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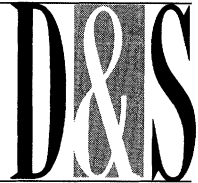
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Critical Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis: an exchange between Michael Billig and Emanuel A. Schegloff



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■ *Whose terms? Whose ordinariness? Rhetoric and ideology in Conversation Analysis*

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■ **ABSTRACT.** This article examines Schegloff's (1997) defence of Conversation Analysis (CA) and his attack on critical discourse analysis. The article focuses on Schegloff's claims that CA takes an empirical stance without a priori assumptions and that it examines participants' talk in 'their own terms'. It is suggested that these claims are problematic, and that CA, as depicted by Schegloff, contains an ideological view of the social world. This can be seen by examining CA's own rhetoric, which conversation analysts themselves tend to take for granted. First, CA uses a specialist rhetoric which is literally not the participants' own terms. Moreover, this specialist rhetoric enables conversation analysts to 'disattend' to the topics of conversation. Second, CA's 'foundational rhetoric' is examined. It is suggested that this foundational rhetoric, which includes terms such as 'conversation', 'member', etc., conveys a participatory view of the world, in which equal rights of speakership are often assumed. The assumptions of these rhetorical conventions are revealed if they are applied to talk in which direct power is exercised. In this respect, CA is not, as Schegloff suggests, ideologically neutral, but habitually deploys a rhetoric that conveys a contestable view of social order.

KEY WORDS: *conversation analysis, ideology, rhetoric*

Schegloff's (1997) article 'Whose Text? Whose Context?' provides an important defence of conversation analysis (CA). The article is significant not only because of its strong clear argument, but also because Schegloff is one of the most distinguished creators of CA. In his article – and again in his reply to Wetherell's (1998) considered response – Schegloff provides a powerful case for using the

procedures of CA (Schegloff, 1998). He contrasts the empirical stance of CA with that of critical discourse theorists, who, according to Schegloff, let their own assumptions dominate their analyses. Powerful though Schegloff's arguments might be, and great his personal contribution to the study of talk, it is necessary, however, to analyse some of the assumptions of his position.

Wetherell (1998) suggests that CA needs to be augmented by social theory in order to examine the ideological aspects of language. The present argument aims to complement her critique, but it takes a different line. It critically analyses Schegloff's depiction of CA as merely a detached investigation of conversational detail. CA contains its own sociological and ideological assumptions. As such, CA is always more than conversation analysis, and, by implication, it is not so different from the sort of critical analyses, that Schegloff takes to task.

First, some disclaimers should be made. Although this article will doubtless appear critical of Schegloff's position, some major points of agreement should be stressed. In no way do I wish to defend the sorts of loose 'critical' analyses, which Schegloff had in mind but which he was too tactful to name. I share Schegloff's unease about studies which pronounce on the nature of discourses, without getting down to the business of studying what is actually uttered or written (see Billig, 1997a, for a critical examination of cultural studies on this account). Like Wetherell, my academic background is in discursive or rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1996). Discursive psychologists have shown that much insight is to be gained by close-grained analyses of discourse, using most notably CA (Antaki, 1994; Billig et al., 1988; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). In my own work, I have stressed the contribution of CA: for example, the notion of turn-taking is vital for recasting the processes of Freudian repression in terms of discourse (Billig, 1997b, in press).

The present critique is not intended to be an overview of CA. It concentrates on Schegloff's portrayal of CA, because his dismissal of critical discourse analysis follows from this portrayal. At present, there is debate amongst conversation analysts about the directions that CA should take (see, for instance, Watson, 1997, and more generally Silverman, 1998, chapter eight). Not all adherents of CA would necessarily subscribe to Schegloff's construction of CA. I do not go into these debates as such, although some of the issues raised in them overlap with some of the issues I discuss here.

In this article, I do not follow Wetherell's (1988) example of introducing new conversational data; nor do I re-analyse Schegloff's data extracts. There is a case for stepping back from the sort of data which CA examines, in order to investigate CA's own rhetoric – or at least, the rhetoric which Schegloff uses to present CA. The present critique, thus, belongs to the tradition of the Rhetoric of Inquiry, which takes the writing of academic disciplines as its object of study (Bazerman, 1988; Billig, 1994; Gross and Keith, 1997; McCloskey, 1986; Myers, 1991; Nelson et al., 1987; Simons, 1989, 1990). If one wishes to talk of 'data', then Schegloff's own texts can be treated as data: their rhetoric can be treated as

objects for analysis. By so doing, it will be possible to argue, contra Schegloff, that CA's 'foundational rhetoric' is not neutral, but it conveys a particular and contestable image of social order.

Studying participants in their own terms

Schegloff constructs a number of contrasts between CA and (unspecified) critical discourse analysis. As might be expected, these contrasts are not rhetorically neutral but are designed to illustrate the strengths of the former and the weaknesses of the latter. Schegloff's prime complaint is that critical theorists claim to know how power is accomplished within talk but do not bother to study the mechanics of conversation. Schegloff's contrast between the a priori biases of critical analysis and the empiricism of CA is related to another claimed difference. Critical analysts supposedly impose their own terms on the object of analysis, while CA is based on the terms of the participants. CA follows the injunction of 'taking seriously the object of inquiry *in its own terms*' (Schegloff, 1997: 171, emphasis in original). CA privileges 'the orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings etc of the *participants* in some sociocultural event' (p. 166, emphasis in original). By contrast, traditional sociologists and critical analysts 'deploy the terms which preoccupy *them* in describing, explaining, critiquing, etc. the events and texts to which they turn their attention' (p. 167, emphasis in original). Schegloff produces a nice ironic move, which returns the rhetoric of critical theory against its practitioners. By imposing categories on participants, critical analysts display a 'theoretical imperialism' or 'a kind of hegemony of the intellectuals' (p. 167). As shown later, critical analysis is not uniquely vulnerable to such irony. Schegloff's own rhetoric, or that of his version of CA, can likewise be turned against itself.

Schegloff proposes that CA should be methodologically primary. He writes of 'the mandate to first understand the target "text" in its own terms' and stresses that this mandate applies to 'talk-in-interaction' (Schegloff, 1997: 171). The analysis, thus, must be based on participants' hearings: 'If the parties are hearing that way and responding that way – that is, with an orientation to this level of turn design – we are virtually mandated to analyze it that way' (p. 175). Schegloff is concerned about analysts, who impose their own theoretical concerns. Feminist analysts might be predisposed to 'hear' the operation of unequal gender power in interchanges between men and women. Unless the participants themselves can be heard to 'orientate' to gender issues, then this hearing of gender will be illicit (or unmandated). This is the point of Schegloff's (1997) second example, in which males are heard to mention gender. There is no 'impossible hurdle' to analysing the concerns of gender, but analysts must not introduce these concerns if the participants have not done so. That would be an infraction of the principle to study participants in their own terms.

Realist tales

The first issue is to probe what exactly it means to claim to study participants' talk 'in its own terms'. This notion, which lies at the core of Schegloff's defence of CA, cannot be taken for granted. In outlining his thesis, Schegloff claims that analysts should directly observe the realities of social interaction. Analysts do not need 'readings in critical theory, but observations – noticings about people's conduct in the world' (1998: 414). As Schegloff realizes, this idea of direct observation may seem to indicate 'a methodological and epistemological naivety'. Nevertheless, he defends the idea that talk-in-interaction has its own 'internally grounded reality' (1998: 171). Heritage (1984) expressed the same idea when he claimed that CA provided a powerful microscope for the study of social life. Similarly, Boden (1994) has written that 'by giving back to social agents their knowledgeable ability of their own social actions, it was then possible to sit back and observe the structuring quality of the world as it happens' (p. 74).

Schegloff's highly sophisticated 'naive methodological and epistemological naivety' needs examining. As analysts have shown, the realist rhetoric of science is not straightforward (Edwards, et al., 1995; Potter, 1996). Scientists are making all sorts of extra-scientific claims when they claim that the facts merely speak for themselves (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Such realist tales, including those told by the practitioners of CA, are themselves rhetorically examinable.

It is not the case, as Boden suggests, that the conversation analyst can just sit back and observe. Like all academic disciplines, CA must be written. For this, it requires its own practices of writing. There are certain words and phrases, which let readers know that they are reading a CA text and that the author is 'doing CA'. There is no doubt that CA uses a highly technical vocabulary. This creates a paradox. Although participants are ostensibly to be studied 'in their own terms', they are not to be written about in such terms. Instead, analysts use their own terms to accomplish this observation of participants' own terms.

The speakers, conventionally studied by CA, do not talk of 'adjacency pairs', 'preference structures', 'receipt designs', 'self-repairs', etc. These are categories which the analyst imposes. Schegloff several times makes a distinction between the sort of ordinary language, that the participants might use, and the specialized language of CA. He uses the word 'vernacular' to describe the sort of ordinary language that the analyst must get beyond in the analysis. In his first example, Schegloff (1997) demonstrates that one of the participants in the talk is not interrupting 'in the conventional vernacular sense' (p. 196). He writes that to call a participant's response 'an emotional response' is to give a 'vernacular gloss' (p. 196). More generally, he contrasts CA, which is applied to the world 'refracted through the prism of disciplined and molecular observation', with critical analyses which are 'refracted through the prism of "casual" vernacular observation' (p. 180). 'Vernacular', in these contexts, is not being used in a neutral manner: the analyst is being criticized for using (or being misled by) 'vernacular' terms, which are contrasted with the specialized vocabulary to be deployed in the business of analysis.

The question, then, is how the analyst gets from the participants' own words to the specialized non-vernacular vocabulary of analysis. The realist tale is a way of dismissing the problem. The 'naive methodology and epistemology' allow conversation analysts to claim that they are not 'imposing' categories: they are merely labelling what actually exists and can be observed to exist. Thus, it is asserted that the technical terms describe objective realities in an unproblematic way. The analyst can point to a transcribed text and say 'Look, there is a preference structure', as surely as a realist can kick the table as proof of that object's existence (Edwards et al., 1995).

The difference between the analyst's rhetoric and the vernacular of the participants is more than merely a difference in vocabulary. Analysts are attending to matters that the speakers do not. In Schegloff's (1997) first example, the speakers are discussing how their son's car has been vandalized. The topic, which preoccupies the speakers, is not of especial interest to the analyst. Schegloff writes of the use of 'second assessments', 'WH-questions' and so on – topics, which the speakers do not talk *about*. This difference between the topics of the analyst and the topics of speakers has been discussed by some conversation analysts. For example, Sharrock and Anderson (1987a) specifically discuss how analysts move away from attending to the features of talk that 'are readily observable' by the speakers. According to them, the 'result is that Conversation Analysis *necessarily* disattends to what actors may see as the business of their talk, in favour of the activities which actors engage in solely by virtue of their character as operators of a speech exchange system' (p. 246, emphasis added).

The reason why this is a necessity, according to Sharrock and Anderson, is that CA is based on the 'stock idea' that conversations are organized and orderly (1987a: 245). Analysts seek to uncover this underlying organization from different conversational incidents, extracting the general features of conversational organization from specific examples. Thus, it has been claimed that CA is 'content free' (Lee, 1987). Psathas (1995) points out that the turn-taking system, which has been so central to classic CA work, is assumed to be 'context free' and is 'independent of the contents or topics talked about' (pp. 35–6). Schegloff's (1997) treatment of his examples exemplifies this form of analysis, which Watson (1997) identifies as 'traditional conversation analysis'. Schegloff finds patterns of sequential organization, relating to assessments, turn completion and turn-taking. Such patterns are general features of conversation and are unrelated to the specific topic, which the participants are discussing. To accomplish this sort of analysis, Schegloff, to use Sharrock and Anderson's terms, 'disattends' to the particular topic, that the participants see themselves talking about.

Two problems can be raised. The first is to question whether the principle to study conversation in the participants' 'own terms' is necessarily breached, at least in part, by its own practice and by its programme to find general structures of orderliness. In order for CA to study, for example, the orientations to turn-taking, it 'disattends' to what the participants see as their main concerns. In a literal sense, analysts, in writing of the participants, impose their own terms.

The second problem arises if the analyst wishes to study those matters, to which traditional CA routinely 'disattends'. Can analysts do so, if they follow typical CA practices that direct analytic attention to issues which the participants do not overtly talk about? For instance, an analyst, such as a critical feminist, might wish to use Schegloff's first example to talk of patterns of child supervision, rather than of second assessments. The irony is that to follow Schegloff's recommendations – and ostensibly to observe the participants in 'their own terms' – the analyst would end up speaking about the things that the participants do not speak of, using a set of terms which the participants do not use. But to speak of the same things as the participants do, the analyst would run the risk of being accused of imposing her own categories on the analysis.

Foundational rhetoric of CA

One of the great strengths of CA is its insistence on working with openly available data. The analysts specifically relate their technical terms to aspects of extracts of talk. For the sake of argument, let us concede for the moment that there is no epistemological or rhetorical difficulty with the ways that CA translates the words of those it studies into its own technical vocabulary. However, not all the aspects of CA's technical vocabulary result from such exhaustive pointing to textual extracts. Like all theoretical perspectives, CA deploys terms which might be called 'foundational'. These are not terms which are linked to specific pieces of data, but terms which enable the pointing and the linkages to be made. The foundational rhetoric of CA is not justified in terms of specific features in particular transcripts, but is used in order to analyse that data.

Using Schegloff's texts, one might start to compile a list of foundational terms. The list might include 'conversation', 'mundane conversation', 'everyday conversation', 'vernacular', 'participants', 'members', 'talk-in-interaction', 'orientation'. Schegloff in his article does not point to specific features of his data in order to claim that 'those words in that line' provide an example of 'talk-in-interaction' or a 'member's orientation'. He takes their usage for granted. This usage marks these terms as rhetorically different from terms such as 'preference structures', which are linked to particular examples.

Sharrock and Anderson (1987a) claim that CA examines people's taken-for-granted habits. CA uncovers, they suggest, orderliness 'in the unnoticed, taken for granted, flotsam and jetsam of talk in all our ordinary, daily lives' (p. 247). Again the principle can be turned around. As Ashmore (1989) has so provocatively demonstrated, the rhetoric of ethnomethodology can be turned against ethnomethodology. In this case, one might ask, what does CA take for granted in its own discourse, as it examines the taken-for-granted habits of 'ordinary' speakers?

The question itself is not altogether innocent, if ideology is to be uncovered in the unnoticed habits of life (Billig, 1991; Bourdieu, 1990; Eagleton, 1991; Van Dijk, 1998). So ideology might stalk the unnoticed and the taken-for-granted

assumptions of intellectual inquiry, especially the sort of social inquiry that overtly claims to be ideology-free and merely empirical. Therefore in asking what assumptions the foundation rhetoric of CA conveys, one can be raising questions about its ideology.

The rhetoric of 'ordinary conversation'

As always, Schegloff urges analysts not to remain at the level of abstract theory, but to observe how discourse is used. Therefore, abstract remarks about CA's foundational rhetoric are insufficient. One needs to examine how specific terms are used. Two sets of terms are briefly considered. The first set refers to 'conversation' and the second to those who are observed to engage in conversation.

Schegloff in his critique of critical studies, like many practising conversation analysts, does not spend time discussing what a 'conversation' is. The term is deployed as if there were no difficulty in pointing to conversations. Schegloff conveys that his two data examples are extracts from 'conversations', without pointing to specific features in the data to justify that description. Like other conversation analysts he recognizes that not all talk might be conversational. Thus, Schegloff (1997) switches between the terms 'conversation' and 'talk-in-interaction', sometimes, but not always, conveying a distinction between the two. For example, he refers to 'work on conversation and other talk-in-interaction' (p. 168), implying that not all talk-in-interaction is conversation. CA, however, does not appear to have a technical term to denote talk-in-interaction which is not conversation (although, as shown later, 'institutional talk' sometimes fulfils this function). The omission is indicative. Schegloff implies that CA is not confined to studying 'conversation', but it can be applied to talk which may not be conversation. He does not discuss why the analysis is called '*conversation analysis*', when it can be applied to non-conversations. As Psathas (1995) writes, in briefly discussing this issue, the term 'conversation analysis' appears to be 'a misnomer', for its object of study is wider than conversation (p. 2). The point, however, is not that analysts *should* be more precise, but that an analyst like Schegloff can engage in CA without being so.

Sometimes CA texts employ the distinction between conversational talk-in-interaction and non-conversational talk-in-interaction in order to make argumentative points. For instance, the distinction can be deployed in order to criticize the conventional methodology of interviewing. Here the terms 'ordinary' and 'naturally occurring' will be mobilized in order to distinguish the sorts of conversations, studied by CA, from the sort of second-best talk (normally not characterized even as 'conversation') studied by sociologists. Schegloff (1998), in his reply to Wetherell (1998), distinguishes between "'ordinary" conversation' and Wetherell's interview data which is described as 'an exchange' and appears to be 'researcher-prompted' (p. 415). Heritage (1988), in the first paragraph of an introduction to CA, distinguishes between accounts which are '*naturally occurring* in conversation' rather than being elicited by interviewers (p. 127, emphasis in

original), 'Natural', 'ordinary' and 'conversation' are deployed to make this distinction. Heritage also offers another distinction in the next sentence: 'I will focus on the use of accounts in *ordinary conversation* rather than some more specific or specialized location in social space such as a hospital, a school or a courtroom' (p. 127, emphasis in original). Here, it would appear, the 'ordinariness' of 'ordinary conversation' does not depend upon it merely being 'natural', but on its lack of ties to a specific location. As in Schegloff's examples, the non-specific locations of 'ordinary conversations' are often private homes, or, as in the case of recorded telephone conversations, conversations between homes.

'Ordinary conversation' is sometimes distinguished from 'institutional talk' in terms of rights of participation. For example, Drew (1991) suggests that 'in conversation, turns are allocated equally between participants' for the 'rules for allocating turns ... do not favour any particular participant or category of participant' (p. 21). Thus, 'in principle at least, participants in conversation generally share equal rights of speakership' (p. 22). This is not so, he suggests, in institutional settings where 'there might be quite striking inequalities in the distribution of communicative resources'. For example, in classrooms, courts and news interviews, 'talk' may be restricted (p. 22). One might note how the term 'conversation' is deployed for the non-institutional setting, while Drew switches to 'talk' to describe the institutional setting. Similarly, Psathas (1995) distinguishes between 'free-flowing conversational interaction' and other talk, such as those in classrooms, religious ceremonies, etc., where there are restrictions on who might speak and when they might do so (p. 36; see also Nofsinger, 1991: 4 ff.).

Equal rights of speakership are frequently presumed to be a feature of 'conversations', rather than being specifically demonstrated as such. The presumption is based on assuming that the speakers are sharing the same system of turn-taking. Drew's point is to demonstrate how, in the course of a conversation, there can be specific, momentary asymmetries. In this respect, his analysis is a deviant case study (Heritage, 1984, 1988). In specific moments, when a speaker claims more knowledge on the topic to hand, equal rights of speakership are suspended. The deviant case highlights the general supposition of equal rights of participation in conversation.

If Schegloff's use of CA's foundational rhetoric possesses a vagueness, this should not be assumed to be a fault. It can be argued that academic vagueness in rhetoric can be a vital means of accomplishing a particular way of doing social sciences (Billig, 1994). The vagueness about what exactly is a 'conversation' and what it is not has not hampered the development of CA over the past 30 years. Analysts who promote CA and who imply that it can be successfully applied to non-conversational talk, are demonstrating in a practical way that such distinctions do not matter. They are practising the principle that theoretical distinctions take second place to close working with the details of transcripts. Yet, this does not mean that their rhetoric and methodological practices are free from assumptions about the nature of the wider social world.

If analysts had been vitally concerned to distinguish between conversation and non-conversation, they might have found themselves moving from analysing details of talk towards making the sorts of distinctions that mainstream sociologists make. Analysts, for instance, might need to distinguish between different types of institutional settings. In doing this, they would not be practising CA in its traditional form, as exemplified by Schegloff (but see Watson, 1997, for arguments about how such a move might be made by modifying the practices of 'traditional', sequential CA). However, the point is that analysts such as Schegloff do not dispense with conventional sociological distinctions: they often presume them. Thus, the key term 'conversation' routinely conveys a distinction between institutional social interaction, in which there is an asymmetry of rights, and 'ordinary' interaction, in which there is equality (except, as Drew implies, at particular, observable moments).

It is easy to detect in these undeveloped but present assumptions a distinction which feminist social theorists have disputed. This is the distinction between the public and the private world, or the institutional and the domestic. Feminists have most particularly disputed the notion that 'in principle' there is equality of rights in the private sphere (see, for instance, Fraser, 1989). Of course, any dispute on such matters should, as Schegloff insists, be conducted in the light of close examination of the evidence. However, one can question whether such an examination can be accomplished if the key analytic terms assume the very distinction in the first place. At the minimum, a modified foundational rhetoric might be required.

Participatory rhetoric

More can be said about the sort of social world implied by the foundational rhetoric. Analysts use a number of terms to indicate those whom they are studying. These terms are typically used without justification, as if the rhetoric were obvious and unproblematic. Sometimes the speakers are 'the speakers'; sometimes they are 'participants', 'co-participants', 'members'. Schegloff (1997) uses all these terms. A detailed study of his usage, and that of other conversation analysts, would be likely to reveal that the terms are frequently used interchangeably. Certainly, no overt accounts are given why one term rather than another is being deployed on each occasion.

The terms themselves contribute to what might be called a 'participatory' rhetoric. 'Ordinary conversations' have 'participants', or 'co-participants', who share the same organizational principles of talk, such as turn-taking systems. As such the participants are 'members'. Schegloff uses the term 'member' without specifying what the members are members of. Perhaps it is a 'culture' or a 'society' (Garfinkel, 1967). But this is left unelaborated. To elaborate exactly what the 'members' are members of and what the criteria of membership are, would take this sort of CA towards the sort of sociology that it disavows. 'Member' is, of course, an analyst's term: it can be used whether or not the speakers orientate to any common 'membership'. In Schegloff's main example, we do not hear Marcia

and Tony referring to themselves, or to each other, as 'members' or 'co-participants'.

The terminology conveys commonality and equality. Some conversation analysts take it as a methodological virtue that CA does not deploy sociological categories. For example, Sharrock and Anderson (1987b) claim that CA shows 'little acquaintance' with 'the way of life' from which the chosen data extracts are taken (p. 299). They claim that the mode of analysis is largely independent of background factors, unless the 'conversationalists' attend to such matters (p. 316). However, matters cannot be quite so straightforward if the foundational rhetoric, including the terms 'conversationalists', conveys a historically and culturally specific way of life. As Burke (1993) has shown, the very idea of 'conversation' developed in early modernity in Europe and was bound up with assumptions of equal rights of talk within the specific, semi-private contexts of 'conversation'. In late modernity, one would presume that the sort of domestic conversations studied by conversation analysts, including those presented by Schegloff (1997), take place in private living spaces, not overheard by domestic servants. This need not be specified, because the analysts and their readers presume such a sociological organization. The 'members', then, are presumed to be members of something sociologically and historically specifiable.

There is a further feature of orthodox CA's deployment of its foundational rhetoric. This is the methodological and theoretical primacy given to conversation over non-conversational forms of talk. This primacy is conveyed by the maintenance of the term 'conversation analysis'. Institutional talk is seen, as it were, as the deviant case, marked by restrictions. By contrast, conversation is seen as the point-zero, in which the basic systems of organization, such as turn-taking, can be most easily discovered. Thus, Heritage and Atkinson (1984), for instance, refer to conversation as having 'bedrock status' (p. 12). As some analysts have pointed out, the primacy given to conversation over institutional talk can itself be deconstructed, as can the notion that 'mundane talk' is free from institutional structures (see, particularly, Potter, 1996: 85 ff.; see also Watson, 1997).

What needs to be stressed is that the bedrock status given to conversation is not merely contestable; it carries wider rhetorical and sociological presumptions. Above all, it conveys an essentially non-critical view of the social world. The bedrock situation – or the default option – is implicitly depicted as a world of equality and participation, in which 'members' share systems of social order. Inequality is to be found in the exceptions – in institutional talk, interviews etc. Thus, traditional CA, far from being free of social presuppositions, carries them in the regular deployment of its foundational rhetoric. The warnings against being theoretical, and against using conventional sociological analyses, together with the prescription to keep to the data, can serve to protect these assumptions from analysis. If Schegloff claims that critical discourse analysts explicitly bring socially critical concepts to their study of conversation, so it can be argued that his form of CA is not ideologically neutral: it implicitly uses socially uncritical concepts in the regular conduct of its analyses.

Textual identification of speakers

The conventions for identifying speakers/participants in CA texts emphasize the assumptions about contemporary 'ordinary' conversation. Again, this is a matter of observing rhetorical practices which are performed as a matter of habit and, as such, are not typically justified (but see Watson, 1997, for a discussion which focuses on this issue). Conversation analysts often go to pains to outline their transcription practices, without drawing attention to the problem of how to label the speakers in the transcript. Some conversation analysts identify the individual speakers/participants by single, capitalized letters, normally the first letters of the alphabet (i.e. 'A', 'B' or 'C'). Sacks, for example, did this frequently (Sacks, 1987). The practice emphasizes the analyst's lack of interest in categorizing the speaker sociologically. It conveys that the speakers are interchangeable: the conversational devices produced by 'A' might just as easily have been produced by 'B'. Since one of the expressed aims of CA is to reveal the organization of talk, this practice of naming underlines how the structures are equally shared by the 'participants'. It 'disattends' to differences between 'participants' or 'members'.

Another convention much used by analysts is to identify the speakers/participants by first names (whether real or pseudonymous is not always clear). Schegloff (1997) adopts this convention, presenting the speakers in his first example as 'Marsha' and 'Tony', although in the extracts, neither speaker uses the first name of the other. The use of first names conveys informality. When examining talk in institutional settings, analysts will sometimes identify speakers by social role, such as 'doctor', 'police officer' or 'plaintiff' (Pomerantz, 1987). Sometimes a mixed, or unbalanced, code is used. Those officially employed in the institutional setting are identified by role ('counsellor' or 'therapist'), while 'clients' ('members of the public') are given first names (Buttny, 1993; Edwards, 1997).

Schegloff (1997) does not justify naming the speakers. The names, of course, convey the gender of the speakers, in the way that 'A' and 'B' do not. Why this background information, and not other information, should be given is unexplained. Certainly, the speakers are not 'doing gender', as Schegloff himself stresses. The speakers could have been identified in terms of the content of their talk: they could have been identified as 'mother' or 'father', or 'male child-carer' and 'female child-carer'. Instead, the first names convey an absence of role. The absence is also a presence. In this case, it is a presence of the contemporary norms of informality, as practised in contemporary Anglo-Saxon and American discourse, where 'first-name terms' are considered *de rigueur*. Thus, it is 'Marsha' and 'Tony', not 'Ms A' and 'Mr B'. Not only is a historically specific style of interacting conveyed, but it is taken for granted as a 'natural', 'ordinary' way of relating. Moreover, the naming practice helps to 'disattend' to the specific topic of the talk. The speakers are not referred to as 'primary caretaker' and 'secondary caretaker'. Had they been so identified, the unsuitability of the episode for examining contemporary gender relations might have been highlighted. 'Tony' and 'Marsha' are

that statistically less frequent couple where the father has primary care responsibility for the child. However, the labels 'Tony' and 'Marsha' disattend to role responsibilities in the domestic setting, in the way that 'therapist' or 'plaintiff' do the reverse in the 'institutional context'.

The use of first-names, or the use of interchangeable letter codes, brings its own rhetorical baggage. It conveys that social distinctions are irrelevant in informal situations, where democratic conversational participation is expected. The naming practice, thus, supports the assumption that the conversational situation can be considered as a sociologically neutral space. Feminist critics have argued that the surface of private equality conceals deeply practised and often unnoticed inequalities. If there are such inequalities, then they should be detectable in talk. CA, as conventionally practised and written, may need to be adapted if it is to be suited to revealing such inequalities. Three related points might be made in this regard:

- (i) Although analysts claim not to study historical background, they may be taking such background for granted, even unwittingly accepting an uncritical (or participatory) version of that background.
- (ii) The strategy of much CA has been to look for the commonalities between speakers and what they share in common. Hence it is reasonable to use the labels 'A' and 'B' for such purposes. But people are not interchangeable. There are differences in wealth, education, gender, age, etc. The exploration of these differences within conversation/talk may require a different foundational rhetoric.
- (iii) The foundational rhetoric is not neutral, but it conveys 'ordinary' life as equal and participatory. Since some conversation analysts imply that conversation represents the crucial 'bedrock' for the reproduction of the 'big picture', as studied by conventional sociologists, then a highly controversial picture of 'society' is conveyed, but not overtly argued for. It is an image of sharing, participation, equal members and first-name informality. To take this image as a microcosm of the social world is to take a highly ideological step. It is doubly ideological when the step is taken as if it is itself non-ideological, to be contrasted with the ideological biases of other approaches.

The limitations of the participatory rhetoric

The theoretical implications, conveyed by the foundational rhetoric that Schegloff and others routinely use, can be highlighted by considering when it would be inappropriate to apply uncritically this sort of rhetoric of analysis. The fact that analysts adopt different naming practices for talk in institutional settings, where inequality of speakership is expected, is itself suggestive. It raises the possibility that Schegloff's orthodox CA might be problematic if straightforwardly applied to episodes in which power is directly, overtly and even brutally exercised. One might consider how analysts could describe speakers in situations of rape, bullying or racist abuse. One might imagine that the talk, in the course of a rape in a non-

institutional, private setting, had been recorded and transcribed. One can imagine the rapist threatening and verbally abusing the victim, who in return pleads. Two related questions arise: how should the speakers be identified and how should their talk be analysed?

Conventional practices of naming would seem inappropriate in the case of rape. To call the speakers 'A' and 'B' would suggest that their parts were interchangeable and that gender was unimportant. First-name terms, too, would convey an informality and equality that would be at variance with the situation. Perhaps they should be 'man' and 'woman'; or 'rapist' and 'victim'. In the latter case, the identification would be made on the basis of the content of the talk. If it is 'rapist' and 'victim' in the rape situation (or 'bully' and 'victim' / 'racist' and 'victim' etc), then why should it be 'Marsha' and Tony', not 'primary caretaker' and 'secondary caretaker'? In short, the conventional name-practices gloss over, and reproduce, a series of wider assumptions. These spill out when the 'deviant' case is seriously considered.

Then there is the question what the analyst should be studying in a dialogue of rape, bullying, etc. No doubt the typical organizational properties could be investigated. One might presume that, as the rapist threatens and the victim pleads, they would share the same organization system for alternating their turns. Perhaps, they might even show other features such as 'repairs', 'second assessments', 'WH questions' and so. The analyst could show how the two speakers orientate to each other. The analyst might describe them as 'co-participants' in the conversation, or even as 'members', sharing the same practices.

All this would indicate that something had gone seriously awry. The conventional terminology of the 'participatory rhetoric' would assume that victims participate in their suffering. In what sense are victims 'co-participants' in talk which abuses them? Attention to what abuser and victim share in common, in terms of the organization of talk, would seem to miss the point. The analyst would be 'disattending' to the very matters which upset the assumption of an ordered, participatory social world. To imply that CA *must* disattend to such a matter (or must do so as a first step) is to say something about the limitations of an orthodox CA and its implicitly uncritical theory of the social world.

Supporters of CA might respond by saying that these are unfair examples. Of course, no-one would dream of analysing them in such a way. But that is the point. If one were to analyse them, a different pattern of 'attending/disattending' would be required. Some other analytic attention, beyond the conventional analysis of sequencing, would be required, together with a different rhetoric. If a different pattern of attending/disattending is needed to examine imbalances of power in such situations, then who is to say that similar patterns might not reveal imbalances in the more 'normal' situations that Schegloff presents?

It might be argued, in response, that CA studies 'everyday conversation' or the 'mundane' aspects of the social world, where the conventional terminology is appropriate. Rape or bullying, it would be suggested, is not mundane or ordinary. But, to turn Schegloff's rhetorical question around, one might ask 'Whose every-

day life'? 'Whose mundane world?' Who determines what is to be classed as 'ordinary' or 'extraordinary'? Why would CA assume that in the 'ordinary world' rape, bullying, racist abuse and so on are not mundane occurrences? Where did this assumption come from?

Again, terminological matters cannot be left to the participants/speakers themselves, as if rape and bullying demand a different set of rhetorical terms, if and only if the 'participants' allude to the extraordinary nature of the episode. Schegloff's 'Marsha' and 'Tony' do not allude to the 'ordinary' nature of their talk: in fact, they are speaking about something that for them is an 'extraordinary' event – the theft of their son's car. The analyst does not have to wait until the speakers specifically mention that their talk is 'ordinary', before calling the speakers 'Tony' and 'Marsha' or before claiming the extracts to be examples of 'ordinary conversation'. By the same token, analysts need not wait until the rape victim declares the event exceptional before first-name terms are dropped in the analysis, or the words are attributed to 'rapist' and 'victim'. One should beware of deploying any implicit scale of mundaneness, which assumes that unpleasant, non-participatory features of the social world are non-mundane rarities. Certainly rapes occur every day. Some people may feel that they themselves are bullied every day in their private world. According to many feminist theorists, routine bullying or the gendered exercise of power mundanely occurs in domestic life. This would, of course, need to be demonstrated by close examination of data.

None of these arguments is intended to imply that power and its operations cannot be studied by examining talk-in-interaction. Quite the reverse, power should be examined in relation to the close examination of talk. However, the examination is not as straightforward as Schegloff implies. The contrast between non-ideological CA and ideological critical analysis is not clear-cut. CA, as depicted by Schegloff, has its own ideological baggage. The response should not be to seek to discard all sociological assumptions, as if a pure empiricism were possible. On the contrary, it should be to work with the assumptions. Indeed, Watson (1997), for example, has argued that conversation analysis needs to develop along lines which take into account both the participants' and analysts' assumptions about category-membership. Some projects in discursive psychology specifically aim to take a critical stance, in relation to the assumptions of the speakers who are being studied (e.g., Billig, 1992; Edwards and Mercer, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). There is no need to fight shy of such a critical approach if the alternative is not a pure empiricism, but an unexamined uncritical view of the social order.

One last terminological point can be made. CA might have more in common with critical discursive studies than Schegloff allows. Productive future developments might be possible if the aim of sociological neutrality is abandoned as unrealizable, and the uncritical assumptions are replaced by explicit critical awareness. Such developments might benefit from a new label, especially since the 'conversation' in the term 'conversation analysis' is recognized to be a misnomer. 'Discourse' is not such a bad term, especially if analysts wish to explore

the continuities and discontinuities between oral and written communication. What price, then, the future developments of CA coming from 'critical discourse analysis'?

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'Schegloff's texts' as 'Billig's data': A critical reply

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I

In the Spring of 1968, when I was teaching at Columbia University in New York, a student strike and occupation of the buildings settled over the campus, often affecting segments of the campus in disciplinarily distinctive ways. One example occurred in the philosophy department, largely 'analytic' in commitment. There