Paul Drew & John Heritage (eds.), *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings.* (Studies in interactional sociolinguistics, 8.) Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. x, 580. Hb $79.95, pb $29.95.

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This impressive collection of papers insightfully examines how work is accomplished through talk in various settings including the courtroom (Stephen C. Levinson, J. Maxwell Atkinson, Drew & Heritage); news interviews (Steven E. Clayman, David Greatbach, Emanuel A. Schegloff); classrooms (Levinson); psychiatric interviews (Jörg R. Bergman); the delivery of diagnosis in medical settings (Christian Heath, Douglas W. Maynard); job interviews (Graham Button); gate-keeping interviews which lead to the exclusion of minorities (John J. Gumperz); institutionalized advice-giving by nurses to new mothers in their homes (John Heritage & Sue Sefi); 911 emergency calls (Don H. Zimmerman); and the problematic relationship between troubles-tellings and service encounters (Gail Jefferson & John R. E. Lee).

Despite the range of settings investigated, the separate articles have a coherence and consistent analytic focus that is unusual in a collection of separately authored essays. The unity of the volume arises from three sources. First, all the authors use some version of conversation analysis as a theoretical point of departure. Levinson's study of the relationship between activ-

ity types and language is grounded in the later Wittgenstein's arguments about the inherent diversity of language games, and provides a convincing demonstration that Wittgenstein was correct in not distinguishing speech acts from speech events. In opposition to John Searle and most other speech act theorists, Levinson argues that the inferences required to determine how an utterance constitutes a particular form of action are not a property of the utterance or sentence in isolation, but rather emerge from its placement within a larger activity. Though Wittgenstein's name is not invoked again, this insight is central to all the other papers in the volume as they analyze the meaningfulness of action by embedding strips of talk within the diverse, socially organized practices of language use and inference that dynamically structure the context of institutional work environments. Gumperz continues the analysis of how contextualization cues shape larger patterns of social inequality by looking at how the alternative inferencing patterns signaled by prosody and response patterns in the English of speakers from the Indian subcontinent, vs. speakers from the British Isles, lead to consequential miscommunication, and the denial of positions to Asian applicants.

All the other papers use, as a point of departure, the approach to analysis of talk-in-interaction initiated by the late Harvey Sacks in collaboration with Gail Jefferson and Emanuel Schegloff. Sequential organization – instantiated in a range of different, setting-specific practices and sequence types – provides a major framework for the production and interpretation of action as a temporally unfolding, collaboratively sustained achievement: "rather than starting from sentence meanings, analysis should begin from the study of sequences of actions and the ways in which context forms a resource for their interpretation" (13).

The second factor unifying the papers in the volume is a common focus, across settings, on the activities involved in building questions, and in providing relevant answers to them. While restricting the scope of study in this fashion might seem to exclude a host of speech activities relevant to the organization of talk in the workplace (greetings, narratives etc.), it has the tremendous advantage of providing materials for systematic comparison – among work settings, as well as with various types of organization already well analyzed in non-workplace conversation (e.g. disagreement, questioning, repair etc.) One of the strong findings in this volume is the demonstration of how the contextual particulars of a variety of consequential institutions, including asymmetries in social position and power, are built through systematic restrictions on, and transformations of, the practices that organize talk-in-interaction in less constrained settings. Finally, all the papers ground their analysis in the detailed examination of specific sequences of interaction recorded on audio or video tape. At a time when notions like "discourse" and "practice" sometimes seem to drift free from actual settings and events, this volume provides an example of how a broad and important range of discur-

sive practices can be systematically analyzed within the details of concrete courses of action.

Talk at work begins with an extended introductory chapter which describes the theoretical framework that informs the collection, and also contrasts it with other traditions including sociolinguistics, speech act theory, and discourse analysis. Within linguistics and philosophy, speech acts have frequently been analyzed as psychological rather than social phenomena – i.e. as actions done by single individuals, frequently within a null context, and with the scope of analysis restricted to the boundaries of a single sentence. In contrast, all the papers in the present volume analyze talk as action by embedding one party's talk within larger sequences that are produced through the collaborative work of multiple participants, and are oriented toward the accomplishment of the goals that define the work of specific institutions. Thus both Heath and Maynard examine one of the actions that defines a medical consultation, the production of a diagnosis; and each demonstrates that this is not a unilateral action performed by the doctor alone, but instead emerges through systematic sequences in which the patients are crucial co-participants. In Maynard's data, families who are receiving bad news (a diagnosis that their child is retarded) are co-implicated in the production of this assessment through perspective display sequences in which their evaluation of the child is solicited and incorporated into the diagnosis. Bergman looks at how psychiatrists who are talking to patients describe possibly symptomatic behavior indirectly and through use of the rhetorical device of litotes, i.e. describing something in terms of what it's not rather than what it is, e.g. *not doing so well* (instead of *bad*) or *running across the street not so completely dressed*. Interactively, the task of explicating this formulation with an affirmative description, such as *naked*, falls to the patient, who thereby becomes socially positioned as herself the author of the statement that incriminates her. The relevant framework for the analysis of such a description is not the talk of a single, isolated actor, but rather a sequence of actions spanning the talk of multiple participants. The production of an appropriate subsequent move within this activity requires specific processes of inference, and has the effect of renewing the grounds for consequential institutional identities, such as mental patient. For the papers in this volume, the social character of talk resides not in correlations between features of talk and attributes of participants and settings, but rather in the temporally unfolding processes of action and inference required to build, in concert with others, the features that define particular institutions.

The sequential properties that shape talk in specific institutions into unique, locally relevant patterns of interaction are analyzed in terms of systematic constraints on a larger set of possibilities for the organization of talk in interaction. This comparative framework is made possible by drawing on the cumulative findings of over 25 years of sustained research, begun by

Sacks and his colleagues in the mid 1960s, on the organization of conversation. Thus Button examines a job interview in which the applicant is rejected because, in the judgment of his examiners, he did not even understand the questions he was being asked. However, the interview was structured so that the sequential mechanisms for displaying and negotiating understanding, so as to provide a framework for the accomplishment of intersubjectivity in conversation, were systematically denied the candidate. Paradoxically, these social constraints, which gave its institutional shape to the talk the participants produced together, were used to locate all problems visibly within the mind and actions of a single individual: the applicant who was rejected.

Schegloff, Clayman, and Greatbach all investigate the organization of news interviews. In a rich theoretical paper, probing how context can be demonstrated to be procedurally consequential (e.g. demonstrably attended to by participants as relevant to the organization of their in-situ action), Schegloff uses the Bush–Rather television encounter to explore how the distinctive characteristics of an interview are locally produced (and challenged), on a moment-by-moment basis, through the coordinated actions of parties who are assigned structurally different positions. Greatbach uses the analysis of preference structure in conversation as a comparative framework to study the distinctive organization of disagreement in news-interview panels.

Clayman extends Goffman's speaker-centered notion of footing from multiply laminated frameworks, as found in the talk of a single individual, to analysis of the interactive practices used to do disagreement or support – or to undermine credibility – in news interviews, while maintaining the institutionally relevant neutral stance of the interviewer. A similar comparative framework is used by Atkinson to describe how judges in small claims court systematically construct neutrality by constraining speech practices found in non-institutional conversation, so as to avoid displays of affiliation to the talk of either of the contesting parties. Zimmerman draws together an extended history of research examining many different kinds of phenomena implicated in the organization of 911 emergency calls.

Two papers focus on resources used to contest the definition of the activity in progress, and the way it places participating parties in particular social positions. Jefferson & Lee explore the intricate organization of sequences in which advice is rejected, focusing on how offering advice to someone who has initiated a troubles-telling sequence can be seen as redefining the situation to something closer to a service encounter, in which the party presenting the problem loses his or her status as troubles-teller. Heritage & Sefi provide detailed analysis of how advice-giving is organized in legally mandated interviews with new mothers who resist the imputations of ignorance and incompetence implicit in being the recipient of advice one has not asked for.

Drew provides an extraordinarily rich and subtle analysis of courtroom cross-examination, focusing on how incriminating contrasts are built, and

defended against, within interrogation sequences. The paper provides a host of novel insights about the social and cultural organization of inference, and how this is shaped and contested in consequential settings by specific language choices.

With a strong comparative framework tied to illuminating analysis of how language is itself the primordial locus for human social organization, this collection more than lives up to its goal of describing "how particular institutions are enacted and lived through as accountable patterns of meaning, inference and action" (5). *Talk at work* would make an excellent reader for a course on institutional discourse, and would also serve well as an introduction to current research in the field of conversation analysis. Like its predecessor, Atkinson & Heritage's *Structures of social action* (Cambridge, 1984), it should become a classic.