Chapter 3

The power of Schegloff's work

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My first encounter with the field of research that Emanuel Schegloff, in collaboration with Harvey Sacks and Gail Jefferson, helped to co-found, absolutely and irrevocably changed my life. In 1970 I had just completed my coursework for a Ph.D. in Communications at the University of Pennsylvania and was profoundly unhappy about the inability of the methods and theories of Social Psychology, which constituted one main emphasis of my program, to come to terms with how people in the primordial site of human communication, face-to-face interaction, in fact communicated with each other. Methodologically, the actual lived social world was considered hopelessly chaotic and unstructured, so that reliable data could only be collected in laboratory settings carefully constructed and controlled by the experimenter. Theoretically, all phenomena of interest were presumed to reside within the mental life of the individual, and what was being sought was not the detailed organization of actual social interaction, but instead quite removed hypothetical variables, such as underlying attitudes. A more fruitful approach seemed to be provided by anthropology and cybernetics. To pursue such interests, I obtained a position videotaping and analyzing family therapy sessions at the Philadelphia Child Clinic, an organization that was continuing the cybernetic analysis of communication in family systems originally developed by Gregory Bateson. As Schegloff notes in his interview, therapeutic settings, presumably characterized by pathology in need of a remedy, constituted one of the few places where the analysis of human interaction was officially supported. My new job gave me the opportunity to record and examine in detail a substantial amount of actual face-to-face talk and conduct. However, I became quite disappointed with the institutional assumption that the category "therapy" should be used as a point of departure for all subsequent analysis. This made it impossible to come to terms with how the participants were actually organizing their interaction in concert with each other. For example, it was assumed that one person in the

room, the therapist, not only had special knowledge that the others lacked, but actually understood the family's interaction with each other better than they did themselves.

At this same time, Candy (Marjorie Harness) Goodwin was audio-recording the talk of kids at play on a neighborhood street (later published as *He-Said-She-Said* (Goodwin 1990)). At some point, we looked over the transcripts she was making, and decided to ask the question of how the kids got from one utterance to the next. The world of phenomena this simple question opened up was astounding, and data that until that point had seemed dense and intractable suddenly became subtle, intricate and rich with structure she hadn't even imagined, such as the He-Said-She-Said gossip dispute. I began to explore similar questions about the multi-party construction of action through talk in my videotapes. However, the theoretical frameworks for analysis of discourse then available offered almost no purchase on the phenomena we were investigating. Someone suggested that Candy use Searle's analysis of *Speech Acts* (1970), which had just appeared, to analyze the He-Said-She-Said. This framework, with a theoretical focus restricted to a timeless moment in the mental life of the speaker, and a participant structure that encompassed only the speaker and the speaker's assumptions about a decontextualized, idealized hearer (an addressee never treated as an actual co-participant in the construction of action in his or her own right), offered no analytic insight into the way in which He-Said-She-Said accusations created a context for specific action in the future by moving three structurally different kinds of participants (including a former instantiation of the current addressee) through an ordered sequence of stages in a past culminating in a culturally-organized, semiotically-structured present. In short, with the exception of frameworks being developed by Goffman and Labov which offered crucial insights and points of departure, most of the resources then available for the analysis of talk as action were hopelessly inadequate for coming to terms with the intricate and diverse forms of action we were finding in our data.

After working on her transcripts for several months, Candy showed what she was doing to Labov, who not only responded enthusiastically, but also told us about two people we'd never heard of, Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff, who were also looking at conversation. Indeed, Labov had a collection of mimeographed class lectures by Sacks on conversation that he suggested Candy read. She xeroxed them, and brought them home where I would get a chance to read them every night after I returned from work. This began one of the most intense, stimulating intellectual experiences of our lives. Our own

ability to not only find instances of phenomena described by Sacks and his colleagues in our data, but to use those insights independently and in collaboration with each other to discover new phenomena, demonstrated to us that what this work revealed was not just the brilliant insights of a single scholar, such as Erving Goffman, but a new research field. Different scholars could independently probe in rich, robust data, a host of phenomena central to what it means to be a human being (language, social organization, the social production of meaningful action, etc.) in a way that permitted their separate proposals to be compared and tested, and findings to accumulate. The social nature of not only the phenomena being investigated, but the work itself was vividly demonstrated to us when Gail Jefferson came to the University of Pennsylvania and we began a series of seminars together.

This approach to the study of talk and action provided a radical solution to my unhappiness with existing perspectives in the social sciences. Consider for example the phenomenon of *collaborative utterances*, in which a first speaker brings an utterance, and the sentence visible within it, to a point of possible completion, and then the next speaker adds a new increment to that sentence (Sacks 1992: 144).

Joe:	We were in an automobile discussion,
Henry:	discussing the psychological motives for
Mel:	drag racing on the streets

In so far as the sentence that eventually emerges here is constructed through the talk of three separate participants, it provides an example of elementary human social organization, i.e., an instance of a single course of action built through the differentiated work of multiple parties. However, the resources used to build that social organization are drawn from the defining subject matter of a quite different field: linguistics. Subsequent speakers use grammatical structure (e.g., Mel's placement of a noun phrase after the preposition that ends Henry's talk) to make visible the continuation of a phrase already in progress. Simultaneously, this entire process displays to its addressee (a new boy joining the group) a culturally meaningful action, indeed a construal of events that formulates the speakers as members of a specific social mileau: 1960's teenage hot-rodders. Such practices of building cultural meaning were typically taken to be the special domain of anthropology. In brief, what one finds in Conversation Analysis is an analytic framework that cuts across the solid boundaries policed by the existing social sciences, by analyzing social organization, the details of grammatical use, and culture as integrated, seam-

less components of a common process: the production of meaningful action within talk-in-interaction. Rather than distilling the processes being investigated into a category scheme predetermined by the investigator, and lumping together quite diverse events as manifestations of a hypothetical variable hidden in the mental life of a subject (an attitude, for example), this approach uses the actual details of what people are saying and doing to investigate how they build the events that constitute their lifeworld.

In light of this synthetic perspective, which simultaneously illuminated the details of social organization and grammatical choice, my unhappiness with existing analytic frameworks seemed to emerge from a history in which the social sciences had constituted themselves by each claiming unique control over particular kinds of phenomena (language, social organization, culture, etc.), while trying to differentiate themselves as much as possible from neighboring fields with competing claims. The unfortunate outcome was that central phenomena not only got lost between disciplines, but were actively kept in the shadows by the walls between disciplines that emerged through this process. Thus sociologists could comfortably ignore language structure, precisely because that was the domain of linguistics (Sacks 1963), while for its part, linguistics could turn more and more to a view of language as a quintessentially psychological phenomenon. This partitioning, which created the geography of the contemporary social sciences, now began to resemble the Pope dividing Latin America between Spain and Portugal in a way that not only ignored, but actively distorted, the endogenous organization of the territory so divided. Language structure is far too central an element of human social organization to be left exclusively to linguistics. Schegloff's work constitutes a sustained analysis of the relationship between language structure and the practices used to organize human interaction (e.g., Schegloff 1979, 1996).

One indicator of the power of this approach is its combination of robustness (arising I think from its insistence on looking in detail at what people actually do, combined with a focus on the description and analysis of general, pervasive interactive practices) and ability to accumulate findings about, and understanding of, the domain being investigated. Consider for example Schegloff's "Sequencing in Conversational Openings" (1968). This was, I believe, the first example of Conversation Analysis that was published in a major journal. In many fields such an "ancient" document would be of no more than historical interest, and its relevance would be restricted to the phenomenon named in its title, here Conversational Openings. However, in every course I've taught on conversation, this article has occupied a very prominent place, in large part

because the structures described there not only remain relevant, but actually formed the basis for later developments in the field. For example, in order to explicate analytically how openings produced by different participants were genuine sequences, and not simply individual acts that happened to occur in close proximity to each other, Schegloff developed the notion of *conditional relevance*, roughly the way in which a first action makes relevant a specific kind of next action, creating a field in which not only the occurrence of that second action can be seen to be a next-to-the-first, but equally the *absence* of such an action (e.g., someone who fails/refuses to return a greeting or answer a question) can also be publicly witnessed. This provided what Heritage (1984) has called an architecture for intersubjectivity, as well as a powerful and unique form of context that was incorporated into many later analytic developments, such as Adjacency Pairs and Turn-Taking. The analytic resources used to explicate conversational openings thus had a general power and relevance that extended far beyond the particular phenomenon for which they were first described, and indeed this is a concept that I still cite and use when developing new analysis of my own. Schegloff (1968) contains tools that I still use today.

More generally, Sequential Organization, the extensive description and analysis of how social action is organized through talk within what Schegloff has called the primordial site for human sociality — talk-in-interaction — constitutes one of the most novel and original theories about human social organization, and its relationship to the detailed structure of language, developed in the second half of the twentieth century. Though it provides the primary framework for the emergence of language structure in the lived social world, seminal theorists such as Saussure and Sapir seem to have had no inkling of its relevance or even existence as an ordered domain of structure and action.

The power of this framework to provide insightful analysis of phenomena not initially described by it, was vividly demonstrated to me in my earliest research. In looking at my videotapes of talk in a variety of settings (family dinners, picnics, the back room of a meat market, etc.), it immediately became clear that not only the talk, but also the body was being organized through systematic interactive practices. Thus a turn-at-talk is constituted not by a speaker alone, but instead through ongoing processes of mutual orientation between speaker and hearer. Changes in gaze between the participants led to systematic changes in the emerging structure of utterances and sentences, as speakers both worked to get the gaze of disattending hearers, and redesigned the emerging structure of a sentence as the speaker moved from one type of addressee to another (Goodwin 1979, 1980, 1981). Similarly, a story was not

simply an extended strip of talk produced by a single speaker, an organized text that an anthropologist could collect somewhere and bring back on paper to add to a card file in his or her office, but an interactive field being sustained through the visible embodied work of structurally different kinds of participants, e.g., teller, principal character in the story, focal addressee, etc. (Goodwin 1984). In short, the analytic apparatus being developed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson for the study of talk-in-interaction provided a general framework for the investigation of how human beings build temporally unfolding action within the lived social world, one that encompasses not only talk but also the body.

More recently I have been extending this framework to encompass how participants make use of tools and other features of the setting to build action. Once again, analytic frameworks developed by Schegloff and his colleagues provide crucial points of departure. Thus, in the process of mapping an excavation (see Goodwin 1994 for more detailed analysis), a senior archaeologist gives a directive to a graduate student measuring points in the dirt. Before the addressee has provided any answer whatsoever, the senior archaeologist strongly corrects her. How is it possible to find an answer wrong before it's even been spoken? By virtue of the field opened by the *conditional relevance* of the initial directive, the senior archaeologist can inspect the embodied movements and tool use of the addressee, and find that she is not performing the actions that will lead to the production of a correct answer. The radically new approach to the endogenous production of context offered by Schegloff now encompasses not only subsequent talk, but embodied action and the setting that encompasses it.

In the accompanying interview, Schegloff discusses the issues raised by analysis of institutional, or other specialized forms of discourse, noting in particular the need "to continuously play back and forth between the specialised domain that they study [...] and the ordinary run of human interaction." Some of my current research focuses on Chil, a man able to say only three words, *Yes*, *No*, and *And*, because of a massive stroke in the left hemisphere of his brain (Goodwin 1995, 2000). Such neurologically-impaired individuals have been the subjects of intense study by physicians, neurologists and psycholinguists interested in what such deficits can tell us about how language is organized within the brain. To achieve rigor and precision in this very difficult project, most research has examined the language abilities of a person with aphasia in carefully controlled laboratory settings. While recognizing the great importance of these efforts, in my own research I've been tracking a different animal: the ability of this man to produce meaningful talk and action in the

consequential settings that make up his lifeworld, despite the severity of his linguistic impairment. Clearly, both my methodologies and my analytic tools have been strongly influenced by the work that has accumulated within Conversation Analysis over the past thirty-five years (including my own research on how the body is organized within interaction). Instead of focussing my camera on a single person in a laboratory carrying out an experimental protocol, I have videotaped Chil talking with his family in their home as they carry out the activities that constitute their daily lives (meals, visits to the hardware store, etc.). Despite the extraordinary sparseness of his vocabulary, Chil is in fact a fluent, successful participant in conversation. What makes this possible is the way in which he ties his speech to the talk and action of others, who, for example, state proposals about what he might want to do or say and which he affirms or rejects, leading at times to quite extended sequences. Note that all three of his words presuppose links to other talk. *And* ties other units of talk, such as clauses, to each other. *Yes* and *No* are prototypical examples of second-pair parts used to build a response to something that someone else has said. In essence, the features of sequential organization elucidated by Conversation Analysis provide a framework that enables Chil to use the intact language abilities of others to say what he wants. Instead of focussing on the uniqueness of his situation, this approach uses as a point of departure its continuity with the conversational practices of normal speakers.

Simultaneously, his situation sheds light on talk-in-interaction in general, by forcing the analyst to focus on phenomena that might be taken for granted, or treated as ephemeral, if accompanied by rich talk. Thus, both participants and analysts frequently take for granted their ability to see what a speaker's gesturing hand is doing. However, uncovering the meaning of one of Chil's gestures frequently requires an extended sequence as his interlocutors offer a series of possible glosses. This process highlights the way in which the ability to spontaneously, almost transparently, see the sense of a conversational gesture is in fact a dense, interactive accomplishment as talk and gesture build temporally unfolding meaning by mutually elaborating each other. Though revealed with glaring clarity in Chil's conversation, this rupture between gesture and the talk which makes it understandable is not restricted to interaction with aphasics, but can also be found in normal conversation, though typically in quite special activities such as heckling (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992). In short, as argued by Schegloff here, the analyst of aphasic discourse needs to keep one eye firmly focussed on the practices of normal conversationalists. More generally, the approach that Schegloff helped create for the inves-

tigation of how human beings build elementary forms of social organization through talk embedded within situated action, has extraordinary power.

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