Because human languages can be used to talk about virtually anything, individuals conversing with one another have available an infinite number of topics about which they can talk. One topic is talk itself. In addition to conversations that focus predominantly on talk, for example, those in a linguistics class or a psychotherapy session, many conversations allow talk to emerge as a subtopic within ongoing talk about something else. Thus we often find within a conversation about some other topic metalinguistic expressions such as ((THAT'S WHAT I MEANT)), ((I'M TELLING YOU)), and ((I'LL PUT IT THIS WAY)) that focus on an individual's own talk, as well as expressions such as ((THAT'S

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YOUR OPINION)) and ((WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT)) that focus on an interlocutor's talk.

Although such metalinguistic expressions have been frequently noted—for example, in discussions on psycholinguistic strategies in discourse (Keller, 1979), on "formulating" (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970), on speech act modifying adverbials (Mittwoch, 1977), on lexicalized clauses (Pawley and Syder, forthcoming), and on side sequences (Jefferson, 1972)—they have never been examined in terms of the problems that I want to address in this paper: How is talk about talk integrated into a discourse? Where does it occur and why does it occur there?

In order to answer these questions, I begin with a characterization of some of the linguistic properties of meta-talk and go on to examine its distribution first in a particular discourse unit—an explanation—and then in the conversation in which such a discourse unit often occurs—an argument. Data consist of tape-recorded conversations gathered during sociolinguistic fieldwork.¹

Meta-Talk

Language can be used to talk about itself, that is, it can serve as its own meta-language. Although this is a universal of human language (Hockett, 1966), the task of identifying those elements used by a particular language as its own meta-language is often difficult. Reichenbach (1947, p. 58) suggests, for example, isolating those terms whose designata are aspects of language, for example, word, say, conjugate, mean, true, but Weinreich (1966, p. 163) expands this suggestion to include meta-linguistic operators—terms that function as "instructions for the loose or strict interpretation of designata," for example, real, so-called, strictly speaking, and like. To complicate matters further, different cultures and subcultures choose the terms of a meta-language according to different criteria, as a comparison of Stross' (1974) study of Tzeltal and Abrahams' (1974) study of black English indicates.

A functional approach to the task of identifying the elements of a language used to talk about itself raises other problems. Jakobson (1960) states, for example, that language has a meta-
lingual function when it focuses on the code (the language) as opposed to other components of the speech situation, for example, the speaker, the hearer, or the message. Jakobson notes, however, that verbal messages do not fulfill only one function, so that metalinguistic messages also focus on other aspects of the message, albeit to a lesser extent than on the code. Jakobson's discussion suggests that even when meta-linguistic elements are formally identified, they may have more than a metalinguistic function. And as Lyons (1977, p. 55) points out, even acts that seem to be purely metalinguistic involve other concerns: a meta-linguistic act such as requesting an interlocutor to define a particular word involves phatic concerns—the two are trying to prevent a breakdown in communication—and conative concerns—one speaker is making an appeal to another.

An alternative to Jakobson's formulation is found in Bateson ([1955] 1972) and Ruesch and Bateson (1951). Bateson defines language with a meta-linguistic function more narrowly—as discourse whose subject is language—and language with a meta-communicative function as discourse whose subject (either explicitly or implicitly) is both codification of the message and the relationship between the communicators. The multiple functions served by an act such as definition, then, would be meta-communicative, and the terms suggested by Weinreich (1966) for the loose or strict interpretation of designata would be terms of meta-communication.

The wide range of phenomena that can be identified as meta-linguistic and the vagueness surrounding the boundaries between meta-lingual and other functions of language complicate the task of finding a set of empirical linguistic indicators for meta-talk. Recognizing the problems involved, I identified three indicators of meta-talk: meta-linguistic referents, operators, and verbs.

Consider, first, meta-linguistic referents. The clearest case is when the entity referred to is something in the language per se—words, phrases, clauses, or sentences—and when its relevant attributes are those characterizing it as an element of language. Also included are entities that are characterized through their existence or location in a text: terms of discourse deixis (refers to the
function of features, such as personal pronouns and tense, which relate utterances to the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of the act of utterance) (Fillmore, 1975), such as former and latter, and the next point and the first thing when they refer to an item in a text rather than to an event (compare, for example, the referent of the first thing in phrases like the first thing that happened; see also Halliday and Hasan, 1976, pp. 263–267). Finally, demonstrative pronouns can function meta-linguistically when they point to items in the text rather than to items in the world outside the text (for example, Let me say this; see Partee, 1973), or when they refer to the propositions that are expressed through sentences rather than to the entities referred to (for example, That's a lie; see Linde, 1979; Lyons, 1977).

A second indication of meta-talk is meta-linguistic operators. Operators indicate either the modification or the combination, of propositions into more complex forms in ways that parallel logical operations. Meta-linguistic operators, such as true and false, can be seen as higher-level predicates whose arguments are propositions in the text. Right and wrong can function in the same way. Similarly, verbs such as mean can be seen as higher-level predicates requiring two textual propositions as arguments, as can discourse connectives such as like and for example.

A third indication of meta-talk is meta-linguistic verbs. Meta-languages have in their vocabularies names for things in the language, including things people do with language: the world of verbal communication is categorized, and terms exist with which to talk about speech. One group of meta-linguistic verbs names acts of speech: verbs of saying, such as say, tell, ask, and assert. Other verbs indicate that something will be done to a piece of talk: clarify and define, for example. And still others name speech events, for example, argue and joke.

Meta-linguistic referents, operators, and verbs are all embedded in a linguistic context that provides them with talk on which to focus. Sometimes this focal context goes no further than the boundaries of the containing sentence. In fragment one the meta-talk ((IN OTHER WORDS))² focuses on the two verb phrases denunciate and kick them the hell out of the house, both of which are in the same sentence as the meta-talk:
(1)

**AP:** So Blacks would be the most difficult?

**FM:** Most difficult.
- Most difficult to swallow
- and eh probably denunciate them
- or eh...kick them the hell out of the house **((IN OTHER WORDS))**.
- Because they knew- they would know
- and they know that that would be against
- my...fervent wishes.

Similarly, in fragment two, the focus of **((FOR INSTANCE))** is within the same sentence as the meta-talk:

(2)

**SB:** But, the only thing that stops me is society and...**((FOR INSTANCE))**, y'know living here on this street y'know what...

Delimiting the focal context to the meta-talk often requires going beyond the containing sentence into the surrounding text. In fragment three, **((MEAN))** focuses on predicates that are from two different sentences: *have personality, could really hold their own*:

(3)

**HP:** They both have personality!
- **((I MEAN))** they could really hold their own!

And in fragment four the meta-talk **((I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING))** has as its focal context a sequence of clauses that acts as the discourse referent to **((SOMETHING))**:

*Note:* Transcription symbols follow those developed by Gail Jefferson, and are explained in the Appendix to this special issue. Arrows point to the location of that material for which the segment is cited. The use of double parenthesis to mark meta-linguistic expressions differs from Jefferson's usage.
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(4)

AP: Italian?
RW: We wouldn't mind that too much.
JW: Inner race, yeh.
Well ((I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING)).
If you were put with all black people,
and people were mixed together,
you wouldn't- and y'lived with them,
you wouldn't notice it.
After awhile.

Note, finally, that in fragment five the focal context of the meta-talk is not even within the speaker's own discourse, but within the discourse of his interlocutor:

(5)

YP: Our a's, our chocolate, our uh... en: en: [Oh yeh?]
DS: [Oh yeh?]
HP: In fact South Philly people speak
YP: [The a's!]
HP: different than the people
in Philadelphia uh...
DS: ((THAT'S ONE OF THE QUESTIONS))!

These examples indicate that meta-talk has varying scope; in other words, the span of discourse that serves as a focal context for meta-talk varies in size. The scope of a particular piece of meta-talk is determined as much by what is in the discourse surrounding that meta-talk as by any characteristics of the meta-talk per se. Thus, in determining the scope of the meta-talk in fragments one through five, I took into consideration lexical and semantic relations (for example between *denunciate* and *kick out of the house* in one), topical cohesion (for example, both clauses in three were about the same topic, as indicated by the repeated subject *they*), and conjunctions (for example, the coordinating conjunction *and* in four).³ We will see that it is not only the scope of meta-talk but its location and its function—where it occurs and why it occurs there—that can be discovered by examining the linguistic context and the conversational discourse in which it occurs.
Organizational Brackets

Discourse Units. Chunks of talk that are externally bound and exhibit an internal structure have been called discourse units (Linde, forthcoming; Wald, 1977). An example of a discourse unit is a narrative (Labov and Waletsky, 1967; Labov, 1972). A narrative is externally bound because it is typically begun with an abstract, a statement of the general proposition that will be expanded through the relaying of events, and closed with a coda, a summary statement that carries the listener out of the story and back to the present (see also Jefferson, 1978). In addition to being delimited by boundary markers from whatever talk surrounds it, narratives exhibit an internal structure that distinguishes them from surrounding talk: the complicating action clauses that relay the events do so in the order in which they can be presumed to have occurred.

Although discourse units appear in conversations and verbal interactions and are interrelated with the units in the overall structures of those systems, they are also linguistic units of analysis, and there are some linguistic variables whose restrictions can be understood as stemming from their role in such units (see, for example, Linde, 1979; Schiffrin, in press).

Explanations, that is, segments of talk in which a speaker explains and justifies an assertion, have the properties of a discourse unit. Fragment six illustrates an explanation:

(6)

JC: ((I'LL ANSWER IT THIS WAY)).
My heart would break for the- for my boy, well I have two boys.
Let's say he falls in love, with a black girl, and he marries her,
I would...probably feel hurt.
Not because he married a black girl, because what he'd have to face...in this country, because of the racial situation as it is. So polarized now.
He would have to...hoe a hard road for the rest of his life.
((THIS IS THE WAY I ANSWER THAT)).
Prior to this segment, JC was asked how he felt about marriage between blacks and whites. His answer exhausted his turn at talk, and following its completion he asked his wife for her opinion on the same issue.

Note that there are two meta-linguistic clauses surrounding JC's answer. These clauses indicate the natural boundaries of this piece of discourse. Not only is the discourse externally bound, however, but it also exhibits an internal structure typical of many explanations: the speaker first presents an assertion—makes a point—and then either backs it with evidence or validates it through reasoning. In fragment six JC first sets his assertion into a short series of pseudoevents (their hypothetical status is indicated by let's say, would, and probably), and then indicates why that assertion is valid (beginning with the subordinate conjunction because). Note that JC first denies a reason: not because he married a black girl. Typically, a speaker does not merely deny a reason for the existence of his beliefs, however, and JC continues to give an alternative justification: the racial situation as it is. JC then closes his case.

**Discourse Brackets.** Meta-linguistic clauses indicating the boundaries of a discourse unit are *discourse brackets*. Bracketing devices function as part of the organizational apparatus not only of discourse but of social life and social organization as well (Goffman, 1974, pp. 251–269). Encounters, for example, are bracketed by opening sequences at their initiations (Goffman, 1963, 1971; Schegloff, 1972; Schiffrin, 1977) and ended by closing sequences (Goffman, 1963, 1971; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973).

Bracketing devices also work at different levels of the organization of talk: brackets that begin their lives as part of the organizational apparatus of discourse, for example, can work their way into the grammar of a language, where their bracketing function continues on both a discourse and sentential level (Sankoff and Brown, 1976). And, finally, discourse brackets are not necessarily meta-linguistic; as noted earlier, narratives are bracketed by an abstract and a coda, and explanations, too, can be bracketed by other devices (Schiffrin, in progress). I will be considering only the meta-linguistic variety of discourse bracket here.

Consider, first, discourse brackets that come in pairs. Fragment six illustrated the symmetrical binding of a discourse unit, as does fragment seven.\(^5\)
Meta-Talk

(7)

PM: uh...((THERE'S ONLY ONE THING)) I'm prejudiced on...is that's when...they mingle.
Y'know marriage and all.
((THAT'S THE ONLY THING)) I'm against.

Not all discourse brackets come in pairs, however: rather, a slot may simply be opened by an initial bracket or closed by a terminal bracket. Fragment four illustrated an initial bracket ("I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING"), as do fragments eight and nine:

(8)

JS: If my daughter ever-
((LET ME TELL YOU- I'LL TELL YOU))
if my daughter ever come home with a black boyfriend, he, and she better get out that front door before I can get upstairs and get my gun because they're both dead.

(9)

CG: I might have my opinions.
((I FIGURE THIS WAY)),
they're gonna do it anyway.
Cause that's how I was.

Fragment (10) illustrates terminal brackets:

(10)

PM: But uh...I- I've already met black people where I'd prefer...them, and their personality, an' just by the way they treat you, over some of the whites. I mean y'know ((THAT'S MY OPINION)).

Initial and terminal brackets are structurally distinguishable in several ways. First, initial brackets are often prefaced with initiating conjunctions, for example, well (see Lakoff, 1973; Owen,
1979; Pomerantz, 1978) and now (Schiffrin, in progress). Other introductory devices that appear with initial brackets are the pseudoimperative let (see fragment eight) and the imperative form of the experiential verbs look, see, and listen. Devices such as these are generally absent in terminal brackets.7

Second, although both initial and terminal brackets often contain a meta-linguistic verb (tall, figure, put), they do not share the same range of possible reference times. Reference time is the time at which the event named by the verb is understood to have occurred; it is calculated relative to the time of speaking and is typically marked by tense (Reichenbach, 1947). Not surprisingly, initial brackets may indicate a reference time in the future—the event named by the verb will occur following that moment of speaking—and terminal brackets may indicate a reference time in the past—the event named by the verb already occurred prior to that moment of speaking.

Note, though, that the general present tense is also used in both initial and terminal brackets, for example, in nine and ten. What is occurring in these cases is a more inclusive definition of the moment of speaking: the bracketed material is being included as part of the same temporal slot as the bracket. The potential inclusion of the bracketed material within the reference time indicated by the tense of the bracketing verb illustrates Goffman's (1974) point that brackets "are presumably neither part of the content of activity proper nor part of the world outside the activity, but rather both inside and outside" (p. 252).

Third, initial brackets typically contain a meta-linguistic reference to the material that is coming next in the discourse, for example, this way in fragment nine. Such references as cataphoric: the text to which they are referring follows the occurrence of the referring term. Terminal brackets also contain a meta-linguistic reference, but this reference works anaphorically: the text to which the referring item points precedes its occurrence.

The location of the referring item relative to its referent has an effect on the demonstrative pronoun used: in terminal brackets we find either this (as in six) or that (as in ten), whereas in initial brackets that never occurs. This distribution fits with Quirk and other's (1972, p. 700) observation that that can be used only ana-
phorically, whereas this can be used both cataphorically and anaphorically.

Fourth, in initial brackets the meta-linguistic referent is typically at the end of the clause in predicate position, whereas in terminal brackets it is typically at the beginning of the clause in subject position. (Compare the initial and terminal brackets in fragment six, for example). Clausal position has often been related to information status—the difference between old and new information (see Prince, forthcoming, for a helpful discussion). Chafe (1976) defines old information as “that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance” and new information as that which “the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee’s consciousness by what he says” (p. 30). Old information is likely to occur at the beginning of a clause, and new information to occur at the end of a clause.

Note, then, that because initial brackets precede the discourse material, any reference to that material is new information—the speaker assumes he is introducing it. It is not surprising, then, that meta-linguistic referents in initial brackets occur in the latter portion of the clause. And the meta-linguistic referent at the beginning of the clause in terminal brackets is exactly what we would predict: terminal brackets follow a chunk of discourse material, and thus any reference to that material is old information.

Finally, initial discourse brackets do different kinds of work in the discourse from that which their terminal counterparts do. Goffman (1974) suggests that “the bracket initiating a particular kind of activity may carry more significance than the bracket terminating it. For . . . the beginning bracket not only will establish an episode but also will establish a slot for signals which will inform and define what sort of transformation is to be made of the materials within the episode. . . . Closing brackets seem to perform less work, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is probably much easier on the whole to terminate the influence of a frame than to establish it” (pp. 255-256). Goffman later notes that speakers can use such brackets to obtain permission from their hearers to go ahead and to establish in those hearers a state of suspense in relation to their next words (p. 508).
Labov and Fanshel (1977) hint at a similar asymmetry in bracketing devices for narratives when they point out that "one of the most difficult problems to solve in delivering a narrative is how to finish it," going on to suggest that "some storytellers have difficulty in carrying out this task since an unlimited number of other events may have followed the one they were reporting" (p. 109). These observations imply that although there are clear starting points at which initial brackets can be placed, terminal brackets are not as easily placed because of vagueness in the actual ending point of what is being talked about.

Another advantage of initial brackets may be psychological. Many brackets are lexicalized clauses—clauses that are memorized and stored as a whole rather than being created anew with each production (Pawley and Syder, forthcoming).8 Using lexicalized clauses as initial brackets, then, may give the speaker time to plan or prepare what is coming up next, in the same way that filled pauses (hmhm, uh) can give the speaker time for self-repairs. Another possible psychological explanation comes from a consideration of strategies in producing and comprehending sentences. MacWhinney (1977, p. 152) notes that the first element in a sentence is used as a starting point for the organization of the rest of the sentence—by both speaker and hearer. It is possible that analogous importance is attached to the starting points of a discourse.9

Recall, next, that one distinguishing feature of discourse units is that they have an internal structure—their constituent parts are related in predictable ways—that differentiates them from the surrounding discourse. Explanations, it was noted, typically consist of an assertion that is backed by evidence and/or validated by reasons. These constituents of an explanation are often bracketed from one another by meta-talk. In fragment eleven JC initiates a reason with a bracket, as does HJ in twelve:

(11)

DS: What about the Polish Catholics, though, that- why are they] the most prejudiced?

JC: [Ooh! They-

I- I'll- I think ((THERE'S A REASON)) for it. Number one, they were divided in 1700.
(12)

ED: I- uh- I really believe this. I think that em ((THE REASON FOR IT))

HJ: [It's certainly]

very distasteful t'me.

ED: Well i- it's distasteful to you because

HJ: [((I'LL TELL YOU WHY)).]

((I'LL TELL YOU WHY)). Yeh.

I'm a white man and I marry a nigger.

A black nigger.

And we have children.

What are they?

In fragment thirteen, BT terminates a reason with a bracket:

(13)

BT: Because the more problems that you have

now, they're gonna be emphasized ten times

after you're married.

You think ahead.

((THAT'S WHY)) I would like to see them

go...the way I went.

My way.

Not only reasons but supporting evidence in the form of examples can be bracketed, as in fragment fourteen:

(14)

SB: I would love- I would like- and I...

think my husband and I can...

accept it,

and raise like an Eurasian child or

something. But, the only thing that stops

me is society and...((FOR INSTANCE)),

y'know living here on this street y'know

what...I- I can live with walking down the

street with knowing people are talking

about me, but I don't know how it would

affect my child.
And when more than one piece of evidence is offered, meta-talk can be used to bracket different bits of support from one another, as in fifteen:

(15)

IB: So, we decided since he was living in West Philadelphia,
well both my mother and father,
we decided t'come out here.

DS: Yeh. Yeh it's just about fifteen minutes from West Philadelphia.

IB: Well uh ((ANOTHER TH- THING)) that
I took into consideration
I was working at the Navy Yard at that time, and uh this was- this was convenient,
and I- and we moved out here.

As illustrated in fragment fifteen, brackets such as ((ANOTHER THING)) separate different pieces of evidence from one another and order them relative to one another. They also help to organize the explanation as a whole: ((ANOTHER THING)), for example, acts as a reminder that this is not the only piece of evidence to have been presented.

Not only can reasons and supporting evidence be bracketed but so, too, can assertions, as in fragment sixteen:

(16)

JC: ((THE POINT IS))...religion is a sickening thing with me.
I want to throw up when I see a very religious Jew, or a very religious Catholic, or a very religious Protestant.
I- I- I think I'm very contemptuous.
Very hateful.
Cause I feel they separate the world.
They keep people apart.

((THE POINT IS)) brackets the assertion that religion is a sickening thing, a point that is elaborated until JC begins the next part of his explanation with Cause I feel... .
Note, now, that brackets often do more than separate units of discourse, or constituents of a discourse unit, from one another. We have seen several examples where particular slots in the discourse were labeled: in eleven JC labeled a reason, in fourteen SB labeled an example, and in sixteen JC labeled an assertion. These labeled brackets indicate how material in the bracketed slot should be related to the rest of the discourse, and how it should be heard by a listener.

There are many ways, of course, in which current material in the discourse can be related to surrounding material. One relation is semantic: words and phrases before the bracket are semantically related to those following the brackets. In fragments seventeen and eighteen, one expression is rephrased as another: the material preceding the brackets ((I MEAN)) and ((IN OTHER WORDS)) is reformulated into the semantically equivalent material following the brackets:

(17)

BT: The yellow, the black, the white, the-
y'know all- eh all the races,
they got t'get along.
But I don't think you'll ever see it mixed.
((I MEAN)) where it's- color don't mean anything.

(18)

JC: Yeh, well she was more mericanized than
my background, I- I was a first American
generation in my family. ((IN OTHER WORDS))
I was born in this country.

Other relationships have less to do with semantic ties between clauses than with ties between slots in the sequential structure of the conversation. One of the more complicated uses of brackets to relate sequential material is in self-repairs (Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson, 1977). This is illustrated, first, in fragment nineteen:
(19)

GR: She's the Episcopalian.
There ain't much to convert.
They're mostly like— they're mostly
like the Italians—
((I MEAN)) they're mostly like the Catholics.

Along with the repetition frame *they're mostly like*, the repairable item, *the Italians*, is located by ((I MEAN)). Location of the repairable is often compacted with the provision of the candidate repair (Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson, 1977, p. 376), and this is the case here: ((I MEAN)) also initiates the candidate repair *the Catholics*. In bracketing terms, we can look at self-repairs as sequences in which a speaker wants to cancel a prior element in his talk and substitute something different for it. The bracket can initiate the cancelation and/or the substitution of a prior element.

An example in which the bracket initiates the cancelation of a prior element is fragment twenty, what Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson (1977) call the "‘not X, Y’ format... in which the ‘not X’ component locates the repairable, and the ‘Y’ component supplies a candidate repair" (p. 376):

(20)

IB: And the way prices are of homes today,
   eh these young kids can't afford fifty
   and sixty thousand.
   But they can afford th-
   ((I'M NOT GONNA SAY)) they can afford it,
   but uh thirty, thirty five thousand is
   uh is more in their
   ratio than the sixties, seventies.

((I'M NOT GONNA SAY)) initiates the cancelation of *they can afford it* (locates it as the repairable), and then the substitute (candidate repair) follows *but*. The same format is illustrated in fragment twenty-one, but note that the role of the meta-talk differs:
(21)

IB: I think that eh...uh...number one, uh you had very few blacks living in-the city. Okay?
And not only this city. ((I'M- I'M SPEAKING OF)) Detroit, Washington, New York, but uh...
this the Civil Rights program started in the uh...not- not recently, but twenty, twenty five years ago.

((I'M SPEAKING OF)) initiates Detroit, Washington, New York as material with which to substitute a potentially misunderstood reference to the city, which is what gets canceled by not only in not only this city.

As a final example of brackets in self-repairs, consider fragment twenty-two:

(22)

BR: As long as it was somebody that believed in God but it wasn't not-
((HOW WOULD YOU SAY IT))- it wasn't one of these...groups that don't believe...that...y'know if they-they believed, then I wouldn't mind.

The bracket occurs in this example when the speaker does not know what should be put into a particular slot. ((HOW WOULD YOU SAY IT)) then initiates the description that the speaker wants to use as a substitute for the preceding information gap in the discourse. The occurrence of meta-talk in searches for missing information may be related to its lexicalized nature; as I noted earlier, lexicalized clauses may be used in discourse to give the speaker time to plan what is coming up next.

In all the cases considered so far, the unit of discourse being bracketed was adjacent to the bracket. This is not necessarily the
case, however: a meta-linguistic referent such as former, in fact, is used because the unit to which it points is not adjacent to what is being predicated about it. In effect, former acts as an instruction for the hearer to go and retrieve a prior, nonadjacent element from the earlier discourse and to use it here in the next available slot. Fragment twenty-three illustrates a bracket that acts in the same way:

(23)

GM: um...I um...there were eh-
the treasurer of our class was colored.
And uh...he's um...a lawyer today y'know
and eh the eh...more educa-
I mean there were th- the nice ones...
an- in the higher classes
an' y'know th- the more popular
and then there were...the rough ones then
but um if...they...um...y'know were
clean cut an' had a little...
I mean, they could get ahead,
and ((AS I SAY)) they-
the one was an officer in my class.

((AS I SAY)) instructs the listener to renew the relevance of an earlier statement (the treasurer of our class was colored) and to use it in the next available slot. For the speaker, it initiates a slot in which prior material is allowed to recur. The use of renewal brackets can be seen as evidence that there exists a general prohibition against repetition (see Goffman, 1979b; Grice, 1975) that is relaxed under particular circumstances (see, for example, Jefferson, 1972; Person, 1974).

In this section, I have shown that meta-talk has an organizational function; that is, it acts as a discourse bracket that initiates or terminates slots in the discourse, providing an environment in which to label the material inserted in those slots and to indicate its relationship to other material in the discourse. Although there exists variation in the location of the bracket in relation to the slot, in the size of the slot being bracketed, and in the relationship of material in the bracketed slot to material elsewhere in the dis-
course, we can identify discourse bracketing as one general function of meta-talk.

So far, I have been examining only meta-talk that is about the speaker's own talk. Recall, however, that meta-linguistic expressions can also be used to say something about an interlocutor's talk, as fragment five illustrated. This meta-talk can also have an organizational function, as illustrated in fragment twenty-four:

\[(24)\]

FC: I'm- what-
  \[\text{((WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY)) get} \]
  married in the synagogue,
  \[\text{((YOU MEAN)) marry a girl of their} \]
  own \[\text{[religion]} \]
  re- uh of their=
DS: \[\text{=religion?}\]

Fragment twenty-four contains a common format for an other-repair, that is, the initiation and provision of a repair not by the speaker whose speech was at fault, but by his listener (Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson, 1977). FC requests a clarification, with \[\text{((WHAT DO YOU MEAN WHEN YOU SAY)) preface the item in need of repair; with ((YOU MEAN)), she suggests a candidate repair, or a substitution for the item at fault. Recall that meta-linguistic brackets were used in self-repairs in analogous ways—to cancel and/or replace particular items in the discourse. Thus, the use of meta-talk in repairs is one way in which it acts as an organizational bracket for one's own talk and for an interlocutor's talk.}

Note, however, that the bracketing of material for repair occurs quite generally throughout discourse and that, unlike most of the other organizational brackets considered, it is not related to any particular discourse unit. In the next section, I will show that meta-linguistic expressions directed to an interlocutor's talk do bracket discourse units. In order to understand this type of bracketing, however, we have to turn away from the textual organization of one speaker's discourse to the embedding of that discourse within a conversational context.
Evaluative Brackets

Discourse units always appear within a conversational context. In fact, they sometimes result from a negotiating process carried out through the conversation. Narratives, for example, can emerge when a speaker refers to a single event that occurred prior to the time of speaking (Labov and Fanshel, 1977, p. 106), leading an interlocutor to ask for a contextualization, or fuller description, of that event and thereby prompting a full narrative (see also Jefferson, 1978). Similarly, explanations can emerge when a speaker makes an assertion known to be controversial or disputable, thereby prompting his interlocutor to ask for the reasoning and/or facts supporting that assertion (Schiffrin, in progress). In addition, once discourse units do emerge, they are often coterminous with turns (Wald, 1977); in other words, they often overlap with a unit defined as part of the turn-taking system of conversation (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974).

Discourse units also interrelate with the acts and moves that are realized through the course of an interaction. Both narratives and explanations, for example, can be seen as single acts, that is, as requests for evaluation: the presentation of either discourse unit by one participant in an interaction is jointly recognized as a bid for another participant to assess and evaluate what has been said. In contrast to evaluations of narratives, however, evaluations of explanations are frequently attempts to usurp the speakers' turns and to prevent them from completing presentations by disputing them at critical junctures. The following fragments illustrate some ways in which explanations are evaluated:

(25)

DS: They're not Jewish princesses, they're Jewish princes!
HP: The prince!
DS: Yeh the Jewish prince.
HP: The golden prince!
→IR: ((I DON'T AGREE WITH THAT)).

(26)

HP: But he-- the fact is that he listens. T'my father. And he did her wishes.
We respected our mother to the hilt.

→IR: But that was years ago.
→HP: But why shouldn't you respect your mother today?
YP: Wait a— wait a minute
→ ((THAT'S HIS OPINION))!

(27)

HP: But let's put it this way.
   A woman is needed in the house t'clean the house, and to cook the hou- uh cook the meals, and clean the clothes, there is— there is a tremendous amount of work for a woman.

+YP: Oh c'mon Henry.
+HP: You don't think there's a d— a lot of work for yourself?
+YP: You can get anybody t'come in an' clean the house.
+HP: All week?
+YP: ((THAT IS NOT THE POINT)).
+IR: ((THAT'S NOT R- NO THAT'S NOT TRUE)).
+YP: ((THAT'S OFF)).
No. ((THAT'S OFF)) Henry.
+HP: ((YOU SAY THAT'S WRONG))?
YP: Yep. That's not a mother's duty.
   Just t'clean and cook and clean.

Explanations and challenging evaluations form an argument, and it is within this conversational and interactional context that metatalk functions as an evaluative bracket.

Note, first, that many evaluations are meta-linguistic in form: ((I DON'T AGREE WITH THAT)), ((THAT IS NOT THE POINT)), ((THAT'S NOT TRUE)), ((THAT'S OFF)), ((THAT'S HIS OPINION)), and ((YOU SAY THAT'S WRONG))). Some of these meta-linguistic evaluations are formally identical to the discourse brackets that speakers use to organize their own talk. Fragments twenty-eight and twenty-nine illustrate that ((THAT IS NOT THE POINT)) can be focused either on one's own talk or on an interlocutor's talk:
JC: And then in the end Hungary took these two countries in the end anyhow.
So I mean it shows you.
But ((THAT ISN'T THE POINT)).
((THE POINT IT)) ...religion is a sickening thing with me.

(29)
HP: You don't think there's a d- a lot of work for yourself?
YP: [You can get-] you can get anybody t'come in an' clean the house.
HP: [All week?]
YP: ((THAT IS NOT THE POINT)).

And fragments thirty and thirty-one illustrate that ((IT/THAT DOESN'T MEAN))\(^1\) can be focused either on one's own talk or on an interlocutor's talk:

(30)
HP: Both of my boys are married Jewish girls.
They're happy!
They sat down on the couch, they told me, "You did the right thing, Dad. You stuck to your guns."
Now ((THAT DOESN'T MEAN)) I hate.

(31)
HP: You have to adjust yourself to that per-
YP: [Yeh but wait ((IT DOESN'T MEAN))] because they're not of the same religion that they're- they're eh they're gonna be terrible.

Consider the role of the meta-linguistic expressions ((THAT IS NOT THE POINT)) and ((IT DOESN'T MEAN)) in fragments twenty-nine and thirty-one in the construction of argu-
ments. First, the meta-linguistic referents and operators indicate the exact focus on the disagreement: in twenty-nine, it is whether HP's challenge *all week?* is relevant to the point or central assertion of the argument; in thirty-one, it is whether HP's assertion can be used as evidence from which to draw a particular conclusion. Second, the evaluative expressions function just like brackets: ((THAT IS NOT THE POINT)) cancels the identification of prior talk as the point of the explanation and replaces it with what follows; ((IT/THAT DOESN'T MEAN)) seeks to prevent a potentially inferrable conclusion by denying validity of the evidence that could lead to that conclusion.

These observations suggest, then, that a challenge—an evaluative move in an argument—can be seen as an attempt to apply to another's talk the same organizational devices used to bracket one's own talk. Another way of saying this is that in an argument, meta-talk that is directed to an interlocutor's talk acts as an *evaluative bracket*, rather than an *organizational bracket*.

There are many other meta-linguistic constructions that turn out to be evaluative when they are focused on an interlocutor's talk. Meta-talk that initiates a rephrasing of prior material, for example, can indicate that the speakers share their interlocutors' viewpoint, or assessment, as in:

(32)

FC: I think I would prefer it,  
  but I would never object to another  
  religion. However, I would object  
  strenuously, if it was...  
    any kind of religious—very religious  
JC: ['a religious—']  
FC: [PERSON. ] OTHER WORDS)  
JC: [(IN ] religious.  
FC: [Jewish ] or otherwise, I would eh...eh—  
    I would cry.  
JC: [(IN OTHER WORDS)],=  
fanatically religious, whether it was  
Jewish, or non-Jewish,  
if it's fanatically religious, ]  
FC: [That ] would  
    upset me.  
JC: =we would be upset.
Here FC and JC are jointly presenting a positon to a third party, and the meta-talk allows their shared assessments to emerge by latching them on to one another.

Renewal brackets can also be applied to another person's talk, and they then form an evaluative move in an argument, as in this fragment:

(33)

HP: But it's still a job, that has to be done! You ain't gonna- suppose you don't have the money t'go out and get a cleaning lady?
YP: Oh but you're not arguing that. ((YOU SAID)) that's your duty.
HP: [I say it's a- ] I say that a woman has a lot of work, cookin', and cleaning, and sewing, and shopping, and doing that her job is full.

By reminding HP of what he had been claiming—((YOU SAID)) *that's your duty*—YP prevented him from inserting a new attack into his argument—*suppose you don't have the money*—so that he returned to his initial claims.

Repairs can also form part of the evaluative mechanism of an argument. A frequent format for other-repair was illustrated in fragment twenty-four. The same format can be used to challenge a specific item, as in this:

(34)

DS: Okay. Have you travelled very much outside of Philadelphia?
JB: No. I think as far as we got was Canada. You were overseas, in the war, but I didn't go any further.
IB: uh...Yeh, we went t'New York, we went to Atlantic City, we went t'Pittsburgh.
JB: [Well that's this country, she said out of Philadelphia. um...We just went t'Kuch's ((WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN)) we don't travel?}
IB challenges JB's no, with ((WHAT THE HELL DO YOU MEAN)) prefacing the item of disagreement, we don't travel. The evidence in support of his disagreement—we went t'New York . . .—is the material that he wants to use to substitute for JB's response; thus, it is analogous to a candidate repair. In contrast to fragment twenty-four where this other-repair format was illustrated, however, the substitution material is here presented prior to the cancelation of JB's response.¹²

Note, next, that there are meta-linguistic comments whose focus includes both the speaker's own talk and that of his interlocutors, and that these comments function as organizational end evaluative brackets. It is through this dual focus that self-repairs enter into the evaluative mechanism of argument, as illustrated in fragment thirty-five:

(35)

IR: Well you always live with bitter people
     like that!
HP: Bitter?
IR: Yeh, bitter.
HP: Don't you think it's a hurt?
     Now don't y- y'think it's fair for that
girl- y'think it's fair for the guy?
     Ida it's there babycakes!
IR: ((I'M NOT ARGUING)) whe[ther it's there]
     [It's there!]
HP: or it's not.
IR: or it's not.

IR's repair ((I'M NOT ARGUING)) whether it's there or it's not does not cancel a prior statement of IR's. Rather, what it cancels is HP's apparent misunderstanding of what IR has been saying, a misunderstanding indicated through his Ida it's there. IR's repair, then, forms part of her defense against an ill-founded challenge and serves to point out the invalidity of that challenge.

It is through the same dual focus that renewal brackets focusing on one's own prior talk are worked into an argument. Consider the following:

(36)

IR: At one time I would say that my husband
     would say he would forbid...them t'do that.
I don't think anymore he would.
I really don't.
We have cousins...who uh- she converted...
t'Judiasm, and they live a beautiful life
together. They live a very    beauti-
YP: [But she converted.]
IR: Well ((I SAY)) that they have to decide.

YP's but she converted is an attempt to indicate the irrelevance of
IR's example of her cousins as evidence for her claim that inter-
marriage can work. By reminding YP that she had claimed all
along that intermarriage could work if one member of the couple
converted—well ((I SAY)) that they have to decide—IR invalidates
YP's attempted rejection of her evidence and saves her initial
claim, her evidence, and the relationship of support between them.

By considering the embedding of an explanation within an
argument, I have shown how meta-talk can build on its organiza-
tional function as a discourse bracket to have an evaluative effect;
that is, meta-talk that brackets a cancelation, substitution, rephras-
ing, or renewal of material found in an interlocutor's explanation
acts as an evaluative bracket around that explanation. We can now
return to the meta-talk that is directed to the speaker's own talk to
see how it, too, can have an evaluative effect—how it can not only
organize the structure of the discourse but evaluate the expressive
aspects of what is being said.

Consider, first, fragment thirty-seven:

(37)
YP: I just let things go an' see what happens.
I wouldn't- I wouldn't like t'see it.
I would like t'see my daughter eh marry eh
h-her own kind.
I really would.
Because I think that they have enough eh
problems in the beginning.
That eh- n- t'make this would make it even
eh harder.
((THAT'S MY OPINION)).

((THAT'S MY OPINION)) is a terminal bracket. In addition to
pointing to a piece of discourse, however, ((OPINION)) identifies
the speaker's stance toward what she is saying. An opinion can form a claim in an argument, but it is a claim about facts about which the speaker holds less than absolute knowledge, and so it has less than absolute certainty. Thus, by saying "(THAT'S MY OPINION)", YP implicitly acknowledges the possibility that her claim is disputable, but she also acknowledges that this disputability over the facts does not prevent her from maintaining her own individual position about the facts.13

"(THAT'S MY OPINION)" in thirty-seven is evaluative, then, because it relates a speaker to what she has been speaking about—it indicates her own evaluation of her position. Thus, this bracket has not only a meta-lingual function but also an emotive function; it focuses not only on the code but also on the speaker (Jakobson, 1960). This suggests that the function of some metatalk intersects with that of "hedges" (words that work to make things fuzzier) (Hooper, 1976; Lakoff, 1972; Prince, 1976, 1979).

Consider, next, this fragment:

(38)

FC: I reached the point where I put some of my money inside my shoes. So that if they grab my pocketbook or hit me we'd still have carfare home! (THAT'S RIGHT)!

There are two senses in which "(THAT'S RIGHT)", a terminal bracket, is evaluative. Phrases such as "(THAT'S RIGHT)" are often used to indicate a positive evaluation of what an interlocutor has been saying, for example, to show appreciation, agreement, confirmation. They are also used to reemphasize an assertion whose validity has been questioned. By using "(THAT'S RIGHT)" in response to her own talk, then, FC confirms what she has been saying—as if it had been talk produced by someone else—and reemphasizes it—as if her audience had provoked her into doing so. So, "(THAT'S RIGHT)" is evaluative in this sense.

An unsolicited sign of confirmation and emphasis suggests, however, that more is being expressed than simply the information available from the utterances. Labov (1972) has noted that certain
identifiable clauses and syntactic devices in narrative are ways of evaluating events in the narrative because they indicate what the story is “really about”: they point to the general proposition that it is the job of the narrative to convey and indicate the importance of the events to the narrator (see also Polanyi, 1979; Schiffrin, in press). ((THAT’S RIGHT)) is evaluative in a second sense, then: it indicates that a more general proposition is being expressed; in fragment thirty-eight, it is a proposition having to do with the extremes to which “good people” have to go to survive in a hostile and dangerous world.

Consider, next, fragment thirty-nine:

((I’LL TELL YOU)) looks like a renewal bracket: it opens a slot into which prior material will be inserted and reused. Note, though, that in contrast to other renewal brackets, in which the material was not adjacent to the bracket, this material is immediately prior to the bracket. This bracket, then, seems slightly misplaced.

The sandwiching of a bracket such as ((I’LL TELL YOU)) between two identical utterances, however, has an intensifying effect in that it points to and strengthens the proposition being expressed. Such intensification is a form of evaluation analogous to ((THAT’S RIGHT)) in fragment thirty-eight, as well as another means of indicating the speaker’s attitude toward what he is saying—this time not weakening or hedging his statement but intensifying and indicating strong convictions about the truth of the bracketed assertion. Note, also, that the material being bracketed here is the central assertion of the explanation, so ((I’LL TELL YOU)) intensifies the point that Kids could kill you—and note that
this kind of bracketing is used frequently to defend assertions that have been challenged, precisely because of this intensifying effect.

Consider, next, fragment forty:

(40)

BT: My daughter wouldn't know what the hell she was gettin' herself in for.
Y'know. And not- not- not for anything other than, boy!
You don't know what kind of problems you got in the future.
You got t'raise children,
you're not accepted no side, back or forth,
you got t'be an outcast from the beginning
and n- ((DON'T TELL ME)) love is that great. Cause it's not. It's just not.

It has been frequently observed (see Clark, 1974; Givon, 1978) that negatives are used in more restricted environments than their corresponding affirmatives, for example, when the affirmative has been explicitly stated or is somehow expected. The cancelation bracket ((DON'T TELL ME)), then, suggests that BT expects his claims, along with his supporting evidence, to be challenged with something like what he is canceling—love is great. By explicitly presenting that challenge himself, however, he provides himself with the opportunity for its rebuttal (a long string of reasons not reproduced here follow cause it's not), thereby partially canceling the potency of the challenge.

This evaluative bracket, however, does not necessarily prevent an interlocutor from issuing the very challenge that it is designed to prevent. Faced with a comment such as ((DON'T TELL ME)) love is that great an individual could still attempt to assert that love is great, although the content of such a challenge would be limited by the rebuttals that the speaker had already presented.

(41)

HP: And there were thousands, and thousands,
and thousands,
that were— that paid the price, 
because they had Jewish blood in them. 
Because— I hate— y’know this— I eh— this—
((I HATE T’ SAY THESE THINGS ER BUT IT’S— IT’S TRUE))

By saying ((I HATE T’ SAY THESE THINGS BUT IT’S TRUE)), HP is aligning himself with the sympathies of his interlocutor, who has been arguing against the relevance of the particular piece of evidence in the argument that the speaker hates to say. As Goffman (1974) notes: “Anyone who identifies himself with the standards against which the culprit is being judged (and is found wanting) can’t himself be all bad—and isn’t, and in the very degree that he himself feelingly believes he is. A self-deprecator is, in a measure, just that, and in just that measure is not the self that is deprecated” (p. 521). Once having established such sympathies, then, HP can go on to reinforce his own position with ((IT’S TRUE)), an evaluative tag analogous to ((THAT’S RIGHT)).

The same format is used when speakers block specific criticisms of their statements with what Baker (1975) has called response-controlling but-perfaces; for example, This is none of my business, but. . . . I don’t want you to think I’m a bigot, but. . . . Note that these brackets present the speaker with an advantage similar to ((DON’T TELL ME)) in fragment forty: by presenting the challenge (criticism), the speaker provides himself with the opportunity for its rebuttal and thereby cancels its potency.14

Finally, consider this fragment:

(42)

DS: You said your son brought home a Puerto Rican girl, well, how— how do you feel about like intermarriage?

JB: I don’t agree with it. 
((I DON’T—I DON’T SAY)) it’s— it’s... 
because of color,
I think it’s eh the way you’re brought up.
Too much difference.

((I DON’T SAY)) is similar to the brackets considered in fragments forty and forty-one, and the same advantages are gained by the speaker here. Note, also, that by first clearing away any of the
“wrong reasons” for her negative assessment about intermarriage, JB is freed from making positive assessments. JC in fragment six used the same format before giving his reasons against intermarriage with not because he married a black girl. This format suggests that if an individual can briefly counteract the projection of a questionable and unfavorable self potentially associated with an objectionable position, he is freed from formulating a less objectionable position in the first place (see Goffman, 1979b).

The evaluative brackets in fragments forty to forty-two are disclaimers (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975) that address shared social understandings about the controversial nature of marriage and other intimate contacts between members of different races or religions. That individuals identify these matters as controversial is indicated by the readiness with which they adapt well-known verbal positions in the expression of their own positions, as in:

(43)

SF: She says, "Mom, he wants t'meet me."
I said, "Patricia, he could be anything, really. He could be colored."
Y'know eh...I don't believe in that.
I believe in bein' friends
+Everybody- there's good and bad.
That's my way of believin'.

Another indication is that individuals have available stereotypical labels for behavior, for example, prejudiced:

(44)

AB: What about dating someone from a different race?
CG: I think that would bother me.
That's a terrible thing to say.
+I don't like to be prejudiced, but...
it just doesn't work out.

They also have available stereotypical social categories, for example, bigot:
HP: That's just a bunch of hooey that busing. They just want t'mix the eh- they want t'mix the eh white an' the black together that's- and if y'say anthing, you're a bigot. And that's eh- that's not so.

And they use these labels and categories to characterize different positions. Thus, there exists shared social knowledge that questions about intimate contacts between members of different races or religions are matters of dispute, as well as that positions on these issues are often challenged and, even more, are inherently challengeable. This means that even if speakers do not intend for their talk to present them as persons who are representative of stereotypical positions, behaviors, or social categories, they are aware that this may be the effect. It is to these implicatures that the evaluative brackets in fragments forty to forty-two are addressed.

However, these evaluative brackets do not automatically dispel the inferences about moral character that their speaker intends them to prevent. The actualization of those inferences through blatant attacks such as No! You are a bigot!, or It is because you're a racist are not routine, however, even in arguments. Perhaps the rarity of such open affronts is due to the threat that they present to definitions of self and morality—definitions that are mutually sustained and, thus, mutually penetrable. As Goffman (1967) states: “The individual must rely on others to complete the picture of him of which he himself is allowed to paint only certain parts. Each individual is responsible for the demeanor image of himself and the deference image of others, so that for a complete man to be expressed, individuals must hold hands in a chain of ceremony, each giving deferentially with proper demeanor to the one on the right what will be received deferentially from the one on the left. While it may be true that the individual has a unique self all his own, evidence of this possession is thoroughly a product of joint ceremonial labor, the part expressed through the individual's demeanor being no more significant than the part conveyed by others through their deferential behavior toward him” (pp. 84–85). In short, it may be less ritually damaging to one's own self and morality to openly dispute another's presentation of facts than to openly dispute another's presentation of a moral self.
We can now begin to see how the ongoing evaluation of both an interlocutor’s position and of one’s own position are integral parts of an argument. Goffman (1974, 1979a) suggests that a change in *footing* implies a change in the alignment taken both in relation to others present in the interaction and in relation to one’s self. Changes directed toward either party are expressed in the way an individual manages the reception, or the production, of an utterance. It is easy to see that the evaluations directed by one individual toward what another is saying display changes in the alignment of one speaker relative to another.

The evaluations directed to one’s own utterances, however, also display a change in footing—a change in the speakers’ alignment in relation to themselves. When individuals substantiate their claims and justify their assertions, they establish principals—ones whose positions are given by the words spoken and who have committed themselves to what those words say (Goffman, 1974, 1979a). When individuals comment on their talk through meta-talk, however, a different part of self is projected; here, the individual is projecting an animator, the part of self active in the role of utterance production. Meta-talk allows a speaker to exercise control over the principal at specific junctures during its production by projecting an animator who will bracket the expressive implications of what is being said. It is through these subtle adjustments of self and other—adjustments made possible by the reflexive nature of language—that arguments are interactionally generated, sustained, and eventually ended.

**Conclusion**

That language is used not only to transmit referential information but also to create and sustain expressive meanings is an observation that goes back to Malinowski (1930), and it remains an assumption of many studies of language use and social interaction. In this paper, I have shown that it is not only talk but also talk about talk that is used for both referential and expressive ends: meta-talk functions on a referential, informational plane when it serves as an organizational bracket, and on an expressive, symbolic plane when it serves as an evaluative bracket. Certainly there are other structures in discourse that function as both organizational
and evaluative devices through which speakers represent their worlds and present their selves.

Footnotes

1. Fieldwork was carried out as part of a research project on language change and variation in the Philadelphia speech community (National Science Foundation grant no. 75-00245; principal investigator: William Labov). Most of the data utilized here comes from my own fieldwork with lower-middle-class Jews in an ethnically homogeneous neighborhood, but the data were supplemented by fieldwork conducted by Anne Bower and Arvilla Payne in other Philadelphia neighborhoods, and I thank them for access to their work.

Speakers were recorded talking with individuals with whom they were well acquainted, such as family members and neighbors, as well as with the fieldworker. A routine part of the interview consisted of discussions about a variety of social issues that past experience in the community had indicated were topics of social controversy—intermarriage, neighborhood integration, women working outside of the home—and most of the examples in this paper are from discussions about these issues.

2. Although some examples contain more than one case of meta-talk, only that type that the example is intended to illustrate will be indicated.

3. The larger question of how a sequence of sentences is understood as one cohesive text, with a semantic unity differentiating it from nonmeaningful sequences of sentences, will not be considered here; see Halliday and Hasan (1976) and van Dijk (1977) for in-depth discussions of textual cohesion.

4. Schiffrin (in progress) establishes the discourse properties of explanations in greater detail. See, also, Scott and Lyman (1968) and Weiner (1979) for discussion of two related speech acts from sociological and computational perspectives, respectively.

5. Fragment seven actually illustrates the symmetrical binding of a constituent of a discourse unit, that is, an assertion.

6. Note that when a discourse unit is bound by only one meta-linguistic bracket, there are other ways in which the opposite boundary is marked. In cases such as these, finding the boundaries of the discourse unit is essentially the same task as delimiting the scope of a piece of meta-talk: What is the span of discourse serving
as a focal context for the meta-talk? Again, this question is related to the larger issue of textual cohesion and the semantic unity of a text and it will not be considered in depth here.

7. Note that although well occurs in closing sections of conversation, it occurs as part of a pre-sequence that initiates a closing section (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973).

8. The claim that clauses are lexicalized may be too strong: lexicalization suggests that individual parts of a phrase have lost their independent identity within the phrase, functioning only as components of that phrase (as in idioms). My remarks on meta-talk still apply, however, even with the weaker claim that pieces of meta-talk are often routinized phrases.

9. Note that I have not claimed that initial brackets are more frequent than terminal brackets. Although this is clearly implied by the discussion, such a claim would require knowing the range of environments where both are a possibility (and, therefore, where an occurrence could be compared to a nonoccurrence). One reason why this range is not easily determined concerns the interactional nature of telling a story and expressing a point of view. As Don Zimmerman points out (personal communication), ending a narrative or an explanation may depend crucially on the responses of others, and this factor makes terminal brackets rather special objects, designed perhaps to bring to a close a discourse unit that in some respects is interactionally problematic. Where the possible environments for linguistic brackets are more easily determined, however, there is some quantitative evidence for the more frequent occurrence of initial brackets (San- koff and Brown, 1976).

10. Individuals in arguments are expected to communicate about each other's utterances—to engage in meta-communication in Bateson's (1972) sense. Obviously not all such communications are meta-linguistic.

11. Linde (1979) discusses some of the discourse constraints on the alternation between it and that.

12. Interestingly, there are many cases of structural ambiguity between other-repairs and disagreements; and since the occurrence of repairs does not require an apparent fault (Schegloff, Sacks, and Jefferson, 1977, p. 362) when no fault is found in the other's talk, the functional status of brackets that cancel and substitute material from another person's talk becomes even more problematic.
13. That having an opinion provides a license to go against the facts helps explain the use of brackets such as ((THAT'S HIS OPINION)) in fragment twenty-six to form part of a defense.

14. Compare, also, the prefacing of disagreements with mild expressions of agreement; see Brown and Levinson (1978) and Pomerantz (1978).

References


Meta-Talk


