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EMANUEL A. SCHEGLOFF, *Sequence organization in interaction: A primer in conversation analysis, volume 1*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xvi, 316. Hb \$104.00.

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How is conversation organized? This book, the first in a planned series of “primers” by an author who is arguably Conversation Analysis’s (CA) most authoritative exponent, explains in microscopic detail how speakers bring off the sequences of turns that organize their conversation, and thereby prosecute their business with each other.

We start with CA’s most protean unit, the simple adjacency pair (an utterance immediately responded to by the class of utterance it projects, e.g., *Whatcha doin? Nuthin’*), and we end up with large sequences, over many turns at talk per speaker, as they segue from one to the other (a greeting sequence licenses a move to topic; a story prompts a second story; and so on). We are in a landscape where

the rules of linkage are policed on line by the speakers themselves, and have visible interactional consequences. If the expected response to the first part of an adjacency pair doesn't come in good order, there is subsequent trouble. In common with much of pragmatics, CA takes it that speakers understand that deviation from the rule carries implications; the difference is that in CA, it is the speakers themselves who reveal what those implications are in their subsequent talk.

So far I have said "CA" says this or that, rather than use some formulation such as "the author claims" such and such. I do so deliberately, as testament to the unique part that the book's author, the distinguished sociologist Emanuel Schegloff, has played in establishing CA as an accepted arbiter (or, for many people, THE accepted arbiter) of what goes on in language-in-interaction. His preeminence leads one to expect that this book, nominally a "primer" in CA, will be a definitive account by a world authority, and so it is. Schegloff has been directly or indirectly responsible for much of the groundwork for, and the detail of, the findings that he reports, and his mastery of the material is so complete as to make its exposition all but entirely fill the stage. This is not a book in which much room is given to debate even about a given conversational practice, let alone the significance of the project in its wider sociological or linguistic context. The book is meant to be as exhaustive an account as the publishers would permit of phenomena that make sense in CA terms – and *caveat emptor*.

What, then, are the phenomena? Schegloff sets this book out as the first in a series, and has chosen to kick it off with sequence organization, the kind of CA that is furthest away from ethnomethodology, its main intellectual source. This book is not about people's workings out of the social knots in which they find themselves, or at least, it is not about events described as such; it is about those events, but described at the level of their conversational sequential substrate – those stretches of talk that cohere into self-sufficient, completed interactional units. Schegloff's program here is to explain the details of the design of a sequence's opening move, the nature of the space that it leaves in the air to be filled by the next speaker, the ways that other sequences can be inserted between opening and closing, and how sequences can be interrupted, repaired, halted, expanded, restarted, and transformed. The purpose of the book is not to read off what any of those moves adds up to, in the sense of the kind of everyday reasoning work that ethnomethodology would recognize. The unit of analysis is the sequence, not the action it performs.

Schegloff is aware that the general reader (as well as the ethnomethodologist dismayed at the distance that CA has traveled away from its roots) might have wanted to start not with structure, but with the analysis of human action that gives CA its more accessible face. He does provide the reader with a brief sketch of what a treatment of action in CA might look like, near the beginning of the

book (pp. 7–9); but inevitably its brevity raises questions that can't be answered, and readers who want to see how CA answers its critics over the identification of action from sequences of talk will have to wait for Schegloff to release the next installment of his program, or look elsewhere in the CA literature. Schegloff, in this primer, is not to be distracted by debate over what ought to come first in the study of language-in-interaction, nor indeed by any other theoretical, conceptual, or moral debates in which critics have wanted to involve CA.

Let us delve a little into the complexities of sequence organization that Schegloff lays out. The introductory chapter is an opportunity to rehearse some now well-established points of principle for CA: that we are better off understanding what talk does than what it is 'about'; that sequences of talk accomplish actions (though this aspect is, as I mentioned above, not pursued in this book); and that those sequences are formed by speakers' turns as they constrain what others may do next (or, indeed, recast what others have just done, a matter taken up in the later section of the book on "repair"). The next three chapters form both an extensive account of the basic adjacency-pair unit, and an opportunity to school the reader in a range of CA terms and, above all, the CA attitude to analysis: to work from the tape (the publishers' website makes available sound files of some of the extracts in the book), to assume that nothing in the delivery of talk is unimportant, and to resist common-sense glosses of what is happening. None of these principles is spelled out didactically as such; readers must learn by example. However, Schegloff does take the opportunity, in chap. 5, explicitly to address one of CA's more controversial principles: that certain classes of responses to previous utterances bear the mark of the non-normative. The controversy is whether CA's choice of the word "dispreferred" for this class – a usage that goes right back to the foundation of CA – smuggles in a guess about what people privately want. This would be anathema to CA, and Schegloff devotes time to correcting what he clearly sees as critics' misunderstandings of the matter. But this is the nearest the book gets to a classic introductory textbook chapter.

The bulk of the book is a long investigation of how the base adjacency pair can be stretched, filled in, and expanded. The style of each chapter is to establish a basic idea at the outset – for example, in chap. 7, that life can yet be breathed into an apparently over-and-done-with, open-and-shut adjacency pair. Schegloff will then give examples of the practices by which this is done, taking care to establish in the reader's mind that these are just the kind of examples that led to the inductive discovery of the phenomenon in the first place. Thus, to continue with this example, we see speakers expanding the sequence of an adjacency pair in the most minimal way simply by providing an assessment or a receipt (*good*, *say*, or *oh*); or they may expand it by inducing the other speaker to issue a repair of the earlier turn; or they may topicalize something in the earlier turn; and so on. Indeed, at various points throughout the book, Schegloff warns that he won't

be able to list exhaustively all the ways that something in conversation is done, nor even the consequences of doing it in a given way. This is proper caution, but does prompt the reader to wonder whether there is a limit to the catalogue of things that can happen with sequences. If there is, the question is what the principle to the limit might be; and if not, then the reader is entitled to worry about the danger of boundless empiricism. Schegloff does not confront these worries, content to let the material speak for itself.

For the reader who will not be put off by the density of the writing and the systematic chasing down of varieties, exceptions, and deviant cases (often off the page and into long footnotes), there are sparkling insights along the way. For example, Schegloff elegantly diagnoses a certain kind of trouble that for conversationalists can find themselves in (for example, what to do with a compliment) as their having to deal with a sequence reaching a point where there are cross-cutting – indeed, contradictory – preferences as to what to do next. This nicely uses a uniquely CA-theoretical concept, preference organization, both to reveal a problem we would otherwise only have an intuitive feel for, and to explicate how it is that the speakers solve it. The book is studded with such insights, but Schegloff is not wont to highlight them; the tenor of systematic, democratic inquiry is maintained throughout, with each conversational phenomenon given more or less equal weight.

To be sure, the lack of shading, added to the density of the writing, the uncompromising intensity of analysis, the deliberate narrowness of the intellectual horizon, and the absence of debate makes this book a dubious candidate for a “primer” in CA, in the sense of an elementary introduction. The reader wholly new to CA would be better off with any of the following: ten Have 2007, Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998, Levinson 1983, Nofsinger 1991, or Wooffitt 2005. For any reader with at least a working sense of the CA project, on the other hand, this book is no less than a tour de force and will be appreciated as an instant classic. There has never before been such an exhaustive account of conversational sequence, at such a magisterial level; and there is no doubt that as the series continues, these “primers” will add up not to a mere survey of what Conversation Analysis can offer our understanding of language in interaction, but rather its most authoritative, state-of-the-art manifesto.

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