpretation depends on the reader's ability to draw on a number of informational systems ranging from grammatical structure and lexical patterning to linguistic politeness and turn-taking conventions (Short 1998: 13). These textual data allow scholars to speculate on viewers' experiences of characters. (Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla 2017: 116). Particular textual features reveal to the reader the fictional interlocutors' attitudes to each other's conversational behaviour and thus contribute to a developing interpretation of the dramatic situation, in the sense of dialogue cues being used to infer character (Culpeper 2001: 163; Culpeper & Fernandez-Quintanilla 2017: 96-97).

It is largely on these assumptions that discourse-analytic methods used in analysing naturally occurring conversational behaviour are considered to be applicable to drama dialogue by stylisticians. As put by Culpeper & McIntyre (2006: 779), "dialogue is social interaction, and it is in social interaction that character is displayed and shaped" (cf. also Richardson 2010: 381-382). Conversation analytic insights can and have been usefully applied to drama, and more specifically to dramatic turn-taking (see Culpeper & McIntyre 2006: 782; Bowles 2010: 8-11)¹. It is the turn-taking 'informational system' and its interrelations that I shall focus on here. The questions I consider in the following are these: How can overlapping speech be interpreted at specific points in the *Hot Fudge* script? How can these interpretations (and contrasts with non-overlapping talk) contribute to the script reader's view of the dramatic character and situation? I shall also consider alternative interpretations of overlapping speech on the part of script readers, such as enthusiasm/friendliness/support vs. lack of interest or dominance attempts.

As pointed out by Hayashi (2013: 185), "[a]nticipatory completion and choral co-production can be used as 'affiliating' devices". Indeed, studies of naturally occurring conversation have shown how a turn completion projected by the original (overlapped) speaker may be realised by a different participant (e.g. Lerner 1996 and 2004; see Haugh 2010 on semantic/pragmatic contribution to co-construction; also Auer 2005; Howes et al. 2011: 279-281 and 2012b; Oloff 2008 on non-problematic overlapping turn formats). As suggested by Gene Lerner, in this case "a recipient responds to a prior speaker, not by waiting until completion to act, but by pre-empting that completion as a method of responding" (Lerner 2004: 225). Deborah Tannen suggested that this kind of overlap might convey a "metamessage" about the relationship between the interlocutors, who understand each other so well as to know what the other is going to say next. It is a co-operative contribution and an instance of participatory listenership (Tannen 1983: 120-123), "a show of enthusiastic listenership" (Tannen 2012: 136).

What this might be reduced to, of course, is the most general discourse-analytic principle of attending to interlocutor feedback in discourse (cf. Sacks et al. 1974

¹ Applied most notably to Churchill's play text, with specific reference to her use of overlapping, by Heman (1995;1998).

on “next turn proof procedure”; also Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008: 13). As Cecilia Ford puts it, “each next turn displays the sense made of a prior action”, while she also points out the turn placement (along with composition) as an essential part of meaning making in interaction (Ford 2013: 1125; cf. Tannen 2012: 135). Interpreting participants’ reactions to each other’s conversational behaviour (and thus to its interpersonal significance) depends on whether speakers, to use Schegloff’s formulation, appear to be contesting claimants for a turn space, whether their conduct shows that an overlap is taken as problematic. It is speakers’ interactive displays that should govern the “treatment of the overlapping speech by [...] analysts” (Schegloff 2000: 4). Hutchby (2008) points out the importance of this analytical procedure while discussing participant orientation with regard to perceived impoliteness in conversation (which includes interruptions) – any such instance depending for its “identification as impolite for this particular occasion on features of how it was both produced and responded to” (Hutchby 2008: 238, original emphasis).²

2. Multiparty conversations in *Hot Fudge*

“The simplest example of Caryl Churchill’s influence on British theatre”, according to Dan Rebellato (2009: 173), is “the typographical device of a forward slash to indicate a point of overlap in dialogue”. While one of the very first play texts to use it was *Hot Fudge*, it has not been much discussed amongst scholars of Churchill’s work. *Hot Fudge* is only briefly mentioned by Amelie Kritzer (1991) in her monograph. Elaine Aston (1997: 90-91) simply gives a content summary of the play, as does Philip Roberts more recently (2008: 114). For Anthony Jenkins (1998: 26), *Hot Fudge* depicts “materialistic fantasies”. More recent work on Churchill’s drama barely mentions the play at all: e.g. Rebellato (2009: 173) simply notes it as “a shorter companion piece” to *Ice Cream*, while Diamond (2009: 135) refers to its depiction of “capitalist human beings’ market recognition, either as consumers or commodities”. Most recently, R. Darren Gobert (2014: 110-112) has briefly discussed *Hot Fudge* along with *Ice Cream*, remarking how both seem to employ meanings that “distort social relations”. While this scholar does refer to Churchill’s “intricately entwined dialogue” (Gobert 2014: 8), none of the others specifically mentions the significance of overlapping conversation in that particular play. Joan Hamilton (1991: 191-192) alone provides an interpretation of this device’s interpersonal significance (to be addressed below).

In my view, the play merits a discourse-stylistic analysis because of the directions it contains for specific kinds of overlapping conversation, including instances similar to naturally occurring schisming and co-operative sentence-building. ‘Schisming’ is a conventional procedure whereby a general conversation is split into several simultaneous ones. Its most decisive

² More recently, this approach to overlapping speech has received attention from speech scientists working on virtual conversation agents (speech science being the study of production, transmission and reception of speech); they concede that “the turn-competitiveness of overlaps is not determined by objective physical properties of speech alone” (Hilton 2016: 1263) and emphasise the importance of analysing participants’ reactions (e.g. Chowdhury et al. 2015b).

characteristic is the co-existence of at least two turn-taking systems, “a systematic possibility with four and more parties” (Sacks et al. 1974: 713). The speaker of a schisming-inducing turn breaks away from the ongoing conversation by initiating a new sequence type and introducing a shift in topic and/or action. When the schisming-inducing turn receives a response and the ongoing conversation is sustained, a schisming occurs (Egbert 1997: 3-4; see also Traverso 2004; Aoki et al. 2006). Following this, the participants maintain sensitivity to the parallel conversations, “avoiding a competitive overlap or the activity’s interruption” (Markaki & Filliettaz 2017: 109).

I shall consider multiparty conversations in *Hot Fudge*, specifically, in Acts 1 and 3. In Act 1, two characters out of five form a “conversational duet” – a term coined by Jane Falk (1980: 507), who notes that in conversations between 3 or more people two participants may “undertake jointly to carry out the communicative task to a third” (cf. Lerner 1993 discussing “collectivities in action”). As Szceczeppek puts it (2000: 12), “at certain moments in the duet [the participants] ‘togetherness’ becomes maximally apparent”. In Act 3, on the other hand, schisming occurs, and instances of overlapping reminiscent of co-operative sentence-building can be found.

While instances of interpersonal opposition do occur in *Hot Fudge*, the participants’ smoothing over of differences contributes to constructing an essentially collaborative interactional context. Admittedly, instances of overlapping speech might be interpreted as indicating either a lack of interest, or marking “straight interruptions”, to use Herman’s phrase (Herman 1998: 119-120). The issue for me is the extent to which these interpretations contribute to a “reasonable rendering” of the scene (as per Short, 1998: 7-9). I suggest that in *Hot Fudge* Acts 1 and 3 overlapping can be interpreted as generally *non-conflictive*, and inferring its interactional (and interpersonal) significance is affected by its combination with non-antagonistic cohesion, repetition and repair.

According to Jenkins (1998: 26), Churchill “depicts materialistic fantasies” by juxtaposing “the outlandish plans of unimpressive bank robbers” in Act 1 with “the smooth talk and office-gadgetry that make dubious business acceptable” in Act 3. Concerning these two groups of speakers, Hamilton (1991: 191) notes that

characters interrupt each other and finish each other’s sentences. All know the right word to use and the right impression to create; they can pretend that they know each other because they have arranged themselves in similar language.

Hamilton identifies the same discursive features in the characters’ speech that I have mentioned in relation to the collaboration effect and relates them to the characters’ signalling commonality, “know[ing] each other”. This is reminiscent of Tannen’s assessment of the interpersonal value of co-operative sentence-building: understanding each other so well as to know what one is going to say next (Tannen 1983: 120-123; cf. Coates 1998a: 244; Coates 2007: 46). However, Hamilton’s view of these features in *Hot Fudge* Acts 1 and 3 seems

somewhat negative, as she suggests they realise a kind of pretence to solidarity.

In this respect, one might note that, in principle, it is the interactional context that allows for such an interpretation. Accounting for interactional displays is pertinent here, since the co-participants' response will signal their understanding of certain structural (sub)types of overlapping speech such as co-operative sentence-building and conversational duetting (and thus their understanding of its interpersonal significance). There are co-occurring discursive features that can contribute to understanding – and signalling this understanding – simultaneous/overlapping speech as either supportive or oppositional. This recognition procedure should apply in the case of co-operative sentence-building since it is a (sub)type of overlapping speech. As for its ultimate strategic purpose (such as pretending solidarity/intimacy), the reader's understanding will, to a great extent, depend on an emergent understanding of the characters and their relationships.

2.1. *Hot Fudge Act 1: Overlapping as interrupting or duetting*

As mentioned above, linguists have long been aware of joint action in naturally occurring conversation. Falk (1980: 507) points out that in multiparty conversations two participants may undertake jointly to carry out the communicative task to the third. Tannen similarly claimed that two speakers can be jointly holding the same conversational role as a couple; in this case, the two speakers can say the same thing at the same time in the same or slightly different form, thus producing “choral repetition” (Tannen 1983: 124). Lerner (1993: 213) discusses “conjoined participation” by “relatively enduring collectivities (e.g. couples)” as well as by occasion-specific ones. There are similar occurrences in *Hot Fudge Act 1*. To reiterate, I do not mean to suggest that Churchill's dramatic dialogues imitate naturally occurring multiparty conversations in these instances. My argument is rather that constructed conversations should be interpretable according to the most general discourse-organisational principles, that is, in them intentions are displayed not only in participants' way of relating to each other's talk, but also in their reactions to each other's actions. This contributes to the reader's interpretation of the characters' joint interactional goal, which theatre scholars have so far appear to have failed to observe.

2.1.1. Overlapping and claims for control

It is easily noticeable that in Act 1 not all characters participate in equal measure and on equal terms. For instance, Charlie's way of participating is revealing of his orientation to conversational dominance. The latter is said to be instantiated in “strategies which enable speakers to dominate their partners in talk” (Coates 1998b: 161). Itakura (2001: 2) regards sequential dominance (controlling actions at the level of turns followed by complying actions) as the strongest indicator of conversational dominance. In Charlie's case, another dimension of conversational dominance identified by Itakura, the quantitative one, is also

plainly visible, he being by far the most voluble participant. He quite literally fits her 'everyday conversation' definition: "a speaker who does not allow others to get a word in edgewise, who by asking questions forces others to provide information, or who speaks more loudly than others", that is, the speaker who "consistently produces more controlling actions than the other" (Itakura 2001: 2), e.g. initiations or interruptions (Itakura 2001: 70). Based on Itakura's classification, the most important dimension of dominance with regard to turn taking would be the participatory one, realised through overlaps in particular (cf. Itakura 2001: 70).

Indeed, as can be seen in the following passage from the play, Charlie's default conversational role is initiatory: he utters commands and questions (as well as clarificatory questions/repair initiators), routinely producing prototypical first pair parts which set strong expectations for second pair parts.

Pub: 7 p.m.

MATT, SONIA, CHARLIE, JUNE and RUBY³

- | | | |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | MATT | I wear a suit. |
| 2 | SONIA | He does / look more... |
| 3 | CHARLIE | You can wear pink satin. That's not the point. |
| 4 | MATT | Yes, because they have to believe. |
| 5 | SONIA | He looks completely... / You'd be surprised. |
| 6 | CHARLIE | Look sweetheart we're not talking about would <i>you</i> be impressed / if he asked you out to dinner, |
| 7 | JUNE | You don't listen, Charlie. He don't listen. |
| 8 | CHARLIE | if he asked for your hand in marriage in his suit. [...] that is not the point. |
| 9 | JUNE | Tell us the point then, Charlie. |

(Churchill 1990: 279)⁴

Furthermore, these expectations are regularly fulfilled by the other characters, who do not usually ask questions or make commands of Charlie. Even when they do so (as his wife June does on occasion by urging him to "leave [Ruby] alone"), Charlie rarely complies. He also repeatedly produces interpersonally negative conversational actions such as overt disagreements ("that is not the point"). His way of dealing with overlaps (both when overlapping others and being overlapped himself) also contributes to the impression that he dominates the conversation: Charlie's overlaps are often oppositional, and he hardly ever

³ June is Ruby's "slightly older" sister (Ruby is about 40); Sonia is Charlie and June's daughter; Matt is Sonia's boyfriend (Churchill 1990: 277). This note by Churchill makes it immediately clear to the script reader that these people are members of a family (which might affect one's expectations with regard to their interaction: see e.g. Tannen 2014 on balancing power and connection in the family discourse; also Gordon 2009: 196 on family as an "interactive construction"). The theatre audience, on the other hand, may take a few moments to realise this.

⁴ In the textual examples that follow, Churchill's original notation system is used. Thus "a speech usually follows upon the preceding one BUT:

1: When one character starts speaking before the other has finished, the point of interruption is marked /

[...]

2: A character sometimes continues speaking right through another's speech" (Churchill 1996: 52).

takes notice of the interruption displays produced by someone else in relation to his overlaps (e.g. June's in line 7 above). The same applies to his use of repetition and repair (self-oriented, insistence-related).

Matt and Sonia, on the other hand, demonstrate a very different interactional strategy. Sonia explicitly aligns with Matt, e.g. when she supports Matt's turn 1 by using grammatical intensification ("He does / look more..."). Charlie, however, addresses Matt with his objection, overlapping Sonia, thus ignoring her. Here, verbal conflict is about to be formally established as Matt objects to Charlie ("Yes, because"). Sonia supports Matt again, also reintroducing her own previous point. Charlie overlaps Sonia (indeed, *interrupts* her), this time addressing her directly: "Look" is a conventional turn-initial 'attention-getter', a marker explicitly signalling that the interruptor wants to speak 'now' and is about to grab the floor by cutting the other's turn short (Bilmes 1997: 514-515).

Charlie's decision to oppose Sonia instead of Matt suspends the impending confrontation. That is, Charlie does not continue asserting opposition to Matt and thus does not initiate an insistence and/or intensification-based disagreement sequence – a standard opening to verbal conflict as described e.g. by Gruber (1998: 476-478) or Locher (2004: 95-97). Charlie's use of humour at this point may be meant, to put it in Norrick and Spitz's phrase (2008: 1682), to "mitigate conflict from the onset of a potentially contentious interaction". More globally, it is in line with the preceding and forthcoming exchanges with Sonia and Ruby respectively, where Charlie consistently uses humour as a way of asserting power (cf. Hay 2000; also Dynel 2008 and Keltner et al. 2001: 241 on teasing and power).

Charlie talks over June's mocking metalinguistic comment ("You don't listen, Charlie. He don't listen"), which can be interpreted as a kind of third-party interruption signal – probably related to Charlie's interrupting Sonia and disengaging Matt. June recasts her overlapping (and talked-over) comment in the third person, as it were, for the others' benefit, signalling that the original comment is ignored by Charlie as the addressee. Her non-overlapping request to Charlie to "tell the point" is also ignored, while her irony is noted and duly addressed.

- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 10 | CHARLIE | She's always like this on the third vodka. [...] she always has a go / on the – |
| 11 | JUNE | I hope he's nothing like him. |
| 12 | CHARLIE | Who's not? You hope / who's – |
| 13 | JUNE | Nothing, my big mouth. |
| 14 | CHARLIE | Who's not like me? |
| 15 | JUNE | Ruby's giving me such a look now, / I don't dare. |
| 16 | CHARLIE | What are you up to, Ruby? |
| 17 | JUNE | No, leave her alone. |

(Churchill 1990: 279)

Structurally and interactionally, June's overlapping turn ("I hope he's nothing like him") is parallel to Charlie's ironic comment ("She's always like this on the third

vodka”): both use ironic third person formulations in their statements. June’s “him” refers to Charlie (which he shows to understand in his following turns: “Who’s not like me?”). Formally, June is giving a negative other-assessment here: expressing her hope that ‘he’ is different, thus implicating that ‘him’, Charlie, is in some respects deficient. Charlie reacts to this assessment, also signalling that June is being interruptive, as he cuts off his overlapped turn in line 10. He uses a conventional clarification request (“Who’s not?”) to refer to June’s overlapping turn – and further insists after June produces a disclaimer (“nothing”). June also indicates that her overlapping negative other-assessment might have been inappropriate (“my big mouth”). She clarifies this by referring to Ruby in her next turn, while still refusing to provide the clarification requested by Charlie. He then switches his attention to Ruby, addressing her in his next clarification request (“What are you up to, Ruby?”), but it is June who responds instead, asking him to “leave her alone”.

While Matt and Sonia may form a conversational duet (which will be discussed in section 2.1.2), there is a difference in their individual ways of participating. Both can disagree with other characters, including Charlie, or correct them (e.g. Sonia corrects Charlie in overlap and then openly disagrees with him in the excerpt below). Characteristically, both of these turns are ignored by Charlie:

- | | | |
|---|---------|---|
| 1 | CHARLIE | [...] You keep going in and out all different banks, / every time you |
| 2 | SONIA | Building societies. |
| 3 | CHARLIE | go in you’re giving them another chance to get you. |
| 4 | SONIA | Every time you go in you’re making money. |
- (Churchill 1990: 280)

Yet on the whole, Matt is the only participant in Act 1 who engages in a sustained opposition with Charlie. That is how Act 1 opens, with Matt opposing Charlie’s disagreement (Churchill 1990: 279). In this case, the opposition dissipates because Charlie switches to Sonia, who has been supporting Matt. There are additional points in the following extract which are worth considering. For instance, Matt uses conventional clarification requests and repair initiations to assert opposition to Charlie. In fact, Matt has staged an explicit opposition with Charlie in the excerpts below, insisting on his position by repeating clarification requests – apparently implying disagreement as well as (or, rather than) lack of understanding.

Pause.

- | | | |
|----|---------|--|
| 14 | CHARLIE | When I was your age I just went in. [...] You had to take more with you than a suit. |
| 15 | MATT | What are you saying? I don’t shoot people? No, I don’t shoot people. |
| 16 | CHARLIE | I never shoot – don’t start that with me. |

- 1 MATT What's the matter with it?
 2 CHARLIE Don't start.
 3 MATT What's the matter with it?
 4 CHARLIE I don't like plastic.

(Churchill 1990: 282-283)

There is very little explicit cohesion in Charlie's turn (line 14) with Matt's preceding turn. There is topical continuity with the preceding discussion, and lexically a reference to the very first exchange discussed here (e.g. "suit" and "go in"). There is explicit self-reference and a degree of contrast conveyed by juxtaposing it with other-reference (pronominally expressed by "I" vs. "you") – instead of something more relevant, like an assessment of the scheme just presented. All this, along with the pause (a dispreference marker as per Levinson 1983: 307) can be taken to convey Charlie's overall negative reaction (essentially unchanged from the beginning); so, interactionally, his turn could count as rejection. When confronted by Matt, Charlie opts out of replying (and so out of establishing opposition on Matt's topic) by producing unmitigated commands to stop.

The repetition in Matt's initial clarification request ("What are you saying? I don't shoot people? No, I don't shoot people") is modelled on the adjacency pair question-answer. This format may be used to assert opposition by self-repetition formulated as a negative response to the presumed question (cf. Norrick 1987: 260). Thus, Matt asserts a difference, but verbal conflict is not formally established since a statement of opposing positions is not forthcoming. In fact, while demonstrating prospective awareness of impending conflict (as per Goodwin 2006: 453-455), Charlie is still consistently refusing to provide a sequentially relevant next action – just as he has been doing throughout the preceding conversation. "Non-complying" is cited by Piazza (2006: 2095) in her discussion of melodrama discourse as a kind of confrontational reply dealing with "aggressive questions". In Charlie's case, however, rather than being a local opposition-related device, it seems an integral part of the more global dominance-seeking strategy.

Charlie finally starts to produce a structurally matching (oppositional) statement in response to Matt's initial clarification request by reusing Matt's formulation, but he breaks off in mid-phrase to utter a command ("don't start that with me"). While classifiable as a "conventionalised impoliteness formula" (as per Culpeper 2010 and 2011) – perhaps, a "silencer" (cf. Culpeper 2011: 135-136) – Charlie's phrase can also be interpreted as indicating his orientation to *avoiding* conflict rather than to establishing it formally through a sequence of mutual disagreements (cf. Locher 2004: 95-97; Norrick & Spitz 2008: 1668). At this point, avoiding conflict would mean preserving the topical inconclusion – along with the current power balance. June then suggests another potential interpretation of Charlie's continued opposition to Matt: she apparently believes that Charlie needs reassurance, yet Charlie rejects this interpretation, claiming that it cannot be "difficult" for him.

As mentioned above, Charlie's questions are very direct, showing an expectation that his interlocutors would comply with his 'questioner' role. For instance, his turn 10 (Churchill 1990: 280), "Identification", borders on a command, something that might be uttered by a police officer. Matt replies using a similar elliptic format ("Does nicely"). By replying, Matt indeed acknowledges Charlie's right to ask questions, in the format used by Charlie at that. The same reasoning applies to Charlie's clarification request ("Ten's enough?"), to which Matt responds by providing the clarification requested ("Ten's fine").

At this point Sonia switches to co-operative sentence-building, as evidenced by Matt's reaction: he consistently gives up the floor and does not protest when Sonia overlaps him. What matters is her support, contributing to a shared topic and moving towards a common goal. Such support is manifested in Sonia's formulation, particularly in its relation to Matt's overlapped turn (providing a reply to Charlie's question). The other two characters are not participating, nor are they constructing a conversational floor of their own, as the case would be in a friendly multiparty conversation (which indeed happens in Act 3). This suggests that the exchange between Charlie and Matt/Sonia is in the focus of attention.

Thus, Charlie's claim to control in Act 1 is interactively constructed, offset by Matt's attempts to gain discursive power at several points. Matt switches to the initiator role when challenging Charlie; his switch to oppositional clarification requests from giving the exposition of the cheque scam is a response to and fulfilment of Charlie's request. These attempts by Matt at gaining discursive power are explicitly opposed by Charlie, and that leads to an explicit opposition statement. It is precisely the opposition from Charlie that makes Matt's power claims conspicuous. That is, by opposing Matt on these points, Charlie shows both his understanding of Matt's interactional behaviour and his attitude to it (cf. Locher 2004: 94 on the complexities of directly relating disagreement to power). This could be contrasted with Matt's co-operatively replying to Charlie's direct questions earlier. Interestingly, collaborative interaction between Charlie and Matt is *non-overlapping* – as is the oppositional one discussed above. However, both are examples of how Charlie's orientation to conversational dominance in Act 1 is constructed: his right to ask questions *and* be answered is interactively acknowledged by Matt and Sonia – who consistently comply with the expectations set by his turns.

In the extracts from Act 1 discussed so far, overlapping seems to have several principal uses. In the beginning of Act 1, overlapping is used by Charlie to assert his initiator role and his claim to conversational dominance (by repeatedly claiming the floor and selectively ignoring the other participants' claims). Otherwise, overlapping can be used to address a current speaker (e.g. June to Charlie), the group as a whole (by June), or to address a non-participating group member (June to Ruby). An important use related to co-operative sentence-building (e.g. by Sonia) is discussed in more detail in the following subsection. In contrast, and perhaps rather unexpectedly, interpersonal opposition in Act 1 (Matt vs. Charlie) is realised and resolved *without* overlapping. The interactional context offsets the power balance: Charlie as dominant and Matt as up-and-coming contender. One might speculate that by staging an opposition in this

particular format the two male characters are collaboratively constructing their masculine identities (see e.g. Coates 2003 and 2007: 41).

2.1.2. Duetting

Conversational duetting is realised (and recognised) in Act 1 essentially as a kind of co-operative sentence-building in a multiparty conversational setting (with a common addressee and a common strategic goal). It also seems to conform to Coates' (2007: 41) suggestion that in mixed company "overlap as part of the collaborative construction of talk functions as a display of heterosexual coupledness". Having noted that Matt and Sonia often act as a conversational duet, I pointed out several instances of mutual support and co-operative sentence-building above. When Matt and Sonia overlap each other in the duet capacity, (1) the overlapping turn is non-oppositionally oriented to the overlapped one, and (2) no explicit interruption signals are forthcoming from the overlapped speaker. Matt/Sonia may finish or continue each other's ongoing turn in overlap. The overlapped speaker may break off at the point of overlap, but this cannot be easily interpreted as an interruption display since no show of annoyance and/or insistence follows (as described e.g. by Bilmes 1997: 519-520). The other co-participants recognise Matt/Sonia as a conversational duet by accepting (i.e. interactively acknowledging) their collective action. This is especially relevant in the case of their collective response, when one member of the duet replies to a question addressed to the other and is so acknowledged by the interlocutor. They may also be addressed as a duet, that is, no specific member is nominated by the interlocutor, and either an individual or collective response is accepted.

- | | | |
|----|---------|---|
| 12 | SONIA | You don't want cash – |
| 13 | CHARLIE | I want cash. |
| 14 | SONIA | You don't want cash yet [...]. I have done that but / only – |
| 15 | MATT | But only if you've got plenty / of – |
| 16 | SONIA | Only if you've got several cheques [...], and you take two out and let the rest go. / But I'm talking about the |
| 17 | JUNE | Let the rest go? |
| 18 | SONIA | basic way you do it and you don't / want cash – |
- (Churchill 1990: 281)

Sonia displays connection with Matt's overlapping comment: essentially, her turn can be regarded as a coherent expansion of Matt's. There is significant phrasal other-repetition on Sonia's part ("only if you've got [...] plenty"), preceded by other-repetition in Matt's overlapping comment ("but only"). Thus, Sonia effectively displays her understanding of Matt's overlapping comment as supporting her overlapped turn rather than interrupting it. This exchange also offsets June's facilitator role, both in relation to Matt/Sonia and to Charlie. Charlie's previous turn is essentially a statement of his doubt in Matt's explanation, and can therefore be interpreted as oppositional; June's prediction ("So you cash it") is formally suggesting a continuation to Sonia's turn. It also presents a more sympathetic attitude to Matt/Sonia's plan, mitigating Charlie's

directness. At this point, June is working as a complementary couple with Charlie – as Sonia did at the beginning of Act 1 with Matt.

Charlie supports such an interpretation of June's contribution in his next turn. He reacts to Sonia's response to June's suggestion ("You don't want cash"). Again, he refers to himself ("I want cash") as he formally opposes Sonia (using reformulated phrasal other-repetition). Sonia acknowledges his response, although she begins by repeating her previous turn, which is formally similar to an opposition statement. Thus, she both reasserts her position and responds to Charlie's objection (by expanding on her original statement). Note that June's conventional repair initiator "Let the rest go?" (repeating a problematic item), produced in overlap to Sonia's ongoing turn, is talked over and never acknowledged (as in the previously mentioned instances). The reason may be that it is not felt to be particularly pertinent to the progress of conversation; that June does not insist on it, might indicate that her incomprehension is no longer relevant.

Finally, Sonia reiterates her initial response ("you don't want cash"), and it is supported by Matt in overlap. Interpreting Matt's overlap as supportive follows the same reasoning as above. This final example further illustrates the Matt/Sonia duetting: their contributions are formulated continuously, as an extended exposition.

- | | | |
|-------|-------|--|
| 3 | MATT | So what she does. |
| 4 | SONIA | So what I do is I get a building society cheque, right, because – |
| 5 | MATT | Because the Skipton can't bounce. |
| [...] | | |
| 7 | MATT | Because it looks better if you don't take the lot.[...] |
| 11 | MATT | So meanwhile [...] I pay in this very impressive building society cheque, which can't bounce. And <i>then</i> I take out maybe three thousand in cash [...] / and pay it – |
| 12 | SONIA | Because they're impressed by a building society cheque. |
| 13 | MATT | And I take the three thousand and pay it into another account. [...] |

(Churchill 1990: 282)

The strategically placed causal conjunction 'because' in lines 5 and 7 is significant: the first occurrence is other-repeating, manifesting connection with Sonia's adjacent turn; the second is self-repeating, maintaining the continuity. On the other hand, in two cases here Matt refers back to Sonia's adjacent turns using a turn-initial 'because', expanding on them further. Interestingly, Matt refers to Sonia in the third person. This does not mean that their duetting is discontinued – rather, Matt's reference is taken by Sonia as a cue to continue her own turn, which she starts with an other-repetition combined with minimal pronominal rephrasing. Thus, Sonia acknowledges Matt's supportive attitude.

Finally, Matt assumes the initiatory role in line 11 (manifested by the change in the pronominal reference from third to first person). Sonia supports him by referring to his adjacent turn, and expanding on it with a turn-initial ‘because’ and lexical other-repetition (of ‘impressed’ for his ‘impressive’). Here, other-repetition converges with self-repetition as Sonia reuses her own formulation “building society cheque”, which Matt also uses in his adjacent turn. His break-off in line 11 and subsequent self-repair by rephrasing could in principle be interpreted as an interruption signal – if Sonia’s overlapping turn were oppositional rather than supportive, and if an understanding of other-repetition and overlapping were not demonstrated by both of them throughout the extended sequence. As it is, Matt concludes the extended co-operative exposition with Sonia’s support. The additive conjunctive cohesion “And”, “And”, “And” (cf. Toolan 1998: 29) in Matt’s lines 11 and 13 stresses the logical connectedness of the exposition and foregrounds Matt’s last turns as its conclusion.

I have already discussed the exchange which follows this passage, in particular the confrontation between Matt and Charlie. In his counter-exposition (14), Charlie must be addressing Matt specifically – or so is his turn understood by Matt (who takes it up as an expression of doubt and/or negative other-assessment). Charlie’s pronoun use is also characteristic: ‘I’ versus ‘you’, rather than ‘we’ versus ‘you’. That is, Charlie does not explicitly acknowledge Sonia’s (or June’s) contribution, even though he has acknowledged their participation interactively just before. Charlie’s reaction to the Matt/Sonia exposition, while interpersonally negative, is in fact an acknowledgement of Matt/Sonia’s common goal to persuade him (even though he specifically addresses Matt). This interpretation is supported by Matt’s subsequent request to clarify why their exposition fails to persuade Charlie.

Thus, conversational duetting in Act 1 can be interpreted as aiming at the persuasion of a specific participant (i.e. Charlie). This understanding of conversational duetting further illuminates the conversational structure of this Act as a multiparty conversation dominated by certain speakers and certain topics. Indeed, in it two participants (Matt/Sonia) are oriented towards certain practical goals (i.e. recruiting new members for a scam). To attain these, they conspicuously concentrate on a specific discursive goal (persuasion) in relation to a specific target (Charlie). This is achieved in the later part of Act 1, as Charlie grudgingly agrees to try the scheme out, thus confirming the initial suggestion of the characters’ orientation to this goal. While duetting, Matt and Sonia make it clear that their individual contributions should count on behalf of them both (cf. Falk 1980: 508; also Lerner 1993: 213). This can be derived from their mutually supportive ways of relating to each other’s talk and reacting to each other’s actions, as well as in their congruent reactions to the addressee’s actions. The other co-participants recognise Matt/Sonia acting as a conversational duet by interactively acknowledging their collective action.

2.2. *Hot Fudge Act 3: Overlapping and schisming*

Anthony Jenkins (1998: 26) characterized the conversation in *Hot Fudge Act 3* as “smooth talk”. Indeed, lexical composition of Act 3 is quite different from the rest of the play: in Act 3, characters use more formal, polysyllabic lexis combined with a syntax appropriate to written rather than spoken language (e.g. numerous subordinate clauses). The very first turn by Jerry sets the general tone: “I feel that a career in global industry offers a lifetime package as exciting as it is possible to conceive”. This multiparty conversation follows a friendly (and personal) dialogue between Ruby and Colin in Act 2. However, from Act 1 onwards, the reader is aware that Ruby is a member of a small-time crime ring; she is posing as the owner of an exclusive travel agency before Colin, who is ostensibly the owner of a media monitoring company. In Act 3, Colin introduces Ruby to his yuppie friends. A strong contrast is established with regard to the two characters’ conversational behaviour in Acts 1 and 2. A significant difference in the interpersonal context is foregrounded: the friendly chat in Act 2 versus ‘self-presentation/self-promotion’ in Act 3. Also, there are no instances of joint laughter in Act 3, as opposed to 5 instances in Act 2 and 2 instances in Act 1. It has been pointed out that joint laughter may be “an invitation to growing intimacy” (Eggs & Slade 1997: 158), or that laughter and intimacy may be “significantly linked” (Coates 2007: 44); so this might contribute to constructing an interpersonal context which is more intimate in Acts 1 and 2 than in Act 3.

2.2.1. Overlapping for support and/or ‘self-promotion’

On the whole, the characters seem to participate in about equal measure. None of them behave in the way Ruby did at the beginning of Act 1, consistently opting out or simply not participating. Jerry may contribute somewhat less than the rest, yet he does participate in an (interactively acknowledged) initiatory role. Ruby and Colin tend to assume responder roles, often also providing interactional support for each other. Colin’s friends present themselves in relation to their high-powered jobs and attempt to forge a connection on that basis. This may involve more localised, individual persuading. Hugh, for instance, keeps mentioning various properties that he believes might interest his interlocutors, e.g. when he offers a watermill to Ruby.

Club: 11 p.m.

RUBY, COLIN, JERRY, GRACE and HUGH

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 13 | JERRY | I feel that a career in global industry offers a lifetime package as exciting as it is possible to conceive. |
| 14 | COLIN | You need flexibility. |
| 1 | GRACE | You need interpersonal skills. |
| 2 | HUGH | The world is certainly getting smaller. |
| 3 | GRACE | And you must find that, Colin, with all the world news pouring into your / office. |
| 4 | COLIN | Yes, I’m certainly very aware of the village / aspect. |
| 5 | GRACE | You must feel like you're the nerve centre.* |

- 6 HUGH We'll soon be able to drive anywhere in France within twelve hours but I could still offer you a watermill [...] for just under eighty-five thousand.
- 7 RUBY If someone acquired it as a hotel you could put me in touch –
- [...]
- 9 COLIN *It is exciting / making connections.
- 10 GRACE And exhausting.

(Churchill 1990: 290-291)

What may further contribute to the collaboration effect in Act 3 (i.e. the characters' signalling commonality, "know[ing] each other", as per Hamilton 1991: 191) is the near-absence of interactional displays of lack of understanding (Levinson 1983: 341; see also Piazza 1999: 1003-1006). In fact, there is only one instance of conventional repair initiation in Act 3: Ruby repeating a problematic item in overlap to Grace's ongoing turn. Ruby's repair initiator is never acknowledged, and she does not insist as Grace clarifies that point in her ongoing turn. In contrast, both the format of repair initiation/clarification request and of the addressee's response, as is the case of Matt vs. Charlie in Act 1, and their ways of engaging into the clarification sequence contribute to the reader's understanding of the discursive power negotiation. The lack of repairs in Act 3 makes the power negotiation more subtle while also signalling a difference in the interpersonal context.

In Act 3, overlaps are used in supportive and responding turns throughout, while initiatory turns are mostly non-overlapping (but see 2.2.2 below on schisming-inducing turns). However, even in supportive turns the characters use overlapping to a different extent. For instance, Jerry's initial statement above is supported by Colin, Grace, and Hugh in turn, i.e. no overlap occurs at that point. These three speakers' replies are supportive not only of Jerry's sequence-initial statement but also of each other. The other-repetition by Grace (in line 14 above) relating to Colin's adjacent turn is both phrasal and structural: she reuses Colin's turn format, substituting one business speak item for another, "interpersonal skills" for "flexibility". Both Grace's and Hugh's turns are topically related to Jerry's initiation, by expanding on the original statement (Grace) or by using the term "world" to refer back to "global" (Hugh). Grace's next turn (in line 3 above) relates to the preceding talk by lexical cohesion ("world news") and by additive conjunction for continuity (assuming "that" is substituted for "the world is [...] getting smaller"): "And you must find that, Colin". Colin's (slightly overlapping) co-operative and interpersonally positive response supports this interpretation of Grace's turn; he uses similar cohesive devices and keeps to the same lexical register.

When Grace addresses Colin later, she consistently acknowledges his replies in overlap (from line 9 above onwards), while Colin overlaps her much less or not at all. Grace does the same while talking to Ruby later (see below); there the overlapping is again unilateral. These overlapping turns are interpretable as supportive rather than oppositional because of their format: they refer non-oppositionally to the preceding talk and to the overlapped turn. There is even

something like co-operative sentence building on Grace's part in lines 9-10 above: when overlapping Colin, she does so in a topically and structurally compatible way by completing his ongoing turn ("It is exciting / making connections") with a grammatically parallel structure ("And exhausting").

Colin's response confirms this interpretation of Grace's overlap as non-oppositional. Although non-overlapping itself, his response is subsequently co-operatively overlapped by Grace. Grace tends to produce her supportive turns in overlap, whether they are addressed to Colin (as above) or in support of Colin's response to someone else (e.g. in line 14 below: addressed to Jerry).

- | | | |
|-------|-------|---|
| 13 | JERRY | Colin will appreciate the importance for the international manager of giving weight to local tastes, cultures and traditions. |
| 14 | COLIN | Yes, you have to forge a bond / with people on the ground. |
| 15 | GRACE | You have to relate to elementary differences / in outlook. |
| 16 | JERRY | And the company that cannot do that will be humbled. |
| [...] | | |
| 19 | GRACE | And you must face the same issue, Ruby. You |
| [...] | | |
| 2 | GRACE | go to research the vacations yourself? |
| 3 | RUBY | And I do make great friends / with the local people. |
| [...] | | |
| 5 | HUGH | If you can spare the time, we're [...] making regular weekend viewing trips to Brittany / and Normandy. |
| 6 | RUBY | I don't think I'd want to tie myself to a house. |
| 7 | COLIN | Ruby's / more of a gypsy. |

(Churchill 1990: 291-292)

Colin, nominated by Jerry in the beginning, responds to the exceedingly formal statement with an explicit agreement that elaborates further on Jerry's topic (exemplified through the use of the same business speak). Both Colin's and Grace's turns are supportive of Jerry's initiation, as well as of each other. As Grace has done before, she repeats Colin's formulation "you have to" (in overlap), producing a complementary support for Jerry's initiation, couched in similar lexis. Generally, Grace and Jerry are happy with each other's overlaps. When Jerry provides support for Grace in line 16, it is manifested by the turn format (maintaining continuity by reference and additive conjunction). This kind of behaviour may be regarded as an indication of Jerry's over-enthusiastic attitude, as well as his orientation to agreement in this interaction.

I have mentioned that characters' ways of stating and resolving differences can contribute to appreciating the interpersonal context. In Act 3, the only kind of potentially oppositional turn is refusal, for instance Ruby's line 6 above. These instances are not explicitly meant to be interpersonally oppositional, judging

from their format and the addressee's reaction. Ruby's overlap with Hugh's proposal in that turn uses a conventionally polite formulation. Her refusal is mitigated by an introductory metaphorized modal reference to probability (as per Toolan 1998: 53-54), "I don't think"; and there is further conventional mitigation ("I [woul]d"). Ruby's response is humorously supported by Colin (line 7), but this support is overlapped by Hugh's response to Ruby.

Hugh may be (formally) ignoring Colin's supportive turn by referring to the earlier exchange, but he does not actually challenge the existing collaborative context. Hugh's turn is formulated as a statement in support of his earlier offer rather than a direct insistence on it. The topic of buying property is then taken up by Jerry, with a self-referring statement. There is a significant difference in formulation at this point. In her response turn, Ruby refers to reasons that are not straightforwardly material, which are couched in more or less neutral lexis, as well as being conventionally polite. Colin, in his supportive turn, affectionately refers to Ruby's personal qualities in the same colloquial register. Jerry, on the other hand, sticks to business speak, demonstrating affinity with Hugh in taking the same stance towards "home as an investment".

There is a further instance of refusal (again, on Ruby's part) in Act 3 (line 3 below). It is as much a conventionally polite formulation as in the earlier instance: "I wish I could but".

| | | |
|---|-------|--|
| 2 | GRACE | [...] I don't have the address / of your agency. |
| 3 | RUBY | I wish I could but we're completely run off our feet with company clients and / can't take individual – |
| 4 | COLIN | Ruby's too exclusive / for us. |
| 5 | GRACE | Ruby, that's too bad [...] |

(Churchill 1990: 294-295)

Ruby is again supported by Colin, in much the same way as before: Colin provides humorous support immediately after the target action (namely refusal), this time even overlapping Ruby's ongoing turn. Even though Ruby breaks off when overlapped by Colin, this cannot be easily interpreted as an interruption display: Colin's comment is not oppositional towards the overlapped turn, but rather mitigates the refusal in it. This may also give an idea of the local interpersonal context as regards these two characters in particular: Colin monitors and supports Ruby in Act 3, which is consistent with its participant composition (in Act 3, all of the people Ruby meets are Colin's friends). As in the previous case, Colin's support is overlapped by the addressee (and Ruby's current interlocutor), Grace, in line 5. Colin's comment might not be explicitly acknowledged, but there is no further insistence or display of discontent from Colin. None of the speakers signal that the behaviour demonstrated by any of the others is inappropriate. In both cases, the current interlocutor's reply to Ruby is congruent with Colin's support as well as with Ruby's original turn.

2.2.2 Schisming

As can be seen from the above examples, in Act 3 of Churchill's play overlaps may result from addressing an interlocutor other than the one currently speaking. Such overlapping turns are neither oppositional to the overlapped ones in their formulation, nor shown to be such by the overlapped speaker(s). What is important is that these overlaps are not overtly treated as problematic by participants themselves (cf. Schegloff 2000: 4). Such turns, produced in overlap to another's ongoing turn, when they are explicitly directed to a different addressee, can introduce schisming – that is, splitting a general conversation into several simultaneous ones (as described at the beginning of section 2). Instances of schisming are quite straightforward in Churchill's notation thanks to her use of an asterisk symbol (cf. Churchill 1996: 52).

For instance, at the very beginning of Act 3 (p. 291 – see the first extract in subsection 2.2.1), Hugh starts his initiatory turn directed to Ruby (line 6) just as Colin starts his response to Grace (line 9). Hugh's initiation can be topically related to an earlier part of the conversation about the "global village" as he refers to being "able to drive anywhere in France within twelve hours". However, the *action* here is an instance of offering (in contrast to the preceding statements). According to Egbert (1997: 3-4), the speaker of a schisming-inducing turn may break away from the ongoing conversation by introducing a shift in action (as well as in the topic). Grace's turn in line 5 is addressed to Colin, as is her previous turn (where there is explicit nomination, "Colin", along with second person pronouns). Hugh's "you" in his next turn refers to Ruby and is acknowledged as such by her.

Finally, Grace relates to the previous talk (line 19) when she explicitly addresses Ruby in overlap of the ongoing exchange between Colin and Jerry. Grace's phrase "you must face the same issue" refers to her preceding exchange with Colin and Jerry on "forging a bond with people on the ground". That is, Grace's overlap is not in opposition to the ongoing exchange; furthermore, she extends the shared topic to a different participant. Thus, the co-existence of two turn-taking systems (as per Sacks et al. 1974: 713) is realised as Grace's turn is taken up by Ruby and the ongoing conversation is sustained. As Hugh did before, Grace could break away from the ongoing conversation by initiating a new sequence type, but she still relates to a shared topic while introducing a new action appropriate to an initiatory turn, namely questioning (as opposed to the preceding statements).

Grace, therefore, may be interpreted as attempting to include Ruby in the general conversation (rather than trying to construct an entirely separate conversation), asserting intra-group connection (rather than separation). Furthermore, the pairing of speakers is not fixed. From time to time, speakers explicitly refer to or address members of other talking pairs (e.g. Colin engaged with both Jerry and Grace). Colin and Ruby also support and relate to each other while engaged with a third interlocutor, e.g. Colin supporting and humorously expanding Ruby's response to Hugh in line 7 (Churchill 1990: 292).

For actors, staging schisming (and overlapping dialogue in general) may seem “horrendously difficult”, a “technical nightmare” (actress Lesley Manville in Luckhurst 2015: 92 and Gobert 2014: 9, respectively). In theatrical performance, the simultaneous presence of (at least) two talking pairs onstage entails certain performance considerations, such as gaze direction (see e.g. Bavelas et al. 2002 and Rossano 2013 on its significance in the naturally occurring conversation). In order to realise more fully the overlapping dialogue in Churchill on stage by using facial expressions, gestures or tone of voice, it has to be analysed with regard to its interpersonal significance. I have been discussing how this can be inferred: an array of discursive features including overlap are being reacted to by co-participants, thus providing an interpretative resource with regard to the dramatic situation and character.

Some relevant directorial decisions are mentioned by the actors who participated in the 1982 and 1991 productions of another Caryl Churchill play, *Top Girls*. In particular, Deborah Findlay notes with regard to the multiple-speaker overlapping dialogue in *Top Girls* Act 1:

When everybody was speaking, in the overlapping bits, we had to decide which bits were important to be heard, so some lines would take supremacy and somebody would go a bit quieter so that bit of story could be heard properly (Goodman 1998: 81-82).

The dialogue was thus “calibrated” so as to “direct the audience’s attention more effectively as the scene progresses” (Gobert 2014: 9). I hope to have shown how the linguistically-informed interpretative framework that I have presented may shape such directorial decisions.⁵

3. Conclusion

I have discussed how discursive features in a play script can contribute to the reader’s understanding of the characters’ interactional orientations, effectively giving an idea of their interpersonal orientations. I have presented my suggestions of how these features could contribute to the reader’s inferences on situation and character. Characters’ interactional strategies may include a range of options, from ignoring the other’s contributions to co-operatively producing joint text. Thus characters’ orientations to various interactional outcomes are manifested: minimising confrontation vs. continuing and/or enhancing confrontation; closing vs. continuing a particular topic or the interaction itself. These interactional displays enable inferences about interpersonal orientations: attitude to the interlocutor and the relationship (such as establishing affinity vs. difference). As noted in the beginning, the script of *Hot Fudge* demonstrates several uses of overlapping speech (in combination with other discursive

⁵ Awareness of linguistic means employed to this end in the naturally occurring conversation might also inform directorial decisions with regard to staging such scenes. As noted, for instance, by Szczepek (2000: 13), the prosody of duet incomings is characteristically ‘non-competitive’, while voice quality is singled out by Chowdhury et al. (2015a) for non-competitive overlaps in general.

features). I hope to have shown how individual interpersonal orientations are inferable from the interactional strategies that include the use of overlapping (as well as non-overlapping) speech.

Beginning with a discussion of co-operative sentence-building, I have proposed the following: acknowledging and/or reusing the other's overlapping formulations in a non-oppositional format can show the speaker's understanding of those contributions as collaboratively oriented. Co-operative sentence-building (often described as a characteristic feature of certain multi-speaker settings) contributes to the effect of collaboration and enthusiasm, and to constructing an interpersonal context. In the case of *Hot Fudge*, it contributes to an effect of mutual support and understanding between (pairs of) speakers. It may be oriented to a common addressee, with a common strategic goal — thus in Act 1, co-operative sentence-building is often interpretable as (collaborative) persuasion of a specific participant. This further illuminates the conversational structure in Act 1: it is a multiparty conversation dominated by certain speakers and certain topics. This is conspicuously manifested by the way claims of dominance are realised interactively: overlapping speech is used by the parties involved in the dominance negotiation, while it is conspicuously absent from the sequence directly related to, but not resulting in, a verbal conflict.

A number of instances of overlapping speech in Act 1 have been further discussed with regard to their similarity to conversational duetting (Falk 1980). This mainly refers to certain mutually supportive ways the duetting speakers employ while relating to each other's talk and reacting to each other's actions. Co-participants recognise a conversational duet by interactively acknowledging their collective action. On the other hand, in the multiparty conversation of Act 3 non-oppositional overlaps may result from addressing an interlocutor other than the one currently speaking. These overlaps are not overtly treated as problematic. From the perspective of interactivity this is a central argument in classifying these overlaps as non-oppositional. To reinforce this argument, I have considered examples of overlaps occurring in Act 3 in relation to conversational schisming (Sacks et al. 1974; Egbert 1997), noting how they can be oriented to asserting intra-group connection.

I hope to have shown how characters' interactional and interpersonal orientations can be inferred from certain features of their interaction — particularly, from their treatment of overlaps. This point, which is ultimately related to interpreting the significance of discursive features for (potentially) conflictive interaction in drama, can be especially relevant when one is aiming at substantiating (or contesting, as the case may be) a literary critical interpretation.

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