



COLLABORATIVE

COMPLETIONS

AN INTERACTIVE DEVICE FOR SOCIAL SUPPORT



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What are we doing when we finish each other's sentences?

This everyday phenomenon is known as the **collaborative completion** across several disciplines that explore our real-life interactions¹. Among these is discursive psychology; a unique, qualitative approach that appreciates our everyday social encounters as a site at which "psychology is produced and made consequential"² through our social actions. An important facet of research within this discipline involves analysing contexts where the way talk unfolds has significant impacts for our lives.

In line with this, the current project seeks to analyse the functions of collaborative completions across numerous contexts, most notably including the **New Zealand Victim Support helpline**. Herein, callers routinely present experiences of crime and trauma to contact operators, who in turn have the role of deciding whether to allocate a support worker qualified to provide emotional and practical support. Despite callers having exclusive access to their reasons for phoning the organisation and explanation thus being an action solely within their domain, callers' accounts were found to be a common action that contact operators collaborated in the construction of. The question of what this accomplishes is addressed in the following analyses.

DATA AND METHOD

The data was selected from a total of 397 Victim Support calls made available for the current project. From these, interactions that featured collaborative completions were subsequently transcribed using the following conversation analytic conventions³:

01	Line numbers flush-left	(0.0)	Silence durations
.	Falling intonation	>text<	Rushed speech
:/-	Sound stretch/cut-off	[text]	Overlapping speech
=	Latching; no hearable silence between	<u>text</u>	Emphasis placed on underlined speech
~	Shaky voice	.h/h.	Inbreaths/Outbreaths
(.)	Pause less than 0.2secs	1/?	Beginning/final rising intonation

Additionally, all identifying characteristics such as names and locations were anonymised in this process. For example, the interactants are identified by their roles as "CALLER" and contact operator "CONTCT". These labels are located between the line numbers and units of talk in the proceeding transcripts.

SUPPORT WHEN WORD-SEARCHING

This extract follows the call's opening, and begins with a caller explaining their reason for phoning Victim Support:

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01 CALLER: and I'M just wondering >I'm just wanting some
02 advice< on I've (0.9) been given all this: (0.6)
03 paperwork for a protection order and chi-uh
04 (1.0) uh (2.1) ah (1.6)=
05 CONTCT: .hh hhhh.
06 CALLER: =care of children: like act
07 (1.8)
08 CONTCT: mh-mh,
09 (0.8)
10 CALLER: ~a:~nd I've been struggling to hh.
11 (1.1)
12 CALLER: Um (.)
13 CONTCT: .h fill it out?
14 CALLER: ye- (0.4)fill it out and they said that you:
15 might be able to (.)help me

```



TROUBLE MARKERS: Consider the last time you were talking with someone and either of you had difficulty recalling a word. Recipients of talk are typically able to recognise such word-searching due to pre-pausal tokens like "um", pauses, and vocal hitches, all of which mark ongoing talk as troubled⁴. Lines 11-12 of the extract above demonstrate the caller's use of these signals when they encounter difficulty while explaining their reason for phoning the organisation.



THE COMPLETION: Trouble markers establish the opportunity for an attentive recipient to enter the speaking floor in order to help a struggling speaker⁴. The key aspect of using a collaborative completion to do this is that the recipient produces an utterance's final component on the initial speaker's behalf, as at lines 10 and 13 above. In this case, the contact operator displays **attention** to the recently foregone reference to paperwork, and offers a candidate **understanding** of where the caller's troubled account is headed by producing the possible final component "fill it out". This understanding is then confirmed by the caller's affirmation "ye" and repetition at line 14.

SUPPORT WHEN HELP-SEEKING

This extract begins after the caller has discovered that the victim they phoned on behalf of does not meet typical criteria for support:

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01 CALLER: cos this is like completely out of the ordinary for
02 this family and (0.4) they um just wanna know what
03 services are availa: [ble so]
04 CONTCT: [ye:ah ]
05 CALLER: obviously my first port of ca:ll=
06 CALLER: =is .h [victim sup]port so I [thought I'd] just call=
07 CONTCT: [ is us ] [ yeah ]
08 CALLER: =to see if (0.6) u:m this kinda meets the crit:e:ria
09 for yo:ur services or not

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PROJECTION: In contrast with the prior extract, there is no apparent trouble during the caller's ongoing explanation for phoning above. Contrarily, a steady talking pace and inbreath at line 6 project an intention to continue speaking⁴.



THE COMPLETION: Although no speaking trouble is apparent above, there is the potential for it. Calling the organisation is itself an act of help-seeking, and without necessity this could be perceived as an inappropriate request vulnerable to social consequences⁵. The contact operator's **anticipation** of the caller's account and subsequent maneuver to produce its final component therefore performs **alignment** with the caller's construction of their decision to phone as warranted and obvious, at a moment of possible social tension due to request refusal.

KEY FINDINGS

The preceding extracts each illustrate a broader pattern of how contact operators use collaborative completions that invoke attention, anticipation, understanding, and alignment with respect to a caller's ongoing account. Notably, despite contact operators having roles as conduits to support rather than as support-providers, their uses of the device during callers' accounts illustrates enactment of the institution's overall objective to extend care and support to those who are seeking it.

