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Emanuel A. Schegloff, *Sequence Organization in Interaction: A Primer in Conversation Analysis*, Volume 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xvi+300pp.
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I have no doubt whatsoever that this book will become and remain the definitive work on the analysis of sequencing in conversation and that the projected series of volumes on conversation analysis (CA) as a whole will become and remain the definitive work on CA. It is thorough, comprehensive, rigorous and accessible to beginners and seasoned practitioners alike. And this is no more or less than we should expect from one of the founders of CA itself with a remarkable publication record in the field spanning some 40 years.

When the book arrived in the mail, I immediately leapt to the wrong conclusion: that the “sequence” of the title indicated that the central theme would be the turn-taking (or multi-party) problem – the question of who gets to speak in a conversation and when. Indeed “sequence”, “sequential” and so on have been used this way by several conversation analysts including Sacks himself (see Sacks, 1970; McHoul, 2005). Yet, while aspects of turn-taking do turn up in the book where required, along with matters such as repair, topic and preference organisation, the central theme of this work is the organisation of talk in terms of what Schegloff marks as the central unit of sequencing: the adjacency pair. ⁱ

Adjacency pairs consist of two, often but not always, contiguous turns at talk: a first pair part (FPP) spoken by one speaker and a second (SPP) by another. They consist then of such familiar things as:

question + answer
greeting + greeting
offer + acceptance/rejection
request + granting/refusal
telling + return telling

Schegloff’s take on this is that fundamental (or “base”) adjacency pairs are the ultimate building blocks for longer, and sometimes extremely long, stretches of talk. How this is accomplished by actual speakers in actual conversations is by what Schegloff refers to as “expansion”. Accordingly, the first seven of the book’s fourteen chapters are devoted entirely to the achievement of expansion and the remaining seven concern corollaries of the expansion phenomenon, one of which I will deal with in some detail below precisely because of its exceptionality: “topic-proffering sequences”.

Expansions of adjacency pairs occur in three fundamental ways: as *pre*-expansions, *insert* expansions and *post*-expansions and, significantly enough (bolstering Schegloff's case for the fundamental unit argument), these expansions are often, but not always, themselves constructed as adjacency pairs. The neatness of this approach cannot be underestimated. It shows how massively conversational sequences get worked up as nested turns and how this nesting works around the fundamental sense (for participants) that things get done in conversations by virtue of the upcoming arrival of something, a SPP, and then by virtue of the base adjacency pair's consequences for the rest of the talk. The first of these is best instanced by pre-expansions; things such as pre-invitations (pp.29-34).

Invitations are tricky matters. They can meet with acceptance or refusal as their SPPs. And, as Schegloff shows with meticulous attention to detail (which I cannot rehearse here, see chapter 5), the first of these (acceptance) is preferred and the second (refusal) is dispreferred — where these terms, “preferred” and “dispreferred” refer to “a social/interactional feature of sequences ... *not a psychological one*” (p.61; original italics). To this extent, both parties to an invitation, inviter and invitee, may have an interest in avoiding an upcoming SSP in its dispreferred form. (And this goes for a whole range of other adjacency pairs, not just for invitations.) The pre-invitation is a solution to this problem.

Taking an example from Schegloff, we can see this at work (p.31). Here John wants to invite Judy (and just possibly a third party) over for a talk.

- 1 Jud: Hi John.
- 2 Joh: Ha you doin-<say what `r you doing.
- 3 Jud: Well, we're going out. Why.

Line 2 is the pre-invitation. What it does is to foreshadow a possible upcoming invitation, contingent upon Judy (in the pre-SPP) saying, for example, that she has no plans for the evening or some such kind of response. If she does that, John can know that the dispreferred base SPP, a refusal, is less likely than the preferred option, an acceptance. As it turns out, Judy's response to the pre-invitation signals that, were he to have simply made the invitation (that is, without the pre-), the response would have been in the dispreferred form, a refusal. The pre- technique, therefore, avoids the arrival of both the FPP itself, the invitation, and the dispreferred SPP that would have been the likely response to it.

What we see here — and this is but a tiny fraction of what Schegloff has to say about pre-expansions (he deals in copious detail with six types of them) — is not merely a general feature of conversational structure; it is that, but it is also a highly specific and locally useable technique for getting some particular thing done, here and now, in this place, by these particular participants. This is one of the main, as it were, theoretical-methodological upshots of this book. It is aptly signalled by one of the book's epigraphs from Goethe: “The general and the

particular converge; the particular is the general appearing under various conditions". Schegloff, dare I say, expands on this in his final chapter, "Summary and Applications" (which I strongly advise any reader to look at first). His remarks are important for anyone who still thinks that CA is either purely structure-seeking (nomothetic) or purely a "micro" indulgence in transcript fragments (idiographic). He writes:

... saying of some turn (or turn-constructive unit, or series of turns) that it is a pre-invitation, or an insert expansion, or a repair sequence, etc. is not the *end* of analysis; indeed, it is not even the *beginning* of analysis. It is the *preparation* of a bit of the target data for analytic inspection, with a candidate possible direction of analysis ready for assessment (pp.260-261; original italics).

Let's have a look at this policy at work in a particular instance, one kind of insert expansion.

Insert expansions consist of a pair (or several pairs) of turns occurring in the space between the base FPP and the base SSP. They are, if you like, wedged in between the two primary parts of the base adjacency pair. Schegloff makes a further and extremely interesting distinction between two types of insertion: those which orient themselves backwards with respect to the already uttered FPP and those which orient themselves forwards to the yet-to-be-uttered SPP. These two, post-first insert expansions and pre-second insert expansions, Schegloff claims, are qualitatively different as we shall see after looking at an example (p.102).

1 A: Were you uh you were in therapy with a private doctor?
2 B: Yah.
3 A: Have you ever tried a clinic?
4 B: What?
5 A: Have you ever tried a clinic?
6 B: ((sigh)) No, I don't want to go to a clinic.

Here lines 3 and 6 constitute a base adjacency pair. Lines 4 and 5 are the insert expansion oriented in some way to the FPP. What I find interesting about this is Schegloff's claim that such post-firsts are routinely accomplished as "repairs" (pp.100-106). This is one, and probably the only one, point on which I am not completely convinced by Schegloff's handling of the matter. Though my uptake of it could be considered a minor quibble – which it probably is – it may have some consequences for Schegloff's general structural claim about the qualitative differences between post-firsts and pre-second.

What I'm trying to get at here is that I am not completely convinced that, for example – though it goes for some other cases too – lines 4 and 5 above do actually constitute a repair, with line 4 as the "other initiation" of the correction and line 5 as the "self correction". On one reading my objection is weak. This first take hears B's "What?" as a signal that he has not properly heard A's question

and is asking for a repeat. Here I would simply have to ask: is requesting a repeat a form of initiating a correction? It would seem *prima facie* not to be, at least in the sense that turns 3 and 5 are identical in every respect. A is effectively and hearably bringing the implication that precisely nothing was in need of correction.

The second reading brings, I think, a slightly stronger argument against the “repair” thesis concerning post-first insertions. Here we could hear “What?” as some kind of objection to (or at least disagreement with) A’s very suggestion that B attend a clinic for whatever problem B has; and the emphasis + questioning intonation at least suggest the plausibility of this reading – though prolongation of the vowel would have convinced me somewhat more. Again, and I necessarily leave the question dangling: is an expression of objection to, or disagreement with, a suggestion or piece of advice strictly an instance of repair?ⁱⁱ

So there’s at least a glimmer of a possibility that post-first insertions do things other than just repair and this has consequences for Schegloff’s claim about the qualitative distinction between post-firsts and pre-seconds. That is, if my suspicions carry any weight at all (and this would require much further analytic investigation) the following may need some revision:

“Post-first” insert sequences are “generic” in the sense that they are not differentiated according to the type of sequence in which they figure. Other-initiated repair is a practice with its own characteristics and organization fitted into a larger organization of repair which provides resources for dealing with trouble.... “Pre-second” insert expansions are (with few exceptions) type-specific.... That is, these types of insert sequences are preliminary to some particular type of second pair part which has been made relevant next by the type of first pair part to which it is responding (p.106).

If I’m right, then the contrast (generic vs. type-specific) may not be quite so definite as it is stated here. Interestingly enough, in the sentence following the above passage, Schegloff goes on to say that post-firsts in fact *clarify* their respective FPPs. In many respects, I’m much happier with this formulation, on the proviso we accept that not all clarifications are repairs and vice versa. Still, in the absence of further investigation, the point remains moot; and, besides, who am I to go picking bones with Manny Schegloff where any aspect of CA is concerned?!

Now here’s one thing I strongly admire about this book and about Schegloff’s approach generally. One way of putting this is to say that he’s not afraid of exceptions to his own overall findings; in fact, he often uses them to distinct analytic advantage. I’m mindful here of an early paper by Schegloff on the openings of phone calls (Schegloff, 1968). Having put forward a highly intuitive rule, that persons called take first turn and callers take second turn, Schegloff decides to reject this generalisation on the basis of a single piece of data where the person called is distracted at the very point of their turn slot and, hence, does not

speak first. This one piece of data convinces Schegloff that the first “turn” is in fact the phone ringing, occasioned, of course, by the caller. So the missing “first turn” turns out actually to be a missing *second* turn: a finding with significant consequences for the analysis of phone talk that I have no space to rehearse here.

The present book contains something similar, though on a larger scale. Up until the start of chapter 8, Schegloff works with (again a highly intuitive) hypothesis, or proto-rule: “preferred responses are sequence-closure relevant and dispreferred responses are sequence-expansion-relevant” (p.169). That is, when the parties are audibly in “agreement”, there’s little more to be said on that topic and a new sequence is on the cards. When there’s trouble, disagreement, etc. there’s cause for expansion. But in chapter 8, Schegloff puts forward a class of sequences that reverse this proto-rule. These are “topic-proffering” sequences. They routinely begin with “questions” or, more strictly, with utterances in interrogative form. Here’s Schegloff’s first example.

1 Ava: °That’s goo[d]
 2 Bee: [Dihyuh have any-cl- You have a class
 3 with Billy this te:rm?

Having reached the end of a topic sequence, Bee opens up the possibility of “Billy” becoming the next topic of talk and she does this with a characteristic interrogative. Following this Ava offers a clearly preferred response: “Yeh he’s in my abnormal [psychology] class”. What’s significant about this is that the preferred response generates further talk to that topic, while a dispreferred would tend to the opposite pole: sequence closure. Hence a reversal of the proto-rule. A rough picture of this could be as follows:

FPP	“Question”	and	Topic-proffering
	Interrogative <i>form</i> + specific <i>content</i> [“Billy”, etc.]	and	Action performed
SPP	Positive/preferred	or	Negative/dispreferred
	Sequence expanded	or	Sequence truncated
	Topic-sequence opened	or	Topic-sequence closed

Hence we have a structure that reverses the regularly found relations between preferreds/dispreferreds and sequence expansions/sequence closures. As ever, thinking back to Goethe, it is never good enough to close off one’s formulations of the general (“rule”) until all the particulars are in. And all the particulars – with a nod in the direction of Sir Karl Popper – are never in.

Finally, something of further importance arises from my little sketch above, hence the indicative italics. That is, FPPs routinely consist of three ingredients: *form*, *content* and *action*. And Schegloff, throughout the book, makes a good deal of this as an important way of looking at adjacency pairs. For example the FPP, discussed in several places in the book, “Would you like a cup of coffee?” has an interrogative *form* (it looks on the surface like a question). It has particular *content* (reference to someone’s present desires, coffee, etc.). And it performs a particular *action* (offering). And in such circumstances at least the form/ action couplet is routinely doubly acknowledged in the SPP: say, “Yes, thank you very much” or “No thanks, I’ve just had one”. The “yes” or “no” answer the *question*, while the “thank you” or “thanks” acknowledge the *offer*. And we can see this no more clearly than in the instance of (joking or cheeky) SPPs that deliberately take the actional aspect of the FPP “in the wrong way”.

(Coulter, 1976: 1; modified)

Teacher: How many people don’t have paper? ((Looks around))
 Student: Five.

Significantly enough then, not just a single utterance (the FPP) “contains” social-actional significance. At least the whole adjacency pair and, if any, its expansions, need to be inspected before that can be seen (cf. McHoul, 1987) – and in actual (transcribed) instances. This puts a whole new complexion on studies of discourse and society generally and shows how CA can be critical to such studies. In particular, and this is a very important point which Schegloff modestly relegates to a footnote (p.78, fn10), the old mechanical stand-by of speech-act theory (to name just one candidate) may now have a more considered and alternative; one that is responsive to actual materials, open to re-analysis, and thereby promising a firmly grounded approach to the critical question of how discourse, in and as actual practice, accomplishes social facts.

Notes

ⁱ Shegloff makes the following distinctions which put the matter succinctly:

The organization of practices for turn-taking serves to provide for the *distribution of opportunities to talk* among parties to an interaction. The organization of practices for constructing turns-at-talk serves to shape *what is said in those opportunities and how*. The practices of action formation allow the composition of a turn ... in the *position* in which it is placed, to constitute *some possible recognizable action*, and to be understandable as *some possible action* – that is, *what is done in those opportunities*. Sequence organization – organized around its core sequential practice and unit, the adjacency pair – relates a series of these productions into *coherent courses*

of action, and thereby harnesses the resources of talk-in-interaction to getting things done (p.263; original italics).

ii A basic membership-categorisation analysis could show that there are differences between the predicates [seeing {being in therapy with?} a private doctor] and [being a clinic patient]. The first could possibly be ascribed to just about anybody in the society; the second to someone with a more chronic condition. B's "What?" would seem, then, to be an attempt to stave off his/her being taken as a possible incumbent in the latter category.

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