

Emanuel A. Schegloff

UCLA

I've had my say. Margaret Wetherell has engaged it, thoughtfully, temperately and (happily) with data. It will be no surprise that I agree with those of her remarks which are appreciative of Conversation Analysis (CA) and disagree with her reservations about its scope and limitations; or that, reading with pencil in hand, I have jotted extensive notes to myself detailing these disagreements. But there it should rest. Except for one point.

Wetherell formulates her reservations about CA by doubting that inquiry can, if pursued along the lines which I urged in 'Whose Text? Whose Context?', adequately deal with what she takes to be CA's '... own classic question about some piece of discourse—why this utterance here?' (p. 388). In taking this as her point of departure, she embodies an understanding of this question which differs from my own and from that expressed in the first published expression of that point (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 299). So I wish in this response to address this point and clarify my understanding of the import and status of the question 'why that now?' And if that clarification has some consequences for other elements of Wetherell's argument, so be it.

The point about 'why that now?' was not (and is not) that it is the central question for CA in the first instance, but that it is (as we wrote then) '... a pervasively relevant issue (for participants)'. It is by virtue of its pervasiveness for *members* that it is central to CA work. And we went on to suggest the indexicality of that question for participants in that the posing of it by participants may be 'relevant to finding what "that" is'. The point in that text was that there was no a priori characterization of the talk—no sense of 'that' in 'why that now'—by reference to which the question's sense was determined—not even that it was the 'utterance' that invoked the issue. The 'that' could indeed locate 'the utterance', or the intonation (some *particular* intonation), or the term used to refer to a person or place, or a gesture, etc.—any 'remark-able' feature of the talk or other conduct in interaction. Indeed, every part of the 'why that now' question (for participants) must be understood as indexical. The 'now' can range across various orders of granularity—various orders of temporal or structural place-types, from where in the unfolding of a turn-constructural unit to where in a turn, to where in a sequence, to (as in the 'Opening Up Closings' case) where in the overall structural organization of the conversation, and others (and

other *sorts*) as well. The 'why' can invoke any order or sort of account or grasp.

The context in which the 'why that now?' question was introduced in the Closings paper, then, was just one local embodiment of an utterly general and principled issue for conversational participants (in this case, placement of the utterance type 'first part of a terminal exchange' by reference to position in overall structural organization). The key point, however, is that the 'why that now?' question is in the first instance the *members'* question. For the external analyst, it is its operation for members which is of interest: to what it is addressed (what are the 'that's and the 'now's) and how it is understood: what does some combination of composition—the 'what'—and position—the 'now'—come to embody, to realize, to *do* for the members? It is because anything can in principle be a locus of order for parties—something which invokes 'why that now?'—that analysts are well-advised to remain open to any order of detail they can notice. CA's question is a second-order question—prompted by, made relevant by, and grounded in the parties' conduct in each case.

Understood this way, Margaret Wetherell's claim about the inadequacy of past work in CA—that it does not offer an adequate answer to its own classic question 'why that now?'—may well be correct; indeed, it surely is correct. But the inadequacies of past work will not be alleviated by turning to critical theory for their repair. Wetherell asks whether 'a descriptive analysis [...] guided by Foucault's concept of genealogy [...] [would] count as importing theorists' preoccupations' [whether] 'Schegloff's boundary line [would] be breached if [...] we attempted to develop a feminist commentary ...?' (p. 402) Who knows? If approached in the spirit of these questions, probably so, because the questions appear to be prompted in the first instance by readings of Foucault and the concerns of feminist commentary, not by observable features of the participants' talk and conduct. In the end, it is by examining with greater perspicacity—and specificity, episode by episode—what mobilizes the members' work of 'why that now?', what its product understandings are, and how those products are displayed in ensuing conduct by others, etc., that we make the work better. What is needed is not readings in critical theory, but observations—noticings—about people's conduct in the world and the practices by which they are engendered and understood.

Here is where we see most clearly the advantages of Wetherell's introduction of data into the discussion. In fact, several of the questions which Wetherell puts forward about the data as examples of issues beyond the scope of CA but prompted by feminist and post-structuralist concerns strike me as quite within CA's scope, and engaging precisely because of their apparent relevance to the parties to the interaction. It is that relevance which underwrites their interest, not their derivation from academic and political literature or their resonance with the inquirer's sympathies.

Referring to a young man's promiscuous night on the town, she asks:

Why, for instance, does Aaron respond to Paul's accusation that he is 'on the pull' with an argument which formulates the young women involved as

also wanting casual sex [...], thus attempting to make his own actions no longer 'a right geeky thing to do'? Why, in this community, among these members, might this possibly work as an adequate justification? Why is this assumed to be a possible 'good defence'? [...] Indeed, why is Paul's intervention heard in the first place as a critique which deserves an answer? (p. 404)

These questions start with observations about the data and candidate descriptions of what the parties are doing; they seem in point precisely because, at least *prima facie*, the parties (arguably but defeasably) seem oriented to them as relevant; and they pose possibly cogent CA questions. Paradoxically, it seems to me that to answer these questions, one needs analysis specifically along canonical CA lines rather than by reference to other modes of address. But the issues that seem to press for early analysis are ones which do not seem likely to be entertained in Wetherell's treatment.

Take for example Wetherell's question, 'Why, in this community, among these members, might this possibly work as an adequate justification?' Who indeed are 'these members'? What is most striking to me, what would early on merit the attention of a conversation analyst, is that this entire exchange appears to be *researcher-prompted*—not just the sequence being discussed but the whole interview and series of interviews. These are not just ordinary 'conversations' among 'members of this community'. How do the kids see it? Is the interaction from the outset between 'interviewer' and 'subjects'? Between 'adult' and 'kids'? Are sexuality and gender ideologies the known interest of the interviewer from the outset? What do the boys think Nigel (the interviewer) is doing there, talking to them? Asking these questions? In this way (e.g. concerning the night out, 'Is that *good*?')? Although ostensibly unrelated to the focal topic of interest in sexist stances among young males and justifications for them, this issue presents itself as a central feature of this occasion taken as a type of interaction, embodied in who asks the questions and who answers them, and what might be understood to be done by the asking and the answering. It is arguably relevant to the boys' talk as a matter of recipient design. The stances being articulated may be not so much 'in this community, among these members' as 'in the presence of this researcher, in the face of these accusation-tinged interrogatories'. Yet what is most striking is the virtually total lack of attention to Nigel and his actions in this analysis. Although he plays the *agent provocateur* for the sequence being analyzed, he hardly appears in the analysis at all, and therefore does not enter into the analysis of the boys' talk.

Rather than beginning with gender ideologies, one might propose, the analysis might begin by addressing what the parties to the interaction understand themselves to be doing in it, what sort of interaction they show themselves to be collaboratively constructing. Each utterance could then be understood by reference to its place in that enterprise. And then attention might be turned (if there was continuing interest in doing so) to issues of cultural constructions, ideological formations; those analyses would be brought to bear on the boys' utterances 'really', already analyzed by refer-

ence to the context in which they were produced in the first instance. Those analyses would not themselves be conversation-analytic, because they would be grounded in, and answerable to, concerns extrinsic to the interaction (unless of course it were possible to show the parties themselves oriented to these terms of analysis). But they would be addressed to utterances, to discourse, interpreted by serious reference to what they seriously were for their speakers and recipients.

I began by insisting on restoring the centrality of the 'why that now?' question to its original locus—as a/the key orienting issue for parties to talk-in-interaction. Efforts to repair the inadequacy of CA's dealing with this question as an *analyst's* question should nonetheless be answerable to it as a *member's* question. Wetherell and others may wish to pursue other questions than ones which they understand to be those posed by conversation analysts, but it would be useful not to underestimate what the reach of CA's questions is, and to be clear about the differing enterprises which may be involved. If CA has any appeal to this constituency of readers—the 'critical discourse analysis' community—it may be because of the way in which it has come to formulate its problems, the way in which it has tried to ground its solutions, and the character of the resulting analyses. Perhaps the appeal of the results has been deeply related to the character of the working methods. Obviously some may wish to proceed differently, but it is worth recognizing that the enterprise is different and the payoffs are likely to be different in kind and in grounding as well. For CA, it is the members' world, the world of the particular members in a particular occasion, a world that is embodied and displayed in their conduct with one another, which is the grounds and the object of the entire enterprise, its *qua non*.

REFERENCES

- Schegloff, E.A. and Sacks, H. (1973) 'Opening Up Closings', *Semiotica* 8(4): 289–327.
- Wetherell, Margaret (1998) 'Positioning and Interpretative Repertoires: Conversation Analysis and Post-Structuralism in Dialogue', *Discourse & Society* 9(3): 387–412.