

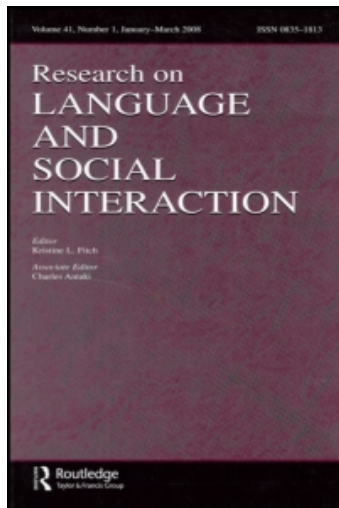
This article was downloaded by: [informa internal users]

On: 23 June 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 755239602]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Research on Language & Social Interaction

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t775653697>

Commentary on Stivers and Rossano: “Mobilizing Response”

Emanuel A. Schegloff^a

^a Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles

Online publication date: 12 February 2010

To cite this Article Schegloff, Emanuel A.(2010) 'Commentary on Stivers and Rossano: “Mobilizing Response”', Research on Language & Social Interaction, 43: 1, 38 – 48

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/08351810903471282

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08351810903471282>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Commentary on Stivers and Rossano: “Mobilizing Response”

Emanuel A. Schegloff
Department of Sociology
University of California, Los Angeles

My engagement with Stivers and Rossano’s “Mobilizing Response” (henceforth S&R and MR, 2010/this issue) has led me in many directions, of which space limitations confine me to four.

1. The first is focused on the relationship between two conceptions of the calling of conversation analysis (CA): One is centered on the organization of action in interaction, the organizations of practices for accomplishing those actions and courses of action, and the basic infrastructure for the whole domain—turns and their form and distribution; actions and their trajectories; troubles and their resolution; language as an interface with the physical, social, cultural, emotional, and other worlds that humans live in, grasp and navigate, etc. The other conception is centered on embodied actors, bringing the elements of the organization of human sociality just mentioned into being moment by moment in a particular place, with particular others, vying with or yielding to one another, etc. Both are important, but for me the former is the crux of our undertaking; the title “Mobilizing Response” suggests that for S&R the latter is the target.
2. The second direction was dominated by a recurrent sense that the analyses of the data extracts that were to supply the empirical grounding of the argument were too often wide or shy of the mark, particularly with respect (a) to the claim that the targeted utterances were sequence initial and (b) to the assignment of action terms to characterize them—these shortcomings being especially worrisome since the focus of their claims was on other aspects of these utterances.
3. The third direction concerned a persistent uneasiness with several of the arguments being put forward and the gap between them and the data analyses. The most problematic of these was (for me, at least) the notion of differentials in “pressure on a recipient to respond,” and what (sort of) evidence could be brought to bear in support of such a claim that might also undermine it.

I am indebted (once again) to my colleagues John Heritage and Gene Lerner for their critical reading of earlier drafts and their thoughtful advice on matters of substance, balance, and nuance. If there remain rough spots in the text, the responsibility is entirely mine.

Correspondence should be sent to Emanuel A. Schegloff, Department of Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles, 264 Haines Hall, 375 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1551. E-mail: schegloff@soc.ucla.edu

4. The fourth direction dawned gradually on me as I tried to formulate an alternative to S&R's undertaking; when I got it under some control, I found myself wondering whether S&R's project might after all be a good way to proceed, if only they would forego the critical grounding of their project (which I think to be for the most part ill considered) in favor of the affirmative grounds for pursuing it.

My hope is that each of these brief discussions merits (and will repay) serious attention.

SOME ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE: WHAT IS AT THE CORE OF CA'S ENTERPRISE?

S&R begin their introduction this way: "A fundamental puzzle in the organization of social interaction concerns how one individual elicits a response from another." And a few pages later, they begin their "background" discussion like this:

With particular actions, Schegloff asserts, social actors impose on cointeractants the normative obligation to perform a particular type-fitted response at the first possible opportunity. Specifically, "given the first [utterance], 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—all this provided by the occurrence of the first item" (Schegloff, 1968, p. 1083). Typical cases of social actions that make relevant a type-fitted response include offers, requests for action, and requests for information. (2010/this issue, p. 5)

I find this "actor-centric" way of formulating the central issue to which their article is addressed seriously problematic.

First, their introduction takes the central problem to be the relationship between two individual persons, and, specifically, how one of them gets the other to respond. And the lead-in to the Background section conveys that that is what the quotation that follows was addressed to: "With particular actions, Schegloff asserts, social actors impose on cointeractants the normative obligation to perform a particular type-fitted response at the first possible opportunity." This casts the matter as one of a speaker imposing on a recipient—what one actor does to another, with the implication (in the word "impose") of "against their resistance or withholding." But the quotation that follows is *not* about the *relation between actors*; it invokes a *relationship of one utterance to another*. Actually the word "utterance" (in brackets in the first quotation) has been supplied by S&R. The text in the original was as follows:

The property of conditional relevance is formulated to address two problems. The first of these is: How can we rigorously talk about two items as a sequenced pair of items, rather than as two separate units, one of which might happen to follow the other? The second problem is: How can we, in a sociologically meaningful and rigorous way, talk about the "absence" of an item; numerous things are not present at any point in a conversation, yet only some have a relevance that would allow them to be seen as "absent." Some items are, so to speak, "officially absent." It is to address these problems that the notion of conditional relevance is introduced. 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 non-occurrence it can be seen to be officially absent—all this provided by the occurrence of the first item. (Schegloff, 1968, p. 1083)

Notice that there is no mention of actors here; the objects being described are "items"—utterances or actions, not people. But when S&R sum up the virtues of this line of inquiry, they introduce

“speakers” and their “failures.” The difference is far reaching. In many ways it echoes in reverse the distinction Erving Goffman (1967) drew at the end of his preface to his volume, *Interaction Ritual*: “Not, then, men and their moments; rather, moments and their men.” Applied to conversation analysis, what was invoked in the just-quoted passage from Schegloff’s 1968 paper is an address to *practices and actions*, and the *organizations of practice that underwrite all interaction*—what shapes and defines the “moments.” It is these—the essentially anonymous structures of the occasions themselves—that we must elucidate in order to have the tools to effectively analyze the particulars of singular episodes of interaction and the conduct of their participants. It is the practices informing and underlying the conduct of particular individuals on particular occasions that is the distinctive basis for CA’s contribution, at least as I understand it.

Second, in the same paragraph with which they begin, S&R follow the citation by offering as prototypes, “Typical cases of social actions that make relevant a type-fitted response include offers, requests for action, and requests for information”—all action types commonly realized in question formats, a category that they propose to retire in favor of its deconstructed elements. But it was not on question–answer sequences (or other sequence types realized via question–answer sequences) that adjacency pairs (then called “utterance pairs”) were first described by me, but summons–answer sequences (1968).¹ Might S&R accept summons–answer sequences as obligating a response without respect to gaze, prosody, morphosyntax, or epistemics? If that is so, then we have a sequence type—centered on its first pair-part, a summons—whose initiating action per se makes relevant, or obligates, a response. Withholding a response is doing an action—for example, “snubbing” the summoner, i.e., rejecting the move to open an interaction or confirm one’s presence and in-principle availability. If so, then there is at least one sequence type—one which commonly launches a new spate of talk—that does not appear to be in principle reducible to a conjunction of morphosyntax, prosody, epistemics, and gaze.²

It is the elements of conduct and the occasions they organize, not their deployers, that occupy the central role in CA’s ways of understanding talk and other conduct-in-interaction. Those for whom the language and linguistic forms—whether grammatical, prosodic, semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, etc.—are central are basically linguists who have recognized what CA has to contribute to their enterprise and who undertake to reciprocate; academically, they are found in departments in the Humanities (at UCLA, for example, in Applied Linguistics and Asian Languages and Cultures; at a few universities, in Departments of Linguistics; elsewhere in Departments of English, German, Finnish, etc.). Those for whom actors, social relationships, identities, institutional practices, projects, roles, and conflicts are central are basically sociologists, anthropologists, or social psychologists who have recognized what CA has to contribute to their enterprise;

¹In fact, when I first addressed myself to “questions” as an analytic target, it was to call into question prevalent views of them: “On Some Questions and Ambiguities in Conversation” was first delivered in April, 1972, first circulated by Steve Levinson and Gerald Gazdar in *Pragmatics Microfiche* in 1976, and first formally published in Atkinson and Heritage, 1984.

²Or would S&R dismiss the relevance of these as they appear to do when they write: “The inclusion of multiple response-mobilizing turn-design features leads to higher response relevance than the inclusion of fewer or no features. There is a clear ‘ceiling effect’ with actions that are ritualized and/or leave little room for design variation such as greetings and farewells” (2010/*this issue*, p. 27). Is this a ‘ceiling effect’ or a ‘cellar effect’? What is striking is that summonses, greetings, and farewells do *not* mandate any of the features S&R treat as the sine qua non of mandating response—not lexicomorpho-syntax, not distinctive interrogative prosody, not epistemics, and not gaze. Should they simply be dismissed as an inconvenience?

academically, they are found in Social Science Departments (most often in Sociology or Communication). Because Sacks and I were both trained in Departments of Sociology (and Gail Jefferson's degree was in the then-named School of Social Sciences at the University of California, Irvine), our work and that of our colleagues and students (Clayman, Drew, Heritage, Lerner, Maynard, Raymond, Zimmerman, et al.) has often encompassed both the so-called "pure" CA and its so-called "applied" realization in person-populated episodes of interaction. Both are valued and valuable, but it is important to keep the difference in mind—and in practice.

But CA, as I understand it, is most centrally focused on (a) the elements of conduct (principal among them actions); (b) the practices by which those elements are constituted, shaped, and deployed; and (c) the organizations of those practices that underwrite the forms and trajectories of human interaction, and the ways in which it shapes human experience. This is conveyed in the nomenclature that has presented itself as apt for representing the constitutive organizations of practice that appear fundamental to the organization of interaction: turn-taking organization and the organization of turns; the organization of action sequences; the organization of repair; the practices of word selection, referring, categorizing; the overall structural organization of the unit "a single conversation"—all of them are addressed to the empirically grounded accounts of what some practice(s) of talking or other domains of conduct-in-interaction are used to do, how they are implemented and responded to, where they are located and the terms of such locating, and so forth. What is central is the organization of the conduct.

To be sure, the forms of language through which much interaction is expressed are indispensable and inescapable instruments of these elements, practices, and organizations of practice, as are the other resources by which conduct-in-interactions is inflected and conveyed—gaze, gesture, posture, exploitation of the immediate physical environment, etc. Each of them deserves its own fellowship of inquiry and intersection with CA.

And, to be sure, there are multiple orders of relationship informing the conduct of parties to interaction, multiple contexts in which their interactions may play themselves out, various institutional arrangements under whose auspices these identities, relationships, contexts, and other social-structural arrangements such as networks get played out, etc. Each of them deserves its own fellowship of inquiry and intersection with CA.

But the study of interaction as implemented by CA is addressed not to these forms, resources, and environments per se, but to the contribution they make to—their realization *as* and incorporation *into*—the elements of conduct, the practices by which those elements are deployed, and the organizations of those practices that are the constitutive components of human interaction; it is the action that gives these resources their organizational relevance. Although felicity of expression and accessibility to readership often engender the metaphor of people using or deploying the practices, the more serious stance emphasizes the robustness of the organizations of practice and the ways in which they shape the conduct of this or that transient congregation of persons. Again, not persons and their moments, but the organization of those moments.

But where *do* the people come into the picture? They are the users of the organizations of practice we describe—if we get it right. On the one hand, they employ the practices of talking and other conduct to implement the actions they accomplish; on the other hand, they come to understand what another has done by analyzing the talk and other conduct—bit by incremental bit in real time—for the *practices* of talking and the other conduct-in-interaction and their *position* in the organizations that undergird interaction that constitute them for what they are. In the end, describing the practices of conduct-in-interaction gets us an understanding of what the parties

are/were up to, and in a fashion not accessible to addressing the data as vernacularly motivated action. It works in one direction, and not in the other, because (if we get it right) the parties' conduct is organized and understood by them precisely by reference to the organization of action-in-interaction that we have described.

SOME ISSUES OF DATA ANALYSIS: DETAILS, DETAILS, DETAILS

If I understand their article correctly, the problem or question S&R mean to address is how to understand the variable success of sequence-initiating utterances in actually “mobilizing response.” Their solution is to deconstruct the “sequence-initiating utterance” into six components: the action being done, the sequential position in which it is done, its lexico-morphosyntactic design, its prosodic delivery, its built-in epistemic stance, and the gaze deployment of its speaker. In fact, however, their treatment of the action being done is somewhat cavalier—more a matter of name assignment (request, announcement, noticing, etc.) than of analysis that grounds the name assignment in observable features of the utterance; and the sequential position is equally so, being disposed of by the assertion of “sequence-initiating.” In the paragraphs that follow, I address what seem to me to be problems in their treatment of both these respects—critical because there can be little doubt that they are indispensable features of any analysis of talk-in-interaction.

One of the key tasks of researchers in developing claims for a phenomenon is not to sacrifice the detailed examination of single cases on the altar of broad claims—especially when the cases are meant as evidence for the broad claim; *one of the key tasks of readers* is to examine the detailed analysis of single cases as episodes with their own reality, deserving of their own rigorous analysis without respect to their bearing on the larger argument for which they are being put forward. In what follows, I suggest the bases of my reservations for a handful of the instances—three for each feature. Space considerations preclude the reproduction here of the data extracts and pertinent treatment by S&R, so readers are urged to turn to the identified parts of their article to be read in conjunction with the text that follows.

Are the Target Turns Sequentially Initial and Therefore Sequentially Implicative for a Reply?

(a) *Extract 11, the paragraph in which it is included, and the paragraph after that (ending in “Cheng’s assessment”); target turn by Cheng: “This is pretty good.”* Why is this not to be understood by reference to the earlier exchange described by S&R, in which “As they are both eating dessert, Jill offers Cheng a second piece of dessert that he says he may have after they walk,” and “During a lapse, Cheng has cleaned his plate” This assessment surely seems related to the preceding exchange, and is therefore *not* sequence-initial—perhaps even sequence-final, as assessments frequently are.

(b) *Extract 13, and the paragraph of which it is part; target turn by Mark: “It’s not bad.”* Given S&R’s account that “Just prior to this Kim has declared one kind of ravioli the best of all and Mark has read from the package what it is made of. Here, in line 1, Mark makes a global assessment of the ravioli they have been eating . . .,” in what sense is this utterance sequence initial?

(c) *Extract 14, and the paragraph in which it is embedded; Target turn by B: “And I buy these ((leaves)) too at the Rummola” (in Italian).* S&R’s account is that “Several minutes earlier A had asked B where she buys one of the materials. In line 3, B announces that another material (the leaves) can also be purchased at the shop mentioned previously.” It is unclear in what sense this is an “announcement” rather than more of the answering; in fact, that appears to be built into the prior turn’s construction by the inclusion of “also”/*anche*, which marks this as an addition to something earlier (and something A had *not* asked about; no wonder there is no uptake!). This extract exemplifies trouble on both fronts—the sequence-initial positioning and the action characterization; one might suspect that, having opted for the action types “announcing, assessing, and noticing” as “noncanonical” types of first pair-parts, one could easily be drawn to those characterizations in data analysis and presentation.

Are the Target Turns Instances of the Proposed Action Types and Ones That Have Been Treated as Making Second Pair-Parts Relevant Next?

(d) *Extract 12, the paragraph in which it is embedded and the two that follow it, as well as the second last paragraph of the section, just before the section heading “Reconsidering Canonical Actions.”* The action being realized in the target turns is here first characterized as “assessing” (in the lines preceding the text of the extract). Subsequently S&R entertain the possibility of “complaining,” but dismiss it because neither of the addressees have any responsibility for cleaning the tableware. Finally, they consider “noticing,” but it not clear what position they end up with on this count. My sense of the data (with virtually no exposure to the video data, which I may have seen once or twice several years ago) is that “noticing” is the most apt characterization. The fact that “dirty” is an assessment term does not make the turn’s action be an assessment; it conveys the noticing of the undesirable state of the tableware. Though S&R suggest that “they are just beginning a meal so cleaning up is certainly not relevant right at this moment,” one could as easily conjecture that, at the beginning of the meal, the observation is even more relevant, and more immediately relevant. Might it be addressed not to the others, but as an outloud (or what Goffman [1978] called “self-talk”)? It seems to be clearly self-addressed, and serves as an account for the physical actions Luisa is undertaking; it is the “just-noticed-ness” that warrants her picking up the dishes. On this view, the turn in question clearly *is* implicated in a sequence; perhaps not a sequence of talk but of actions—her own actions. And, as an alternative to her doing a complaint or being “a taskmaster,” might the turn be heard as possibly apologetic (with visitor and camera there to see the dirty dishes)?

(e) *Extract 20, the two paragraphs that precede it and the line that follows it.* Here I am less concerned with the target turns (“I put raisins in the salad. (.) D’you like that?”) than I am with the sentence following the data extract. Here, then, what is at issue is not the article’s argument itself, but the adequacy of the analysis of the extract as an interactional exchange with its own integrity. S&R understand the response that Kim extracts from Mark as one in which “. . . he confirms liking the addition of raisins.” I must say it seems more grudging than that to me. He does *not* “confirm liking the addition of raisins;” that would be something like “I love raisins in salad.” Instead, he seems specifically *to avoid saying that*, declaring his love for *raisins*, and *not* for what she has *done* with them.

(f) *Extract 21, with the sequence in which it is embedded and the preceding paragraph.* It is unclear to me how this turn (“Bear’s waiting to see you,” where “Bear” is their pet cat) can be treated as a “request;” and adding “indirect” doesn’t solve anything if left without analysis that shows how it comes to be that. On the face of it, this turn in each of its sayings gets constructed as a noticing, or a mention of a noticing, or directing another’s attention to a noticed something. A requesting might be something like, “Hey Cheng, say ‘hello’ to Bear.” One needs analysis to support such a claim, especially when making an argument turn on it.

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ARGUMENT

1. Having begun by ostensibly showing that “These cases of canonical first pair-parts provide compelling evidence that in sequence-initial position, speakers mobilize recipient response through the action they perform” (2010/this issue, p. 7), they go on to cast doubt on this stance and ask/conjecture, “Is it possible that what mobilizes response in canonical actions is the inclusion of multiple of these features in the construction of the action?” And at the very end, they conclude, “With respect to the position put forward by Schegloff and Sacks, we argue that action is indeed critical, but it is not, on its own, sufficient, except with highly ritualized actions such as greetings and farewells,” though in what sense action “is critical” remains at best inexplicit, and at worst, pro forma or totally obscure. For a field that has been built around actions as a/the central building block of talk- and other conduct-in-interaction, this is a nontrivial claim to make, and the evidence for it should be substantial.
2. A key section in S&R’s argument is the one titled “Assessments and Their Design” (2010/this issue, pp. 10–17).
 - (a) The section is motivated by the very end of the preceding section: “Although our data support Pomerantz’s finding that assessments are commonly responded to, we also observe that they sometimes fail to mobilize response and in such cases no sanctioning has been observed” (2010/this issue, p. 10). However, S&R have previously noted with respect to questions that

The regularity and reliability of response that is exemplified in Extracts 2–4 is further supported by a previous report that in English 85% of responses to questions were answers (Stivers & Robinson, 2006). Finally, a recent study across 10 languages shows that approximately 90% of requests for information receive a response that either answers the question or deals with an inability to answer (Stivers et al., 2009). (2010/this issue, p. 6)

This suggests that questions may also “sometimes fail to mobilize response and in such cases no sanctioning has been observed,” and it is unclear why assessments are cast as prominently requiring alternative treatment.

- (b) In bringing this section to a close, S&R remark about assessments that “. . . the inclusion of, for instance, interrogative syntax does not transform these assessments into requests for information” (2010/this issue, p. 17). Of course not! Who would have thought that? But why not “. . . into requests for alignment or agreement”? More generally: Is it not arbitrary playing with analytic terminology to continue to call it “an assessment’ with turn-design features of interrogative syntax and prosody,” instead of recategorizing the action as “a request for aligning assessment”? It is arbitrary to say “it is not a changed action, it is changed design features.”

- (c) Throughout the article, S&R invoke “hold[ing] the recipient more accountable for not responding than without these features” (here taken from 2010/this issue, p. 16). Indeed, a whole section is titled “Turn Design and Response Pressure.” What would evidence for these claims for differential “accountability” or differential “response pressure” look like—in particular in dealing with single cases? Without evidence, how can this claim be more than a common-sense grasp? This applies of course to more than this section on assessments and the section that is overtly about “response pressure” (see, for example, the third last paragraph of the section titled “Reconsidering Canonical Actions,” 2010/this issue, p. 26; or, p. 28, emphasis supplied: “As discussed earlier, actions positioned in initial-sequential positions put *some pressure* on a recipient to respond, by virtue of their position, but *this pressure is minimal*.”). If there is no way to show this on individual cases, the temptation is to show it on aggregates of cases—the relative frequency of securing a response under differing types of action and turn designs itself serving as a proxy measure of individually experienced “pressure” or “accountability,” as they have in fact done (see previously, under 2a). But there are substantial problems in reasoning from properties of aggregate data to properties of individual instances of the aggregate—problems that there is unhappily no space to elaborate here (see Freedman, 2001; Gallistel, Fairhurst & Balsam, 2004; Robinson, 1950).
3. S&R summarize their section on “Pursuits of Response” (addressed to so-called “non-canonical actions”) by noting that, “In each case a speaker begins using a turn design that is less response mobilizing” (2010/this issue, p. 23); (but, it should be noted, in many instances mobilize response nonetheless). They continue, “Recipients are therefore less accountable for not responding” (2010/this issue, p. 23); and one must ask again: What in the preceding text is evidence that “Recipients are therefore less accountable for not responding”? Indeed, one must wonder why ever a speaker should produce an “all minus” utterance in the first place? Perhaps there is a clue in the remainder of these comments.

SOME PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

So much for the six features of an utterance that S&R commend to our attention. The first two—action and sequential position—are not taken up in much detail beyond stipulation, and their exemplification in data extracts is in many instances quite problematic. As for the other four aspects of an utterance that they put front and center, there seems to me to be relatively little that is new. Lexicomorpho-syntactic design has informed the CA treatment of turn organization, turn taking, and sequence organization—the domains at the heart of the central issues here—from the beginning, though it has surely been enriched by the participation of linguistic colleagues over the last 30 years or so. The same can be said about prosody—but to even a greater degree. Though often treated by invoking Labov and Fanshel’s (1977) so-called “B-events” or Kamio’s (1994, 1995, 1997) “territory of information,” conversation analysts have addressed what is now referred to as “epistemics” under the rubric of “*shared knowledge*” as far back as discussions of recipient design (Sacks, 1992, 1995; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1972, 1979, 1986); and overtly topicalized *disparities* of knowledge or rights to claim it as far back as Heritage, 1984, 1998; Lerner, 1996; Pomerantz, 1980; Schegloff, 1996; and, more recently, Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006; and Stivers (2005) *inter alia*. The newest element in the

features S&R invoke is Rossano's work on gaze, which substantially affects the landscape previously depicted by Kendon and Goodwin.

I am unconvinced that the elevation of these four products of deconstruction and the relative slighting of the first two will be salutary for our understanding of interaction. How then to address the problem S&R have engaged—how to understand the variable success of sequence-initiating utterances in actually “mobilizing response?” My own inclination is not to step downward on the ladder of granularity, but to step upward on it. Instead of deconstructing the packaging materials of turns at talk, what do we learn if we ask instead about the occasions that they inhabit? Specifically, what if we entertain the relevance of the overall structural organization of the occasions from which the data S&R examine are taken?

The dimension of the overall structural organization of interactional episodes that appears to be relevant has as one end of its continuum “continuously sustained talk” and at the other “continuing states of incipient talk” (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, pp. 324–326). Virtually all the interactional data examined in MR are taken from occasions characterizable as “continuing states of incipient talk”; I can do no better than to cite the last section of the just-cited text written 40 years ago and published 4 years later (emphasis supplied in the cited text to follow); indeed, there may be no better way for me to end this commentary:

A few concluding remarks will be in point to try to specify the domain for which our analysis is relevant. What we are really dealing with is the problem of closing a conversation that ends a state of talk. It does not hold for members of a household in their living room, employees who share an office, passengers together in an automobile, etc., that is, persons who could be said to be in a “continuing state of incipient talk.” In such circumstances, there can be lapses of the operation of what we earlier called the basic features; for example, there can be silence after a speaker's utterance which is neither an attributable silence nor a termination, which is seen as neither the suspension nor the violation of the basic features. These are adjournments, and seem to be done in a manner different from closings. Persons in such a continuing state of incipient talk need not begin new segments of conversation with exchanges of greetings, and need not close segments with closing sections and terminal exchanges. Much else would appear to be different in their conversational circumstances as compared to those in which a conversation is specifically “started up,” which we cannot detail here.

These considerations suggest that how a conversation is carried on in its course is sensitive to the placement of the conversation in an interaction episode or occasion, *and that how an upcoming lapse in the operation of the basic features is attended to and dealt with by participants is sensitive to, and/or can accomplish, the placement of the conversation in its occasion . . .*

This kind of consideration can be overlooked if much of the data one is looking at is, as in the case of this article, made up of telephone conversations, because there especially the occasion is more or less coterminous with the conversation; the occasion is constructed to contain the conversation and is shaped by its contingencies . . . (pp. 324–325)³

³From “Opening up closings,” by E. A. Schegloff and H. Sacks, 1973, *Semiotica*, 8, pp. 324–325. Copyright 1973 by De Gruyter. Reprinted with permission. In the original publication a footnote underscored the following point:

A simple distinction between face-to-face and telephone interaction will not do. We do not yet have any adequate technical account of these notions, which would specify the analytic dimensions of significant distinction. A variety of intuitive, plausible distinctions do not hold up. It should not be taken, from the text, that whereas face-to-face conversation can be either continuously sustained or have the character of a continuing state of incipient talk, telephone conversation invariably has the former character. That does not appear to be the case. And even if it were, it would be the distinction between these two modes, rather than that between face-to-face and telephonic, which would be relevant. (pp. 325–326)

Rather than deconstructing the products of the last four decades of work, we should be asking exactly how it should be extended to illuminate interaction in continuing states of incipient talk.⁴

Here is the start of one try. The vast majority of continuing states of incipient talk involve people copresent in the same place or traveling through the same places (think carpool, public transportation, etc.), who therefore share sensory access to the same environment. One of the things they (can) do is register noticings about that environment—noticings that put on offer a line of talk that might be generated from that noticing (for work along these lines involving children, see Szymanski, 1999). Note: “put on offer,” not “require.” Of course, some registered noticings are more urgent in their deployment, and these may be designed in a fashion that prompts response more strongly—in substantial measure along lines suggested by S&R, but not exclusively. They may be “put on offer,” and pursued when not taken up *not by virtue of failure*, but by enrichment of the noticing subsequent to the initial offering. Or a noticing may be put on offer, and not pursued if not taken up; then there is the noticing . . . and long (and not problematic) silence. These are the sorts of things envisioned in that old paper, and S&R’s article provides the occasion for taking them up—but with the aim of understanding the practices, actions, and particularly the sequences of actions of continuing states of incipient talk, which might truly break new ground.

REFERENCES

- Freedman, D. (2001). Ecological inference and the ecological fallacy. In N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (Vol. 6, pp. 4027–4030). New York, NY: Elsevier.
- Gallistel, C. R., Fairhurst, S., & Balsam, P. (2004). The learning curve: Implications of a quantitative analysis. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, *101*, 13124–13131.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays in face to face behavior*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1978). Response cries. *Language*, *54*, 787–815.
- Heritage, J. C. (1984). A change-of-state token and aspects of its sequential placement. In J. M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action* (pp. 299–345). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Heritage, J. C. (1998). *Oh*-prefaced responses to inquiry. *Language in Society*, *27*, 291–334.
- Heritage, J. C., & Raymond, G. (2005). The terms of agreement: Indexing epistemic authority and subordination in talk-in-interaction. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *68*, 15–38.
- Kamio, A. (1994). The theory of territory of information: The case of Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *21*(11), 67–100.
- Kamio, A. (1995). Territory of information in English and Japanese and psychological utterances. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *24*, 235–264.
- Kamio, A. (1997). *Territory of information*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Labov, W., & Fanshel, D. (1977). *Therapeutic discourse: Psychotherapy as conversation*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Lerner, G. H. (1996). Finding “face” in the preference structures of talk-in-interaction. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *59*, 303–321.
- Pomerantz, A. M. (1980). Telling my side: “Limited access” as a “fishing” device. *Sociological Inquiry*, *50*, 186–98.
- Raymond, G., & Heritage, J. C. (2006). The epistemics of social relations: Owning grandchildren. *Language in Society*, *35*, 677–705.

⁴Note “extended,” not abandoned. One reader of an earlier draft of these comments expressed a concern that the citation from “Opening Up Closings” might be taken to imply the cancellation of all the past findings about turn taking, sequence organization, repair, etc. There is ample evidence of the continuing analytic robustness of that work (grounded largely in data from occasions of continuously sustained talk) when applied to conduct in continuing states of incipient talk. That does not blunt the relevance of strong work addressed precisely to what makes for the recognizability and distinctiveness of these two modes of talk- and other conduct- in-interaction. Although that could, in principle, engender major transformations in our understanding, that does not so far appear to be the case.

- Robinson, W. S. (1950). Ecological correlations and the behavior of individuals. *American Sociological Review*, 15, 351–357.
- Sacks, H. (1992, 1995). *Lectures on conversation*. (Vols. 1–2). G. Jefferson (Ed.). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Sacks, H., & Schegloff, E. A. (1979). Two preferences in the organization of reference to persons and their interaction. In G. Psathas (Eds.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 15–21). New York, NY: Irvington Publishers.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1968). Sequencing in conversational openings. *American Anthropologist*, 70, 1075–1095.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1972). Notes on a conversational practice: Formulating place. In D. N. Sudnow (Eds.), *Studies in social interaction* (pp. 75–119). New York, NY: Free Press.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1979). Identification and recognition in telephone openings. In G. Psathas (Eds.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 23–78). New York, NY: Erlbaum.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1984). On some questions and ambiguities in conversation. In J. M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 28–52). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1986). The routine as achievement. *Human Studies*, 9, 111–151.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1996). Confirming allusions: Toward an empirical account of action. *American Journal of Sociology*, 102, 161–216.
- Schegloff, E. A., & Sacks, H. (1973). Opening up closings. *Semiotica*, 8, 289–327.
- Stivers, T. (2005). Modified repeats: One method for asserting primary right from second position. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 38, 131–158.
- Stivers, T., & Rossano, F. (2010/this issue). Mobilizing response. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 43, 3–31.
- Szymanski, M. H. (1999). Re-engaging and dis-engaging talk in activity. *Language in Society*, 28, 1–23.