

# Towards an understanding of graffiti discourse

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*The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which conversational analysis and turn-taking principles may be used to examine graffiti communication. It proposes a definition of graffiti and discusses some of the more important linguistic features. cursory reference will be made to the differences between men's and women's graffiti. This paper argues that conversational analysis tools alone are not sufficient to examine graffiti, but that a framework which incorporates these is worth pursuing.*

## 1. Introduction

Graffiti are a phenomenon that everyone has observed at some time or other. The content of graffiti can vary tremendously from such trite comments as "I was here" to heated debates on the latest politics, and can thereby reflect some of the more important issues in society. In the most private of places, the toilet, one finds graffiti of a more intimate nature. Toilet doors and walls can be the sites of discussions, debates or exchanges of information, which may at times resemble everyday conversations. Graffiti thus make a suitable subject of sociolinguistic research, while their conversational nature lends itself well to a discourse analytical approach.

This paper is part of an ongoing doctorate research project. The project aims to identify different types of graffiti and establish whether these can be classed as sub-genres. The main focus of the research is toilet graffiti, especially conversational graffiti, and one of its principle question is how turn-taking takes place, given that the interlocutors are spatially and temporally displaced. This project will investigate the extent to which discourse analysis (DA) and conversation analysis (CA) tools can be used to provide a suitable research framework for the analysis of graffiti. Because there exists at present no dominant research paradigm – be it sociological or linguistic – it is envisaged that a hybrid framework of traditional DA and CA principles will be established. A further line of inquiry of this project will be an investigation of the style of graffiti according to the gender of the writer, the context and location of the graffiti, and the language of the graffiti (Australian English vs. German).

The purpose of this exploratory paper is to discuss some of the more important linguistic features of graffiti. Some samples of Australian graffiti will be presented and cursory reference will be made to the differences between men's and women's graffiti. The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which some CA principles may be applied to graffiti, in particular Gricean co-operative principles and turn-taking principles of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson.

## 2. Background

Graffiti, whether pictorial or lexical, are important linguistically, historically and sociologically. A diachronic study of graffiti can reveal changes in the language and alphabet. Similarly, graffiti illustrate everyday events and mirror the most important issues of a society. In this way, they illustrate details of customs, institutions, forms of address and political trends.

Most dictionaries define graffiti first as "Script of importance to cultural and linguistic history scratched in a wall" (Drosdowski 1989: 627, my translation). Then we find the definition interesting for this study: "Slogans or figures of aggressive or comical character, sprayed, painted or drawn on walls, facades, etc" (Drosdowski 1989: 627). The Duden also mentions that in this sense, the plural form is used. That is, 'graffito' is rather used by archaeologists, and now also linguists, to refer to a single item of graffiti. Indeed, in the lay language one commonly hears 'graffitis', which shows that many people do not even realise that the term 'graffito' exists, or that 'graffiti' is etymologically a plural. Graffiti has in recent times also been used as a verb, as in 'Someone graffitied my desk'.

Three characteristics of graffiti which are of interest in sociolinguistic research are: firstly, the type of surface on which graffiti is found (desks, walls etc); secondly, the medium (spray paint, ink etc); and thirdly, that graffiti contain, among other things, slogans and figures of an aggressive or comical character. Perhaps for this reason, for many people the word graffiti denotes something unwanted or illegal. With this in mind, I propose the following definition:

Graffiti are any writing or drawing, which may be written, sprayed, painted, drawn or etched in or on any publicly accessible surface, e.g. walls, windows, desk-tops, etc, for which no official provision is made, which are largely unwanted, and which for the major part are anonymous.

According to Kreuzer (1986), graffiti may be sorted into three broad categories:

1. Signs and symbols
2. Written graffiti
3. Figures and pictures.

In this paper, only written graffiti will be discussed. These may be further defined into the following categories:

1. Tagging – simple, unique phrases by which a sprayer or writer may identify themselves, in a sense like signing a name to a graffito.
2. Slogans and monologues – one-liners or sequences written by one person.
3. Conversations – sequences contributed to by two or more writers.

The primary focus of this paper will be on conversations.

## 3. Language of graffiti

Although the language of toilet graffiti is written, it has certain features of the spoken language. Koch and Oesterreicher (1986: 23) established a system of communication conditions and verbalisation strategies which determine whether the language in context approximates the spoken or written language - if it is *Sprache der Nähe* 'language of closeness' or *Sprache der Distanz* 'language of distance'.

Of the 17 features of *Sprache der Distanz* outlined by Koch and Oesterreicher, graffiti show evidence of five: Graffiti can be monologues, the unfamiliarity of the conversation partners is strong, the partners are spatially and temporally displaced, and the publicity is great. Graffiti are final (in that they are written). Of the 18 features of *Sprache der Nähe*, graffiti show evidence of 12: Graffiti can be dialogues, there is a free development of topics, spontaneity, involvement, expressiveness and affectivity. We also see limited density of information, compactness, integration, complexity, elaboratedness, and planning.

For these reasons it would appear that the language of graffiti approaches more closely the language of closeness and the spoken language. Naturally, graffiti is necessarily written and therefore can not really be spoken language as such.

We can point to the following features which seem distinctive of the written graffiti register:

- non-standard grammar and spelling, e.g. upper-case and lower-case spelling where it does not belong
- abbreviations, common in and to Internet speak
- to highlight or stress words, they are written in upper-case, outlined, underlined, bolded or a combination of these, also familiar from Internet speak
- swear words and taboo words, which one would not normally write
- sexual references and jokes, which one would not normally write, and perhaps only express in the most intimate conversations with trusted partners
- racial references which one would not normally express.

The graffiti used as data for this paper will be discussed in more detail in section 5.

#### **4. Conversation analysis as a possible analytical framework**

Conversation analysis is an approach to discourse based on ethnomethodology that had its beginnings in the 1960s by Garfinkel and Grice among others. It was then applied specifically to spoken conversation, most notably by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson. CA is concerned with the problem of order, and how language both creates and is created by social context. The principles seek to describe a set of rules by which conversation and its construction are guided. Traditional CA principles are widely understood to be universal, that is, they represent constraints on conversation which may well be an integral part of language use in all cultures. Their maxims may not, however, be applied in the same way in all languages.

It seems reasonable to apply such principles to graffiti of a conversational nature. As stated above, the aim of this project and more specifically of this paper is to explore the extent to which CA can be used to investigate graffiti. This represents a new methodology, both in the investigation of graffiti and in the application of CA, since CA is normally used to analyse spoken conversations. Two aspects which seem particularly relevant to this study are the conversational principles developed by Grice (1975, 1989) and furthered by Leech (1983), and the turn-taking principles formulated by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

According to Leech (1983), most conversation is governed by the interaction between the Co-operative Principle and Politeness Principle. The Co-operative Principle is outlined by Grice thus: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1989:26). This principle is further defined in four maxim categories: quantity, quality, relation and manner.

Leech formulates the Politeness Principle thus: "Minimise the expression of impolite beliefs and maximise the expression of polite beliefs" (1983: 81). This interacts with Grice's Co-operative Principle when speakers are sometimes forced to violate a maxim by society's norms. For example, if a colleague comes into the office and asks, 'What do you think of my new haircut?', it is a convention, at least of the English-speaking societies, to answer positively, even if the haircut is not particularly flattering. This gives the minimum of impolite beliefs, albeit through the violation of a maxim of the Co-operative Principle.

Leech describes the purpose of irony as the polite veiling of a 'face threatening act', and accordingly formulates his Irony Principle thus: "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the Politeness Principle, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature" (1983: 82).

These conversational principles govern *what* is said, and *how* it is said, but not how conversations are constructed. This has been described by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's simplest systematics of turn-taking. They identify 14 features of conversation (Sacks *et al.* 1974: 700f):

1. Speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs
2. Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time
3. Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief
4. Transitions (from one turn to the next) with no gap and no overlap are common. Together with transitions characterised by slight gap or slight overlap, they make up the vast majority of transitions
5. Turn order is not fixed, but varies
6. Turn size is not fixed, but varies
7. Length of conversation is not specified in advance
8. What parties say is not specified in advance
9. Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance
10. Number of parties can vary
11. Talk can be continuous or discontinuous
12. Turn-allocation techniques are obviously used. A current speaker may select a next speaker (as when he addresses a question to another party); or parties may self-select in starting to talk
13. Various 'turn-constructural units' are employed; eg. turns can be projectively 'one word long', or they can be sentential in length
14. Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations; eg. if two parties find themselves talking at the same time, one of them will stop prematurely, thus repairing the trouble

The two turn-taking rules are formulated accordingly:

1. For any turn, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructural unit:
  - (a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then the party so selected has the right and is obliged to take the next turn to speak; no others have such rights or obligations, and transfer occurs at that place.
  - (b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, be instituted; first starter acquires rights to a turn, and transfer occurs at that place.
  - (c) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then current speaker may, but need not continue, unless another self-selects.
2. If, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructural unit, neither 1a nor 1b has operated, and, following the provision of 1c, current speaker has continued, then the rule-set a-c reapplies at the next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected. (Sacks 1974: 704)

The application of conversational and turn-taking principles and its implications will be discussed further in the next section, with examples from data collected for the present project.

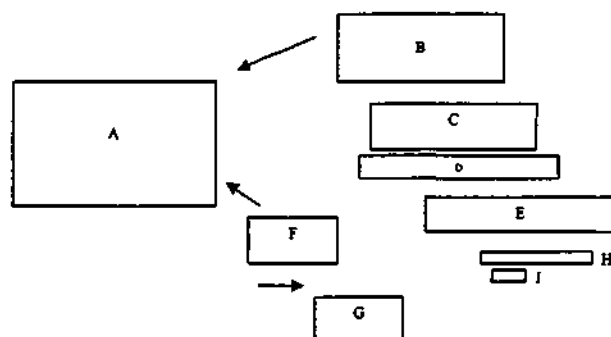
## 5. The data and analysis

The data for the project was collected from toilet doors and walls in the Arts Faculty building at Monash University. As photographs of these graffiti were not suitable for analysis, the graffiti were copied and presented in a manner similar to Hentschel's studies of graffiti (1987). Each diagram is a schematic representation of the position of the graffiti on the wall.

The arrows are placed as in the original. Each schema has been labelled according to the room and cubicle number. Each turn within the graffiti has been labelled alphabetically. The date on which the graffiti were copied has been noted; where possible, a more definite date for some turns has been established. The graffiti in 301.1, 301.4, and B02.2 are from women's toilets; those in 351.2 and 401.1 are from men's toilets. Where graphics have formed a part of the graffiti, they are indicated in the lists of turns.

Where references have been made in this paper to turns in the data, they will be indicated in the following manner: toilet.cubicle: turn. Therefore, the first turn from the graffiti from B02.2 is 'B02.2: A'.

**T 301.1 (18-4-00)**



A: I'm 19 ½ years old and whenever a guy is interested I make up excuses and look for faults to back off. from him. I had a boyfriend once when I was 17 but I couldn't wait to be single again. Does anyone else feel this way?

B: look for faults, if you don't find any he's one worth worrying abt. don't lower your standard's for any jerk.

C: If you look for faults you'll find them and never be happy.

D: EVER CONSIDERED GIRLS?

E: WHY? DO LESBIAN HAVE PERFECT RELATIONSHIPS? EVERYONE HAS FAULTS. GAY, STRAIGHT, NOONE IS PERFECT.

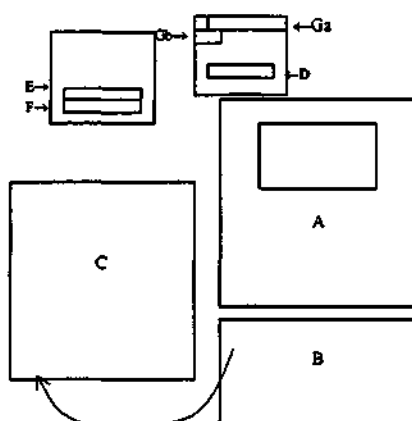
F: I'm 22 and I still feel that way

G: same with me, you just have to wait/find the right person

H: WHY DO GUYS CHEAT?

I: Same reasons girls do

**T 301.4 (A: late 1998; B: 13-4-00; C: 17-4-00; D, E Sep 2000; F,G Oct 2000)**



A: |support the save arts 42| OCCUPATION IS A LEGITIMATE FORM OF PROTEST! THIS IS YOUR Arts Faculty. DO SOMETHING!

B: why? Arts suck! Only 4 dumb people who don't get high enough TER's in school. It's a Load of SHIT about nothing that won't get you anywhere! FUCK ARTS OFF! More commerce!

C: Dear friend, if it weren't for Arts you would not be able to grace us with your highly opinionated verbatim on why  $1 + 1 = 2$  is more important than our ability to communicate via language etc

D: (written on a flyer advertising Women's Studies) A response to the lovely message at the bottom of this door. firstly, you'd be surprised at the number of students in The Arts faculty who got TERs in the High 90's and secondly, if the world was filled with commerce advocates like you, it'd be a VERY boring place! HA.

E: (written on a flyer advertising Communication and Media Studies) In response to the dumb ignorant bitch who thinks arts sux. Just 'cos you fucked your VCE teachers to get into Commerce doesn't mean everyone has to. Not like commerce is a top shit course either!

F: Unfortunately you defeat yourself. This is not a language-rich argument!

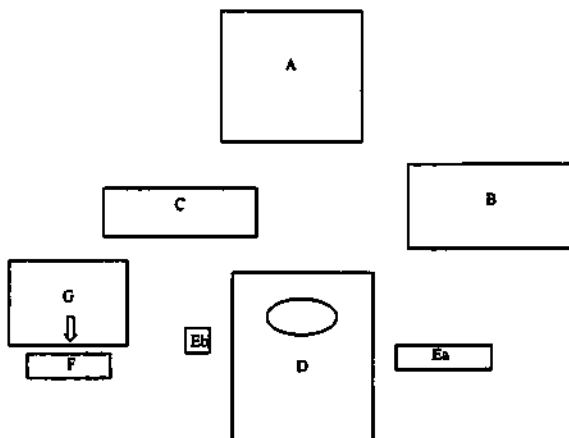
Ga: Women's Studies = No Jobs!!

Arts Students = Jobs in Merchant Banks

Psych; English; LOTE = / In Britain even Zoology Students are employed in Merchant Banks They know how to play with the animals!!!

Gb: Go for Honours and all doors will open!

T401.1 (20-4-00)



A: FUCK OFF ASIANS

B: (scratched out 'ASIANS' of A and wrote:) WASPRASISTS WASPS OUT!

C: AUSTRALIAN SCUM

D: CHOKING VICTIM (oval contains crude illustration of this)

FUCK ANARCHY it's Bullshit for stupid Rednecks

E: (scribbled over 'CHOKING VICTIM', 'ANARCHY' and 'it's' of D, and wrote:)

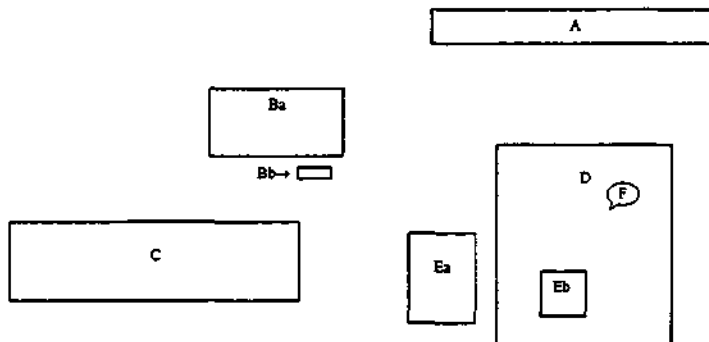
Ea: Mac Gyver

Eb: He's

F: Mac Gyver

G: Fuck u asshole

T 351.2 (20-4-00)



A: ARBEIT MACHT FREI

Ba: HUNGARIAN SLUTS FUCK HARD + DEEP!

Bb: (signature) FLEX ®

C: HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE GETTING OLD?

YOU HAVE DRY DREAMS AND WET FARTS!

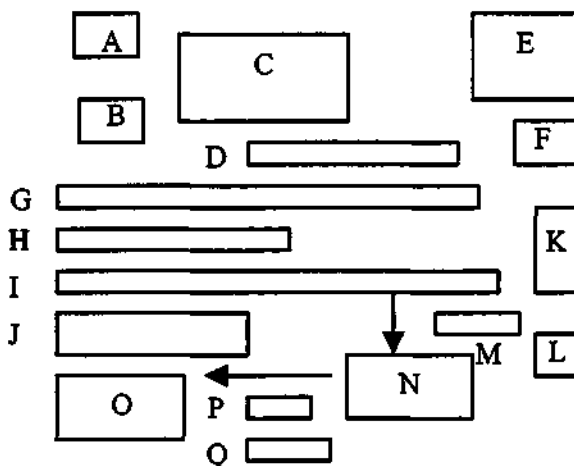
D: SWEDISH GIRLS GIVE EXCLUSIVE HEAD JOBS (also contains a crude illustration of this, with bold lines from D and softer lines from E)

Ea: SO DOES YOUR MUM! + YOU SISTER!

Eb: (added to graphic: see below, and wrote) Stop sucking my nose

F: OH ROB YOU'RE SO BIG!

B02.2 (17 Oct 2000)



A: I ♥ Mike Patton!

B:  $\begin{array}{c} \circ \\ \text{c} \mid \text{c} \\ \hline \text{c} \mid \text{c} \end{array}$

C: Feminists are all bitter, undersexed men, trapped in the bodies of women. What a waste!! You all need 2 get fucking lives!!!

D: yeah whatever you say, lady

E: ONLY FUCKERS WRITE ON WALLS

F: You're an Uncle Fucker

G: Be strong. You are BEAUTIFUL!!

H: I'm ugly, I'm dumb, I'm stupid... etc. And: I'm not good enough for him

I: OH GOODY! A NICE BLANK WRITING SPACE TO WRITE ALL MY FEMINIST POLITICAL ANTI-RACIST ENVIRONMENTALLY BIODEGRADABLE DEMOCRATIC PROLETARIAT MESSAGES ON!

J: ACTUALLY I'D RATHER READ ABOUT SEX OR WILLIAM SWINSON'S HEP C IS HE STILL AROUND ANYWAY?

K: THEN YOU'RE A FUCKER, AREN'T YOU?!

L: do you understand sarcasm

M: HEY ELLES! ♥ ya, ♥ Krys P

N: Even if it did use to be an anti-racism campaign at Monash Uni!

O: What is "use to be"??? Don't you mean used to be?

P: Power comes from the barrel of a gun - Voltaire -

Q: And: happiness is a warm gun - Beatles

### Graffiti and conversational principles

If we consider the conversations in the data, at first glance each turn seems to follow the Co-operative Principle. Only the maxim of quality, that is the truth of the content, cannot be proven. We assume, however, as in everyday conversations, that the interlocutors are telling the truth. However, according to Blume, the "lack of social connection between the author and reader of graffiti means that Grice's maxims play effectively no role whatsoever" (Blume 1985: 142). Let us therefore examine the Co-operative Principle and its maxims more closely. For convenience's sake, the contributor to a graffiti conversation will be referred to as a speaker, rather than as a writer.

*Make your conversational contribution such as is required.* As we will see below, a contribution in graffiti is never "required", as such. This statement has the prerequisite that the current speaker has required a contribution to the conversation. It will be shown below in the discussion of turn-taking principles that the next speaker is the one who determines if and when a contribution is made. (Of course, one can refrain from speaking in an oral conversation too, but social norms governing this discourse are so strong that to do so would indicate non-standard behaviour, for whatever reason).

*At the stage at which it occurs.* This part of the Principle is difficult to apply to graffiti, since it implies that the "stage at which [the turn] occurs" can be chosen by any of the interlocutors involved. In graffiti discourse, however, if one wishes to respond to a previous statement and continue a conversation, one is not able to choose the "stage". At the most, one can choose where one's contribution will be written.

*By the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange.* Again, since the interlocutors in graffiti conversations never come into contact, they will never agree on an "accepted purpose or direction". It is up to the contributors of each new turn to continue the direction of the exchange. A graffito which does not continue the direction of the exchange will merely be assumed to be



part of another exchange. For example, in 301.1, H asks a question, which does not continue the discussion, but spawns a new exchange.

*Quantity: Give the right amount of information.* What is the "right amount of information" in a graffiti exchange? In spoken conversations, interlocutors have an inherent understanding of what is the "right amount"; one should not speak for too long a time or with unnecessary details (hogging the floor) and one should not give too little information (and appear secretive or unsocial). In a written conversation, no such guidelines apply, and in this respect, graffiti conversations resemble chat conversations, in which turns may be of varying length. Compare 301.4: D, which is a quite long turn, 301.1:D, containing three words, and B02.2:B, merely a symbol.

*Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true.* As mentioned earlier, the truth content of contributions of graffiti cannot be tested; one assumes that interlocutors are telling the truth and are not deliberately trying to lead their readers astray. A far-reaching consequence of this maxim occurs with warning graffiti. These follow a pattern such as "XX has Hepatitis and doesn't tell the women he sleeps with", or "XX is a rapist (followed by address or telephone details)". Such warning graffiti are common in women's toilets (although there are no examples of these in the data presented in this paper, B02.2:] refers to one in an adjoining cubicle). Since these statements could well be libellous, or at best misleading, their truth or falsehood is of major importance.

*Relation: Be relevant.* In most conversations, the contributions must of course be relevant. However, violating this maxim in order to uphold the principle at a more remote level, e.g. for humorous or face-saving purposes, is a common procedure. The lack of face-to-face communication in graffiti, and therefore the reduced amount of shared knowledge of the context of the conversation, renders the possibility of appropriately violating this maxim infeasible. Irrelevant utterances will be ignored or merely be assumed to be part of a different talk exchange. For example, in 401.1, E has modified D's turn by scribbling over some parts of it and adding a few words. E's turn does not continue D's line of argument; it is nonsensical and has been ignored.

*Manner: Be perspicuous.* Obscurity of expression and ambiguity tend to be avoided in graffiti as far as possible through the use of anaphors and arrows (to indicate to which previous turn the current turn is responding). Some obscurity is unavoidable, especially in the case of certain symbols which may be known to only a selected group (e.g. B02.2:B).

This analysis of Grice's maxims seems to indicate that some parts of the Co-operative Principle do not control graffiti conversation; some, however, do, at least to a certain extent. Thus Blume's claim that Grice's maxims "play no role whatsoever" in graffiti communication seems not wholly justified, and it must be noted that she herself offers no evidence to support this claim. Leech maintains that most conversation is governed by the interaction between the Co-operative Principle and the Politeness Principle. Given that graffiti conversation is only partially governed by the Co-operative Principle, it is therefore reasonable to assume that graffiti will be only partially governed by the Politeness Principle (and hence Irony Principle) also. Let us now look at the implications of the application of these Principles to graffiti conversations.

If we examine the data, we see that the Politeness Principle and the Irony Principle are often ignored. Many turns contain taboo words and are very impolite or vulgar. Some insult the previous speaker directly (301.4:E "the dumb ignorant bitch"), and some insult a whole group (301.4:B "Arts suck! Only 4 dumb people..."). However the Irony Principle is evident in 301.4:C "dear friend" and D "the lovely message". It seems that the efficacy of the use of the Politeness Principle and the Irony Principle as face-saving devices is reduced by the lack of face-to-face communication. Since the person being insulted is not present to witness the insult (and indeed may never read it), the language of such turns can be highly direct and offensive. It is arguable that this very offensiveness is what inspires turns from respondents, who hasten to correct (what they see as) offensive remarks or fallacies.

### Graffiti and turn-taking principles

Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson's turn-taking rules seem to require that the interlocutors come face-to-face in order to successfully complete the turn-transfer, because a transfer-relevance place is determined by the current speaker, and to a lesser extent, the other interlocutors. However the interlocutors in graffiti discourse are not face-to-face. Nonetheless, since every turn is written, it is clear when each turn ends. In this case Rules 1b and 1c are valid, because the next speaker is not chosen, but the floor is open to anyone who wants to take a turn. Rule 1a allows the next speaker(s) to be directly chosen (it must be remembered that more than one speaker may respond to the same turn, as in 301.1 where B and F each respond to A, thus initiating two 'lines' of discussion). This can only occur in graffiti if the turn-so-far poses a question directed at someone, such as "Does anyone else feel this way" (301.1: A) or "What do you think?", or a more general question directed at anyone, such as "Why do guys cheat?" (301.1: H) or "Is he still around?" (B02.2: J). Even these questions do not select the next speaker, only open the question to those who wish to answer it. What these questions mean is that the writer *wants* to receive an answer. Rule 2 is valid insofar as a completed turn signals a transfer-relevant place, and should someone wish to add a turn, this could take place at this point.

Some of the features of conversation are likewise valid for graffiti conversations, namely all except features 1, 2, 3, 4, and 14. Some remarks on these features:

1. *Speaker-change recurs, or at least occurs.* In graffiti discourse, speaker-change does not have to take place. Many turns do not need, want or invite an answer. Some turns expect an answer, but never receive one.
2. *Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time.* Because of the spacial and temporal displacement of graffiti discourse, *only one* interlocutor can ever 'speak'.
3. *Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief.* In spoken conversations overlap occurs where someone attempts to take the floor. Since this is not necessary in written conversations, the opportunity for overlap can only exist in an extended sense: when someone writes her/his turn over that of another. This may occur for three reasons: firstly, limited space in which to write; secondly, to change something in a previous turn; thirdly, to give one's own turn emphasis.
4. *Transitions (from one turn to the next) with no gap and no overlap are common.* In the literal sense, a gap occurs after every turn in graffiti discourse. Temporally, there has to be a certain pause between each turn. Spatially, a gap may or may not occur. In the data, there is evidence of turns which are directly next to or even on top of the previous turn, just as some which are far from the previous turn. An extreme case is illustrated in one conversation (not in the data presented for this paper), where one turn is written in one toilet cubicle, and the answering turn is written in an adjoining cubicle.
14. *Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations.* Repair mechanisms are not necessary in graffiti discourse, since turn-taking errors do not occur.

It is interesting that these rules and observations are made from the standpoint of the turn-so-far. Apart from the questions mentioned earlier, the turn-so-far in graffiti discourse does not do anything to select the next speaker. It is rather the right of the next turn to respond to the previous. This can take place in four ways:

1. by means of arrows as in 301.1 (B responds to A; F responds to A, G responds to F). Note that the head of the arrow may point to the respondent (301.4: B, 301.1: G) to indicate a logical progression of argument, or to the previous turn (301.1: B, F) to indicate the source.
2. by means of anaphors (301.4: F "this is not a language-rich argument", emphasis mine), where "this" refers to E's turn, unfortunately not couched in the most elegant terms.

3. by means of direct references to previous turns, eg in 301.4 B's turn is responded to by C "dear friend ...", D "a response to the lovely message...", and E "In response to the dumb ignorant bitch...".
4. by simply writing the responding turn close enough to the previous to indicate a logical progression of dialogue, answer to a question etc, eg 301.1: H asks "Why do guys cheat" to which I responds "Same reasons girls do".

### Conversation construct and gender

It is interesting to note that that there are *only* conversations in 301.1 and 301.4 (women's toilets), and no one-liners, tags etc. They are conversations with many turns, whereas the conversations in 351.2 and 401.1 (men's toilets) have few turns. In fact, 301.1 and 301.4 are each one conversation; B02.2 (women's toilet) contains no less than six separate conversations:

1. C - D
2. E - F - K - L
3. H - G
4. I - J
5. I - N - O
6. P - Q

Of the 17 turns in B02.2, only A, B and M are one-liners. Of the turns in 351.2, only the sequence D - Ea can be counted as a conversation; Eb and F merely add to a graphic, although thereby causing a quasi-dialogue between the drawn characters. In 401.1 the only sequence approaching a conversation is that of A - B - C. This suggests that conversations are longer and more co-operatively constructed in the women's discourse, but that conversations tend to be avoided in men's graffiti discourse in favour of one-liners. The more co-operative nature of woman-to-woman discourse has been shown elsewhere (cf. Coates 1998, Johnson & Aries 1998).

It will also be clear from the data presented in the appendix that the language and content of graffiti varies according to the gender of the writer (and, one may argue, according to the gender of the reader, since one can be fairly certain that primarily women will enter women's toilets and men will enter men's toilets). Women's graffiti tend to cover three main themes: problems of relationships and sex; politics, especially university politics; jokes and poetry. The topic of men's graffiti is usually sex, but men tend to show off, make observations about the abilities of women of certain races or insult other men. Men's graffiti do not discuss politics as much, and rarely university politics. Political observations tend to be stated more violently, and not really discussed but rather political affiliations are simply declared. Jokes and poetry, if appearing at all, tend to be obscene. Pictures likewise tend to be obscene or violent.

The discussion above argues that CA tools, specifically the Conversational Principles of Grice and Leech and the Turn-taking Principles of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, may be utilised for the analysis of graffiti with some success. As has been shown, not all the principles, and not all parts of them, appear to govern graffiti conversation. It therefore seems appropriate to conclude that, whilst this framework should not be discarded, a hybrid framework of CA and DA tools is likely to be more effective in examining graffiti communication.

### 6. Conclusion

This paper proposed a definition of graffiti based on its etymology and current usage. Five samples of graffiti collected from toilet cubicles in a university building were presented and discussed. It was shown that the language of toilet graffiti approximates the spoken, informal language in many respects, and as such may show evidence of non-standard syntax and language and topic choice in contravention of society's norms of face-to-face communication. The construct of graffiti conversations was discussed in terms of conversational analysis and turn-taking principles. It was shown that graffiti discourse does not usually adhere to CA principles; the lack of face-to-face connection between interlocutors seems to render most CA principles void. Turn-taking principles tend to be made from the standpoint of the turn-so-far, which is inappropriate for graffiti

discourse, since the choice of speaker falls rather to the next turn. The purpose of this paper was to present some graffiti data and explore the extent to which CA tools can be used for their analysis. It was shown that CA may be used to some extent, but that a new analytical framework must be developed. This is one of the aims of this doctoral research project.

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