

Telephone Conversation in the Fiction of Raymond Chandler: Opening up Openings and Closings

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ABSTRACT

Telephone conversations play a very considerable role in Raymond Chandler's novels: they actively contribute to the creation of suspense by unexpectedly complicating the plot, they are often the means Chandler uses to establish power relations, they are frequently responsible for Marlowe's «tough image» and they also help to construct Chandler's peculiar personal style. However, to my knowledge, no detailed analysis of these conversations exists. In this paper, the findings of conversation analysis regarding the structure of telephone conversations (Schegloff (1968); Schegloff and Sacks (1973)) are applied to Chandler's fictional telephone conversations in order to show that, on the whole, the representation of telephone conversations in fiction makes use of the same rules participants orient to in non-fictional telephone conversations, although they tend to differ in opening and closing sections. In Raymond Chandler's fiction, the opening and closing sections of telephone conversations are often suppressed or expanded for stylistic purposes. In this paper, a corpus consisting of the 93 telephone conversations included by Chandler in his seven novels is analysed and six different types of Summons-Answer sequences are identified according to how the answer is reported, using for this purpose the speech and thought presentation model developed in Leech and Short (1981) and Short (1988). Closing sections in fictional telephone conversations are shown to differ considerably from the closing sections typically found in non-fictional telephone interactions. It is also suggested that one of the functions of the synthetic closing section of many fictional telephone conversations is their contribution to the representation of power relations in fiction.

There is something compulsive about a telephone. The gadget-ridden man of our age loves it, loathes it, and is afraid of it. But he always treats it with respect, even if he is drunk. The telephone is a fetish.

(RAYMOND CHANDLER: *The Long Good-bye*)

1. CHANDLER AND STYLE

The fiction of Raymond Chandler has always been an obvious choice for the study of style and for the practice of stylistic analysis, perhaps because Chandler himself was obsessed with style. This obsession is not only implicitly present throughout his fictional works but it is also very explicitly discussed by Chandler in his critical essays and in his letters. Chandler tried to define style on several occasions and he has variously referred to style as: «the quality of the writing as writing» (Chandler, 1962: 83-84); «the creation of magic by words» (Chandler, 1962: 92); «the real business» (Chandler, 1962: 92); «the magic which makes a paragraph or a sentence or a line of dialogue or a description something in the nature of a new creation» (Chandler, 1962: 92); «a projection of personality» (Chandler, 1962: 75); «the product of the quality of his [the writer's] emotion and perception ... [and the] ability to transfer these to paper» (Chandler 1962: 76).

Most of these definitions are rather vague and metaphorical but they show his constant, unrelenting preoccupation with style. For Chandler, style is not simply a matter of «editing and polishing» (Chandler, 1962: 76). He also took the trouble of pointing out common misconceptions about style: «the barbed phrase, the sedulously rare word, the highbrow affectation of style - these are amusing but useless» (Chandler, 1962: 78). Chandler, was therefore very concerned about the craft of writing and he was also preoccupied with the achievement of a personal style. In one of his letters he has in fact left some indication suggesting that he never made a stylistic choice without a good reason:

«when I split an infinitive, God damn it, I split it so it will stay split, and when I interrupt the velvety smoothness of my more or less literate syntax with a few sudden words of bar-room vernacular, that is done with eyes wide open and the mind relaxed but attentive. The method may not be perfect, but is all I have» (Chandler, 1962: 77).

Chandler's obsession with style has been noticed by several critics and has led to several studies of his idiosyncratic style. Amongst these studies one ought to mention Martínez-Dueñas (1980), Crombie (1983) and New-

lin (1991). With the exception of Crombie (1983), who has studied semantic relations operating beyond the level of the sentence, most studies of Chandler's style have been confined to the boundaries of the lexico-grammar, and have therefore adopted a non-discoursal point of view. These studies have mostly focused on either his hard-boiled slang, his tough vocabulary, his imagery, his hyperbolic similes, and his burlesque wisecracks, or on his staccato syntax, clipped sentences and his initial imitation of Hemingway's prose, later discarded in favour of a more personal style.

My concern with Chandler's style, by contrast, is to try to show that this author's stylistic experiments sometimes materialise over long stretches of text. Chandler's characteristic style emerges not only from his vocabulary or from the rhythm of his prose or from the upsetting of logico-semantic expectations, but also from features which belong to the study of text and discourse. The study of Chandler's fiction will benefit then from a discoursal approach and, likewise, the study of discourse is likely to benefit from an exploration of Chandler's writing, since his prose provides interesting data for the practice of discourse analysis.

2. TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS IN FICTION

The representation of telephone conversations in fiction is an interesting phenomena in itself because the embedding of a telephone call in a piece of prose narrative is a technical challenge for the writer. The insertion of the telephone call necessarily demands a shift from first-person or third-person monologic discourse to dialogic discourse, a new fictional situation in which the writer has to portray a conversation between two people. This shift has its symmetrical counterpart at the end of the telephone call, when a second shift, from dialogic discourse back to monologic narrative, usually takes place. In other words, the embedding of a telephone call in fiction requires a shift from non-interactive discourse to interactive discourse at the beginning of the represented phone call and second shift from interactive discourse back to non-interactive discourse at the end of the telephone conversation. It might be then worthwhile investigating how these shifts are managed, how the boundaries between non-interactive and interactive discourses are defined and crossed in both directions.

There are other reasons for studying telephone conversations in fiction, and in particular in the fiction of Raymond Chandler. One of these is that telephone conversations can become the instrument and the medium for power struggle. For a private investigator like Philip Marlowe, having his licence withdrawn is tantamount to a life sentence. A phone call is all Mr. Potter needs in order to make Marlowe keep his nose away from Sylvia Lennox's death in *The Long Good-bye*.

«A telephone call, Mr Marlowe, would deprive you of your licence. Don't fence with me. I won't put up with it.»

«Two telephone calls and I'd wake up kissing the gutter - with the back of my head missing» (Chandler, 1953: 178).

With the predictable wisecrack, Marlowe is acknowledging here that telephone conversations play a vital role in human relations: they are the means of exerting power and enforcing authority. In the fictional world of Chandler, telephone conversations often contribute to the development of power relations.

Sometimes telephone conversations can do more than that, since they enable a private eye to remain in business. Marlowe himself couldn't very well do without a telephone. He does a great deal of business through the phone ¹. In *Playback*, for example, Marlowe never meets face to face with his client, Mr. Umney, but he speaks to him on the phone several times throughout the novel. The novel itself begins with a telephone call from Umney to Marlowe and ends in the same way, with another phone call from Umney to Marlowe. So the novel is structurally framed by two telephone conversations in which Umney tries to get tough with Marlowe and the detective struggles to renegotiate their relationship on a different basis: Umney addresses Marlowe as his subordinate and Marlowe reminds Umney of his professional independence: Umney is not Marlowe's boss. Their professional relationship rests on a mutual agreement: the client can choose whether to hire or fire the detective at will, but the detective is free to accept or reject the client's offer. Their power relation, from Marlowe's point of view, is one of equality, not one of dominance, as Umney seems to think ².

Telephone calls constitute then an important element of Raymond Chandler's fictional world. The study of telephone conversations in Chandler's novels should then prove rewarding for at least two reasons. It should prove rewarding from the point of view of narrative technique, since it will help to explain how the shift from prose to dialogue and back to prose is managed. It should also prove rewarding from the point of view of the representation of power relations in fiction, since it will show how power relations between Marlowe and the rest of the characters are established and how power can be exerted on the phone.

3. CONVERSATION ANALYSIS (CA) AND THE ANALYSIS OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

The selection of Conversation Analysis as framework for the study of telephone conversations in fiction will probably seem an obvious choice, since the ethnomethodologists, particularly H. Sacks and E. Schegloff have

successfully investigated the structure of non-fictional telephone conversations. The application of CA to fictional telephone conversations offers then a chance to compare face-to-face interaction with the representation of face-to-face interaction in literary texts in order to see if the features which are characteristic of non-fictional telephone talks can also be traced in fictional ones.

It has to be noted, though, that despite the obvious advantages which the use of the ethnomethodological findings about the nature of verbal interaction has for the analysis of texts at the interface of language and literature, there has not been an abundance of stylistic studies applying CA to literary texts. However, there are at least two studies which have recently stressed the need and the potential benefit of an application of CA to literary texts. McHoul (1987) has convincingly argued that fictional conversations are no less adequate for conversation analysis than transcripts of face-to-face talk. He has also suggested that the framework itself could be improved as a result of expanding the source of its materials to conversations in fiction and drama. More recently, Herman (1991) has shown how the systematics of turn-taking can be very illuminating when applied to dramatic dialogue. Personally, what I find useful and interesting about the ethnomethodological approach to the study of conversation is, first of all, that it lays emphasis on the analysis of data and stresses the importance of working with data which is naturally-occurring and not constructed or elicited by the analyst. Second, it offers a framework which is wary of the arbitrary imposition of supposedly objective categories on the data (Levinson, 1983: 295). Third, the ethnomethodological approach to the study of telephone conversations is not interested in quantitative results so much as in discovering patterns or structures which recur in the data. Finally, their aim is to study the behavioural strategies which participants seem to be aware of and usually orient to when engaging in social interaction. Conversation analysts aim then to discover the *procedures* and *expectations* which participants employ when producing and understanding conversation (Levinson, 1983: 318-319). The method of CA is then essentially empirical and inductive but it also incorporates a social orientation, and it is the combination of both approaches which is appealing for a stylistic study of literary texts.

According to the ethnomethodological approach to the study of conversation³, telephone calls belong to a series of every-day interactions which present a well-organised structure: conversations on the phone generally have «a recognizable overall organization» (Levinson, 1983: 309). Telephone talks show then a strong tendency to display «clear beginnings and carefully organised closings» (Levinson, 1983: 309). The overall organization of a telephone call is normally based on a *tripartite structure*: telephone conversations consist of an *opening section* at the beginning of the conversa-

tion; a *closing section* at the end; and a series of topic slots in the middle. Most importantly, people's behaviour on the phone shows that participants in a telephone conversation are aware of this tripartite structure and orient to it.

4. OPENING SECTIONS

Schegloff (1968) has noted that one of the most remarkable things about opening sections in telephone conversations is that the person who is not making the call, the person who is receiving the call, is the first one to speak. This fact which may sound trite and banal enough is crucial to an understanding of the structure of opening sections in telephone talks. Schegloff has shown why the person who is not calling, the person with less information, speaks first: this person is not in fact opening the interaction but is rather producing the second conversational turn, since the first turn in the talk is provided by the ringing of the telephone. The first two turns in a telephone conversation are easily equated then with Summons-Answer Sequences:

- (1) Summons A: Jim?
Answer B: Yes?
- (2) Summons A: Mom?
Answer B: What
- (3) Summons -ringing of the telephone
Answer-Hello/3384/English Department

(Adapted from Levinson, 1983: 309-311)

The Summons-Answer (SA) sequence in the opening section of a telephone conversation has a clear equivalent in the Summons-Answer sequences which are frequently present in face-to-face interaction. In both cases, the initial summons functions as an *attention-getting* device. Once the person at the receiving end has given attention by answering the summons, then the talk can proceed. The function of an SA sequence as initial exchange in an opening section is then to establish an «open channel for talk» (Levinson, 1983: 310).

4.1. *Properties of Summons-Answer Sequences*

Schegloff (1968) discusses in depth the four properties of SA sequences: nonterminality, non-repeatability, conditional relevance and immediate juxtaposition.

i) *Nonterminality*

With this property, Schegloff shows that a completed SA sequence cannot appear on its own and therefore it can never be the final exchange of a conversation or telephone call. SA sequences are preambles, preliminaries or prefaces to something else: «By nonterminality I mean that a completed SA sequence cannot properly stand as the final exchange of a conversation» (Schegloff, 1968: 1081). SA sequences are also «signalling devices to further actions» (Schegloff, 1968: 384). The property of non-terminality stems from the fact that the summoner, once the summons has been answered, is under an obligation to talk again: «The very property of nonterminality is furnished by the obligation of the summoner to talk again upon the completion (by the summoned) of the SA sequence» (Schegloff, 1968: 1082). By making the summons the summoner commits himself to explaining what is the reason for the summons. This constraint is a characteristic of SA sequences but not of Question-Answer sequences.

ii) *Non-repeatability*

This second property observes that once an SA sequence has taken place, the summoner cannot begin another SA sequence: «Once a summons has been answered, the summoner may not begin another SA sequence» (Schegloff, 1968: 1082). In this respect, SA sequence are again different from Question-Answer sequences.

iii) *Conditional relevance*

The property of conditional relevance predicts the appearance of an answer after every summons: «By conditional relevance of one item on another we mean: given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen to be a second item to the first; upon its nonoccurrence it can be seen to be officially absent» (Schegloff, 1968: 1083). Since the answer of an SA sequence «is conditionally relevant on the occurrence of» a summons (Schegloff, 1968: 1084), the property of conditional relevance suggests that given a summons, it is normal to expect that an answer will follow. When an answer occurs, it is normally interpreted as the second part of something which has previously taken place. Also, if after a summons takes place, an answer does not occur, this is noticed by participants as something unusual and the answer «is seen to be officially absent» (Schegloff, 1968: 1083). In a telephone call, the failure to produce the answer to the initial summons provided by the ringing of the telephone means that the addressee is not at

home. This third property is closely related to the first one: «the property of “nonterminality” may be reformulated by saying that further talk is conditionally relevant on a completed SA sequence» (Schegloff, 1968: 1084).

iv) *Immediate juxtaposition*

The property of immediate juxtaposition is related to the property of conditional relevance. The conditional relevance of an answer on the occurrence of a summons operates over adjacent turns: «The conditional relevance of an A on an S must be satisfied within a constraint of immediate juxtaposition. That is to say, an item that may be used as an answer to a summons will not be heard to constitute an answer to a summons if it occurs separated from the summons» (Schegloff, 1968: 1084). In other words, the answer must follow its summons closely if it is to be heard as an answer.

These four properties of SA sequences are generally observed by participants in face-to-face conversations and in non-fictional telephone talks, but it is necessary to see whether they also constrain the structure of fictional telephone conversations.

4.2. Summons-Answer Sequences in fictional telephone conversations

The structure of opening sections in fictional telephone conversations is similar to the opening section of non-fictional telephone talks. The SA sequence which initiates the talk in non-fictional telephone conversations is also found in one form or another in fictional ones. However, this initial SA sequence does not always uphold the four properties proposed by Schegloff. On the whole, the first two, non-terminality and non-repeatability are usually observed, although not always⁴. The other two, conditional relevance and immediate juxtaposition, are instead often flouted.

Immediate juxtaposition is not after all as necessary in written as in spoken discourse. Besides, the written medium enables the writer to interfere with the structure of the opening section of a telephone call. The narrator's voice can introduce comments or descriptions between a summons and its answer. In the following two examples, the summons and the answer are taken apart from each other, immediate juxtaposition is not observed and yet the SA sequence is not difficult to recognise, since the answer is still an answer to the summons:

- (1) «I went to the telephone and looked up the number of the police department in the directory. *I dialled* and while I was waiting for an answer, I took the little automatic out of my pocket and laid it on the table beside the telephone.

»When the male voice said: *Bay City police - Smoot talking*, I said: «There's been a shooting at 623 Altair Street. Man named Lavery lives there. He's dead".»

(*The Lady in the Lake*, p. 101)

- (2) «It was almost daylight when I finally went to bed. *The jangle of the telephone* dragged me up out of a black well of sleep. I rolled over on the bed, fumbled for slippers and realized that I hadn't been asleep for more than a couple of hours. I felt like a half-digested meal eaten in a greasy spoon joint. My eyes were stuck together and my mouth was full of sand. I heaved up on the feet and lumbered into the living-room and pulled the phone off the cradle and said into it: *Hold the line*.

(*The Long Good-bye*, p. 240)

As has been already suggested, in fictional telephone conversations the property of conditional relevance of an answer on a summons is not always observed. In fact, in Chandler's fiction, the answer of the SA sequence which opens telephone conversations is often missing:

- (3) «I was shaking the wrinkles out of my damp suit when *the phone rang*. It was Bernie Ohls, the DA's chief investigator, who had given me the lead to General Sternwood.

«Well, how's the boy?» he began. He sounded like a man who had slept well and didn't owe too much money.»

(*The Big Sleep*, p. 39)

- (4) «I threw the list in the waste-basket and *called Kenny Haste*, a crime reporter on the *Chronicle*.

«What do you know about Alex Morny?» I asked him when we were through cracking wise at each other.»

(*The High Window*, p. 28)

In examples (3) and (4), we have to assume that there has been an answer to the summons, even if the writer has chosen not to put it there, because the channel for the talk is effectively opened and the telephone conversations continue after the summons. The peculiar nature of the written medium is again enabling the writer to tamper with the structure of opening sections. The stylistic effect achieved by the suppression of the answer is noteworthy: it renders the dialogue *snappier*. The absence of the answer creates the illusion of swift action: it makes the reader believe that things are moving fast, that there is so much happening and so much to tell, because the writer seems in such a hurry to tell what he has to tell.

So, rather than saying that conditional relevance is not observed in fictional telephone conversations, we should perhaps say that it is precisely the property of conditional relevance what enables the writer to suppress the answer to a summons. Since the answer is conditionally relevant (i.e. expectable) on the appearance of a summons, it is possible to assume that the answer has actually taken place, as long as the summons is explicitly represented in the text. It seems then that in fictional telephone calls the summons in itself is enough to open a channel for the talk.

If we combine conversation analysis SA sequence with the framework for the analysis of speech presentation developed in Leech and Short (1981) and Short (1988), we could classify the opening sections of Marlowe's conversations into the following six types:

1. *Summons missing*

«The voice on the telephone seemed to be sharp and peremptory, but I didn't hear too well what it said - partly because I was only half-awake and partly because I was holding the receiver upside down. I fumbled it around and grunted.

Did you hear me! I said I was Clyde Umney, the lawyer.»

(*Playback*, p. 7)

2. *Answer in Direct Speech (DS)*

«Then I dialled the Sternwoods' number and heard it ring four or five times and then the butler's suave voice saying: *General Sternwood's residence.*»

(*The Big Sleep*, p. 109)

3. *Answer in Free Direct Speech (FDS)*

«I went along the room to the corner of the bar and dialled. The same routine as before. *Good evening, the Château Bercy*, who is calling Miss Gonzalez please. One moment, please.»

(*The Little Sister*, p. 155)

4. *Answer in Narrative Report of Speech Act (NRSA)*

«Finally the telephone rang. *I answered it* and the voice said: «Mr Marlowe? This is Mr. Shaw. At the Bristol.»

(*The High Window*, p. 142)

5. *Answer in Narrative Report of Action (NRA)*

«The phone rang before I had quite started to worry about Mr. Lester B. Clausen. *I reached for it absently.* The voice I heard was an abrupt voice, but thick and clogged, as if it was being strained through a curtain or somebody's long white beard.

“You Marlowe?” it said.

“Speaking”»

(*The Little Sister*, p. 33)

6. *Answer missing*

«I went to the phone and called Carl Moss.

“Phil Marlowe, Doc. Any more patients or are you through?”»

(*The High Window*, p. 148)

The table in Figure 1 shows the number of telephone calls in each of the seven novels of R. Chandler, in chronological order. The table also shows the number of telephone calls for each of the six types of opening sections which have been found in Chandler's novels. The most noticeable thing in this table is that *out of 93 telephone calls, there is only one instance of a telephone conversation in which the summons is missing:*

«The voice on the telephone seemed to be sharp and peremptory, but I didn't hear too well what it said - partly because I was only half-awake and partly because I was holding the receiver upside down. I fumbled it around and grunted.

“Did you hear me! I said I was Clyde Umney, the lawyer”»

(*Playback*, p. 7)

The summons is not explicit here, but the answer is: «I fumbled it around and grunted.» This telephone call, however, appears right at the beginning of Chandler's last novel, *Playback*; it is the opening paragraph in the first chapter of the novel and this is probably the reason which accounts for the uniqueness of this SA sequence. Apart from this telephone call, the remaining 92 have an explicit summons and this seems to confirm what has already been suggested: that the summons fulfils a very important role in fictional telephone calls, since it is used to signal that a telephone conversation is about to begin. In this sense, the summons also plays an important role in the smooth handling of the shift from non-interactive to interactive discourse.

Another interesting fact to be learnt out of the table in Fig. 1 is the high proportion of telephone calls in which the answer is missing. This can be

Figure 1: Summons-Answer Sequences in Opening Sections of Telephone Calls in Raymond Chandler's Novels

	A missing	A in DS	A in FDS	A in NRSA	A in NRA	A missing	Total
BS	—	4	—	1	—	4	9
FML	—	2	—	1	—	3	6
HW	—	3	—	5	—	4	12
LL	—	1	—	3	—	5	9
LS	—	5	1	4	5	10	25
LGB	—	1	—	1	3	20	25
PB	1	2	—	2	—	2	7
TOTAL	1	18	1	17	8	48	93

Key

S missing = Summons missing.

A in DS = Answer in Direct Speech.

A in FDS = Answer in Free Direct Speech.

A in NRSA = Answer in Narrative Report of Speech Acts.

A in NRA = Answer in Narrative Report of Action.

A missing = Answer missing.

BS = *The Big Sleep*.

FLM = *Farewell My Lovely*.

HW = *The High Window*.

LL = *The Lady in the Lake*.

LS = *The Little Sister*.

LGB = *The Long Goodbye*.

PB = *Playback*.

taken as indicating that the absence of the answer in an SA sequence is not a mere coincidence but a stylistic device, a conscious strategy often employed by Chandler, in his novels for the representation of telephone talks. Finally, it seems that the answer in NRA is a late development in Chandler's technique, since it appears for the first time as late as in *The Little Sister*, his fifth novel out of a total of seven.

5. CLOSING SECTIONS

The closing section of a telephone conversation is a difficult art which requires the constant exercise of a number of social skills. It is quite a common experience to feel embarrassed after not being able to manage to bring a telephone conversation to a close gracefully. Levinson (1983) has noted how closings can be a matter of *tempo*:

«Closings are a delicate matter both technically, in the sense that they must be so placed that no party is forced to exit while still having compelling things to say, and socially in the sense that both over-hasty and over-slow terminations can carry unwelcome inferences about the social relationships between the participants».

(Levinson, 1983: 316)

In order to get round these technical and social problems, closing sections often consist of a series of adjacency pairs. Closing sections in non-fictional telephone conversations often look like this one:

R: Why don't we all have lunch?
 C: Okay so that would be in St Jude's would it?
 R: Yes
 (0.7)
 C: Okay so: : :
 R: One o'clock in the bar
 C: Okay
 R: Okay?
 C: Okay then thanks very much indeed George=
 R: =All right
 C: //See you there
 R: See you there
 C: Okay
 R: Okay // bye
 C: Bye

(Levinson, 1983: 316-317)

It would be hard to imagine a novel with a stretch of dialogue which resembled this non-fictional closing section: if the closing section of a fictional telephone conversation had to be represented like the one above, it would take up far too much valuable space in the novel and, even worse, it would *hold up the development of the action unnecessarily*. As a result, the closing section in fictional telephone calls appears considerably reduced in length and sometimes it is not there at all.

Yet the problem of shifting back from interactive discourse to non-interactive discourse still has to be managed. Chandler's formula may not be very innovative stylistically speaking but it is very interesting from the viewpoint of power relations. Chandler, usually has the closing section summarised with NRA and the reader is generally told which character puts the phone down first. Marlowe normally says «I hung up», «he/she hung up» or «we hung up»:

Marlowe hangs up

«The phone on my desk rang at four o'clock sharp.

«Did you find Orrin yet, Mr Marlowe?»

«Not yet. Where are you?»

«Why, I'm in the drug store next to-»

«Come on up and stop acting like Mata Hari», I said.

«Aren't you ever polite to anybody?» she snapped.

I hung up and fed myself a slug of Old Forester to brace my nerves for the interview.»

(*The Little Sister*, p. 29)

Client hangs up

...

«Let me get this straight», I said. «You actually got the coin back - not a promise of it, merely?»

«Certainly not. And I'm getting tired. So if you-»

«One moment, Mrs Murdock. It isn't going to be as simple as all that. Things have happened».

«In the morning you may tell me about them», she said sharply, and hung up».

(*The High Window*, p. 75)

Marlowe and Norris the butler hang up

«...When the General is feeling a little better - possibly tomorrow - he would like to thank you in person.»

«Fine», I said. «I'll come out and drink some more of his brandy, maybe with champagne.»

«I shall see that some is properly iced», the old boy said, almost with a smirk in his voice.

That was that. We said good-bye and hung up.

(*The Big Sleep*, p. 119)

Hanging up abruptly, with no closing section, is regarded by Marlowe himself as a means of exerting power, as «acting tough». When Detective-Sergeant Green of homicide calls Marlowe to threaten him and make him lay off a case, Marlowe interprets the abrupt end of the telephone conversation as part of the message:

«Look, Marlowe» he said raspingly. «You got any funny ideas about this case, you could buy yourself a lot of grief talking about them. The case is closed, finalized, and laid away in moth balls. Damn lucky for you it is. Acces-

sory after the fact is good for five years in this state. And let me tell you something else. I've been a cop a long time and one thing I've learned for sure is it ain't always what you do that gets you sent up. It's what it can be made to look like when it comes into court. Good night."

He hung up in my ear. I replaced the phone, thinking that an honest cop with a bad conscience always acts tough. So does a dishonest cop. So does almost anyone, including me.»

(*The Long Good-bye*, p. 78)

The function of having the closing section replaced by Chandler's laconic formula («I hung up», «he/she hung up» or «we hung up») is manifold: first, it achieves speed, since the lack of a closing section as such contributes to create the impression that things are happening fast, that the narrative is action-packed; second, it displays the power relations obtaining between the participants in the telephone conversation, because either Marlowe is being tough or someone is being tough to him or else he has some friends and fellow-sufferers like journalists and butlers; and third, it manages the return to non-interactive discourse unambiguously and with a minimum of narrative energy.

6. CONCLUSION

This analysis of telephone conversations in Chandler's fiction has aimed to show that fictional and non-fictional telephone conversations tend to differ mostly in the structure of opening and closing sections. With regard to opening sections, it has been shown that non-fictional conversations seem to require that the SA sequence be explicit, whereas in fictional telephone conversations –at least in Chandler's– the answer to the summons may be explicit or it may not. The absence of the answer to the summons, in fact, can be regarded as a stylistic trait, a characteristic present in the style of a particular writer, and such seems to be the case in Chandler's novels in general, and in *The Little Sister* and *The Long Good-bye* in particular. With regard to closing sections, the difference between fictional and non-fictional telephone conversations is even greater, since the closing section is an integral, necessary, and often prolix part of non-fictional ones, whereas it is usually kept to a minimum in fictional ones and sometimes it is not there at all. In the case of Philip Marlowe's telephone conversations, the narrative report of the action of ending the conversation by hanging up often appears in place of a closing section. This can be seen as a device frequently used by Chandler, to dramatize the power relations obtaining between Marlowe and his interlocutor.

Finally, the analysis of the opening and closing sections of telephone conversations in Chandler's fiction has stressed the importance of studying

the shift from non-interactive discourse to interactive discourse at the beginning of a dialogue and the shift back to non-interactive discourse at the end of the same dialogue. The successful management of this double shift is one of the pillars on which the texture of fiction rests and this paper has attempted to draw attention to the role it has to play in the understanding of how the linguistic fabric of a novel works.

NOTES

¹ Knight (1980), commenting on Marlowe's method of detective work, has pointed out that Marlowe does not generally operate by following people, searching flats and constructing a chain of detective clues which fit into a pattern - although he sometimes does all these things. His method typically consists in putting together «data that characters lay before him; the archetypal Marlowe scene is to find him alone in his gloomy office: a client or an enemy will telephone or appear to engage his attention» (Knight, 1980: 160).

² This is in fact one of the most characteristic traits of Marlowe's personality: his acute sense of professional independence, of being his own boss. It is also a trait which is present from the very first Marlowe novel: in *The Big Sleep* we learn that Marlowe was fired for insubordination (Chandler, 1976:8). Contemporary private investigators such as V.I. Warshawski or Kinky Friedman are also zealous defendants of their rights to accept or reject a case as it pleases them, a professional habit probably started by Holmes, who according to Dr. Watson would only accept those cases he found odd and inexplicable. The only shortcoming of this otherwise very honourable stance is that the private investigator might find himself or herself out of clients. Chandler, who sometimes incorporates a parody of his own novels in Marlowe's thoughts, shows Marlowe thinking in *The Long Good-bye*: «After that nothing happened for three days. Nobody slugged me or shot at me or called me up on the phone or warned me to keep my nose clean... I just sat there and looked at the wall» (Chandler, 1952: 63).

³ For this necessarily brief exposition of the framework, I will be following Schegloff (1968), Schegloff and Sacks (1973) and Levinson (1983).

⁴ Mick Short has kindly pointed out to me that non-terminality is not always observed in spy-fiction, where the summons of an SA sequence is sometimes used as a signal, a pre-arranged meaningful sequence: the ringing of the telephone itself carries a certain pre-determined content, because it has been previously arranged that the phone will ring a certain number of times and then it will stop. The hearer does not pick up the phone as soon as it rings; instead, she waits and listens to the number of rings to find out whether it is the pre-arranged signal or someone else phoning. If it is the pre-arranged signal, the hearer does not pick up the phone and no answer to the summons is produced. Once the phone has rung for the pre-arranged number of times and stopped, the interaction is complete.

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