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Bennett, Adrian

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Author(s): Adrian Bennett

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INTERRUPTIONS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF CONVERSATION

Adrian Bennett
University of Arizona

I. A CONSENSUS OF OPINION

- (1) M: Now Mr. B/ what is your view//
 B: Well/ I ha- here. . ./ I have here/
 a list of five hundred jobs/ that were/
 sent to the area/ in Hunters Point//
 M: Sent by whom//

This bit of dialogue is part of a longer encounter between these two persons which I have been examining in order to come to terms with certain issues of the thematic development of discourse. The encounter here is part of a panel discussion aired live on public TV in 1966 in San Francisco two weeks after a riot in Hunters Point. The program was explicitly aimed at consideration of the job situation in the various minority neighborhoods of the city. The interesting thing about this piece of discourse is that it progresses rapidly into a highly charged encounter between the moderator, M, and a group of black men from Hunters Point who eventually walk out of the studio protesting against the way they had been treated. Explicit interpretations of the ongoing course of the program are offered by both these blacks and the moderator which are in considerable conflict with each other. It was my guess that this outcome was a natural outgrowth of the total encounter, example (1) being a very early segment of that. I had concluded that in the slightly longer encounter between M and B of which (1) is a segment (v. example 4), M had in fact treated B rather abruptly and perhaps not with full courtesy. I was much surprised to discover, when I almost haphazardly played only the segment in (1) to about thirty undergraduate and graduate students, that there was a consensus of opinion that M was "interrupting" B, "not giving B a chance to speak," "cutting B off," "being belligerent to B," etc. My favorite characterization of this exchange was that M "sounds like he's gonna fry the guy." These responses were in answer to the very general question, "What do you think is going on between these two people here?" My informants were told only that the segment was part of a televised panel discussion. This informal experiment confirmed my own impressions in an extraordinary and surprising way. I was particularly struck by the fact that on the basis of so much less than the total picture people were able to agree without hesi-

tation about the interpersonal quality of the interaction in (1), arriving immediately at an interpretation that I myself had made only very tentatively and only after laborious consideration of the whole 45 min. tape. Perhaps the most convincing confirmation came from one student who took issue with the charge that M was being "belligerent," offering this reply: Maybe M is acting in the role of an interviewer concerned with getting certain bits of information across to an audience. This may well have been M's own view. But whether or not this actually was his intention, the thing to notice is that this student has offered what Goffman (1971) calls an "account," in this case one which claims for M that "circumstances were such as to make the act radically different from what it appears to have been (p. 110); i.e., not as an encroachment on B's "territory," but as an attempt to mediate between B and the television audience. The offering of an account presupposes the possibility of interpreting M's question "Sent by whom?" as a violation, or in Goffman's terms a "virtual offense" which is in need of some remedial work on behalf of the moderator.

One of the more pleasant results of this experiment was that it helped to justify a feeling I had already had that the study of interruptions might be one way of approaching certain issues of discourse analysis--particularly certain issues of interpretation--without having to view the material of discourse through the lens of some particular methodology, linguistic, semantic or rhetorical, as in the various forms of structural analysis of discourse that have appeared in recent years, e.g. Labov (1972), Van Dijk (1972), Halliday (1976), Grimes (1975), Rumelhart (1975), Bandler and Elgin (1975), etc. Much of this work has of course been of considerable value to linguistics, yet it sometimes seems that we have too quickly adopted unexamined assumptions about the essence of human discourse which have made it difficult to see the phenomena of discourse in the clear light of day.

II. ON STRUCTURAL APPROACHES TO DISCOURSE. The phenomenon of interruption in conversation is an interesting case in point, particularly with reference to (1). A structural-syntactic definition of interruptions, growing out of the considerable work on conversational sequencing of Sacks, Schegloff and their associates, has been offered by Schegloff (1973):

By overlap we tend to mean talk by more than a speaker at a time which has involved that a second one to speak given that a first was already speaking, the second one has projected his talk to begin at a possible completion point of the prior speaker's talk. If that's apparently the case, if for example, his start is in the environment of

what could have been a completion point of the prior speaker's turn, then we speak of it as an overlap. If it's projected to begin in the middle of a point that is in no way a possible completion point for the turn, then we speak of it as an interruption. (My italics.)

Although Schegloff's definitions of overlap and interruption appear to offer the analyst a diagnostic tool with which to isolate certain kinds of 'objects' in talk, there are a number of nagging problems with it. These problems arise as soon as we begin to think in terms of how participants themselves understand particular phenomena as interruptions in the course of talk. One difficulty is that the phrases "in the environment of" and "possible completion point" beg the question of what the environment of a possible completion point might be, and of how we are to determine this in specific cases. But in order to determine whether an instance of a second speaker's turn start is merely an instance of overlap or an actual interruption, we not only have to be able to identify the nearest possible completion point, but have to decide whether that start is inside or outside the environment of that *point*. It is of course not Schegloff's purpose in the paper cited to discuss these issues, but some discussion is offered by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), where the term "transition-relevance place" is used in lieu of "possible completion point." In that article the question of the relationship between syntactic constructions and transition-relevance place is raised. It is suggested that the construction of turns around transition-relevance places in talk can be "made" both intonationally and syntactically. I believe that an unspoken assumption made by the authors here is that in fact the determination of such discourse entities as "interruptions," "turn-constructional units," and "transition-relevance places" (and their "environments") are fully determined by structures which can be observed to actually occur as physical manifestations in the talk itself, particularly in prosodic and syntactic structures. There appears to be a tendency to assume that the "management" of talk and the interpretations that arise from it are directly related to various kinds of observable constructional "units." I would like to suggest that this is in fact not the case, that the relationship between observed structural regularities in discourse and the actual understandings participants have is considerably more flexible than this. To put it briefly, close examination of specific discourses and comparison of observations of structural regularities with informants' reactions reveals that specific constructions are capable of being understood in apparently contradictory ways in different discourses.

To illustrate this argument we can note that if we apply Schegloff's definition of interruption to examples like (1) above and to (2) below, we will come up with definitions directly opposed to informants' reactions. Thus in (1) there is no overlap and the second speaker, M, appears to make his start within a transition-relevance place, insofar as that place is characterizable in syntactic and sequential terms. In fact, there is a slight pause between the end of B's utterance and the beginning of M's of about .5 secs. Clearly this exchange does not fit Schegloff's definition of interruption, although many of my informants characterized what happens in (1) as just that.

Looking at the matter from a different angle, it is possible to show that Schegloff's definition can predict a case of interruption where in fact participants do not themselves feel an interruption is in order:

- (2) B: and y'know, it's surprising to see how much of it is more interrelated than people around here are willing to admit. I mean there's a big denial from d-... y'know where they're separate and they do different things, and we're doin this and
- C: [there's a y'know we operate in a vacuum] Mhm, yeah you choose the part you want.]
- B: And you choose what you want.

Not only did B not feel that C had interrupted here, but she interpreted C's talk as contributing cooperatively to the thematic development of B's own talk. This cooperation is manifested very nicely here by the fact that B picks up on the theme C has uttered and uses it herself as a summation of her prior talk, directing her gaze, as it happens, to C during this time and nodding her head as she does so (as revealed by the videotape of this interaction). And what is just as important a point, even if we could manage to salvage Schegloff's definitions for (2), as for example by calling it a special case of overlap and redefining in nonsyntactic terms the concept of "transition-relevance place," we still would want to understand how it is that this exchange manages to develop so smoothly possibilities of cooperation, whereas in the segment following example (1) (v. ex. 4), cooperation is very much in question.

We might of course point to B's persistence without pause in (2), which seems to indicate she is not interrupted in the usual sense of the term. She is not stopped in her course, although she has to share the floor for the moment with C. Also she does not change the flow and rhythmic pattern of her speech as established in the immediately prior utterances. This flow is characterized

by an increased tempo over the prior utterances, a lowered pitch register, and a sequence of tone groups which end in a low-falling tone. In short, B keeps right on going. Noticing these features might allow us to salvage a structural approach, explaining to us C's overlap (or interruption?) as being cooperative as a 'function' of these constructions plus others already noted. The only problem with this approach is that it is not hard to find similar examples where the first speaker persists in the same fashion as a second comes in to overlap during what would probably be a non-transition-relevant place. Example (3) is from an interaction which informants invariably see as highly antagonistic:

(3) A: Well they've got complaints, is that
whatcha mean?

C: Complaints [th-

A: [they have] complaints. The white
community has complaints] the North Beach

C: [They're not complaints, they're not com-
plaints]

A: community has complaints. The straight
colony out in the Haight Ashbury has com-
plaints. The fact that there are complaints
from different communities doesn't mean
that we have some kind of irreconcilable
conflict that must erupt in violence.

I have played this tape to about a dozen informants and found they tended to characterize C as attempting to get the floor from A but without success, apparently because A manages to keep going without pause or change in rhythm and intonational patterning. They interpreted A's persistence as "ignoring what C is saying," as "Not caring what C is trying to say," as "treating C's objection as not important," as acting "as if A had not heard C," etc. As with example (2) what follows the overlap here tends to bear out the interpretations offered. We see A completing an argument by employing the material regarding complaints in several neighborhoods of the city of San Francisco as background for the conclusion that violence is not inevitable. What is worth emphasizing is that while the overlaps and/or interruptions which occur between two speakers in (2) and (3) resemble each other "constructionally," both on the syntactic and prosodic levels, the interpretations people make as to what the quality of the interaction is tend to diverge radically.

I am not suggesting, by the way, that we abandon formal analysis or that constructional regularities

like those already mentioned do not play a role in participants' forming particular understandings in interaction. A study of overlaps and interruptions from a structural viewpoint might reveal some interesting consistencies in talk, and in fact this approach might be considered a necessary supplement to interpretive approaches being advocated here. I am only claiming that we should not expect to be able to move directly from such observations to actual interpretations made by informants and/or participants.

I think it is also clear that a number of regularities do exist on the structural levels of syntax and prosody. I suggest however that in order to treat these regularities as 'more than' constructional patterns, but as interruptions, as cooperative or antagonistic, as mere accidental overlaps, or what have you, we have to in the first place have a non-structurally-based means of identifying occurrences of these in order to know what it is we are dealing with. Perhaps the severest criticism that one can make of the work of Sacks, Schegloff, et al, brilliant as it obviously is, is that they consistently tend to take their own interpretations for granted. Rather than attempting to see constructional 'units' as indicative of particular interpretations and understandings, we ought to ask how it is that these phenomena can come to be seen as phenomena of interruptions, overlaps, etc. This is less a question of the 'recognition' of preexisting 'structures' but rather one of the interpretation of particular configurations of phenomena against a background of shared assumptions. What syntactic or other constructional regularities we do observe cannot be applied in simple and direct fashion as diagnostic tools, but rather are themselves part of what needs to be explained.

What I have been saying in effect is that Schegloff's distinction between 'overlap' and 'interruption' fails because these two categories are of logically different types, and cannot therefore be distinguished by means of a single set of parameters. The term 'overlap' is essentially a descriptive term which the discourse analyst employs for purposes of isolating an observed feature of a discourse. On the other hand, the notion of 'interruption' is basically an interpretive category which participants can make use of to deal with currently prevailing rights and obligations in actual situations. If we see interruption as an interpretation by people of what is going on as regards participants' handling of rights and obligations in talk, then we are constrained to see an interruption as involving one speaker in conflict with another--in varying degrees of intensity. Such a view encourages us to ask, in specific cases,

what is the nature of this conflict and what role does the interpretation 'interruption' play in it?

III. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW. I will now return to (1), this time expanding it to include the immediately following parts of the talk between M and B, and produce a kind of analysis which will hopefully suggest one way of approaching two very general questions about human discourse which we cannot hope to answer yet but which we might well keep in the backs of our minds whenever we approach a particular piece of discourse: (1) What is the essential nature of human discourse? (2) How is it possible for human discourse to be as it is? I consider these questions to be in some sense the same question since neither can really be answered separately from the other. Another way of saying this is that, if we really want to illuminate for ourselves the nature of human discourse, we not only have to do a good deal of concrete analysis of the observable phenomena of specific discourses, but we also have to come to terms with our relationship as human beings to the world of discourse.

1. M: Now Mr. B/ what is your view//
2. B: Well/ I ha- here. . ./ I have here/
3. a list of five hundred jobs/ that were/
4. sent to the area/ in Hunters Point
5. M: Sent by whom//
6. B: Uh/ d- . . ./ various [()]
7. M: [Are they just posted//]
8. B: government/and uh [departments]
9. M: [What I was interested]
10. in was/ uh/ where did you hear about them//
11. Are they posted/ or or what//
12. B: From a reliable resource/ I should say//
13. I'm not at hand to say/ from where/ or
14. to whom// But...there are five hundred
15. jobs here/ in my hand/ but yet/ before
16. the riot/ uh/ these jobs weren't avail-
17. able/ all of a sudden they are// I would
18. like to know/ uh/ from the the big people
19. from downtown/ why weren't these jobs a-
20. vailable before the riots//

I will not try to provide anything like a full characterization of this segment of talk here, and will unfortunately have to gloss over some very interesting strategic aspects of the interaction, such as B's persistence in the face of M's rather dogged pursuit of his own point. There is some reason to believe that this form of meeting a

challenge from educated whites is a general strategy that blacks may fall back on in such situations. In any case, my focus here will have to be on the issue of how it was possible for my informants to so readily agree not only that M interrupted B here, but also that the interruption had a particular kind of interactional quality. The goal here will be to attempt to retrace some of the paths leading from assumptions of participants and informants to the actual phenomena of this discourse and then to the interpretations that emerged.

In order to begin retracing these paths I will begin with a discussion of the underlying logic of the kinds of judgments about M's treatment of B that have arisen. What beliefs would we have to have--what assumptions, expectations and values--in order to 'reasonably' arrive at the conclusions my informants made?

First of all we have to make certain very general assumptions about M's capacities and about what he ought to be doing. If we say he is being impolite, we presuppose that he ought to be polite. The same sort of implication is involved in the use of terms like "rude," "belligerent," etc. What we are saying then is that M is doing something he should not do, and insofar as we are characterizing him negatively we are assuming he could have done something else. If we assume this we must believe that M is capable of choosing other alternatives which we might loosely call "being polite," and since he does not choose these he has committed an offense against B.

We might also ask just what we mean when we say M is impolite, rude, and so on. Lakoff (1973) has provided a remarkably clear and suggestive account of what we justifiably call certain aspects of the ontological structure of politeness with her notions of camaraderie, distance and equality. In particular M seems to fail to treat B as an equal. For Lakoff treating others as equals means giving them options. With regard to (1) we might be more specific and say that M is not allowing B his rightful share in taking responsible control of the unfolding of the discourse. It appears in fact that M is pulling the development of the discourse in one way while B is trying to go in a different direction. In lines 12-20 we appear to get a full development of what B had begun in lines 2-4. Part of the evidence for this lies in the fact that in lines 12-15 B reiterates part of what he said before. We can see from this that before being interrupted by M B was leading up to a question which, in the context of the composition of the panel, amounts to a direct challenge to some of those sitting on the panel who in fact might easily be construed as samples of "the big people from downtown," i.e. government and labor officials. (That

we can consider this a challenge might partly be due to our understanding of "big people" in this context as a critical rather than as a descriptive term. Why this construal is possible is an interesting question, although I will not attempt to pursue it here.)

If we can accept B's question as a challenge within the situational framework of a live televised panel discussion on "jobless minorities" in which some panel members are labor and government leaders and some are part of those minorities, then we can begin to appreciate in interactional terms M's questions about where the jobs list came from. Specifically we could probably show without much difficulty that the information M can be seen as asking B to provide would in no special way contribute to B's construction of a challenge here. We would not need to know where the list came from in order to understand the challenge as a challenge. B's concern would in this light appear to be to lay a foundation for making his question in lines 19-20 understandable as a challenge. An essential part of this foundation involves three assertions: (1) I have a list of five hundred jobs; (2) Before the riot these jobs weren't available; (3) Now, after the riot, they are available.

We can thus see two possible lines of thematic development here which are in conflict, M wanting to deal with "sources of information" and B with "making a challenge." In this view the interactional issue here has to do with whether M or B is going to get to lead the discourse down the path of his own projected unfolding. The clash between the two protagonists appears in fact to intensify in lines 6-11, but before examining the issue of what justifies our thinking this, I want to turn back to the opening five lines of (4) and reconsider the question of how it is that a consensus of opinion between my informants was reached as to M's "rudeness," etc. This is not only an issue of how it was possible for some informants to see M's question "Sent by whom?" as an interruption, but is just as crucially a question of how they could agree independently as to the interactional quality of that interruption. I would in fact claim that the two interpretations of M's question as (a) an interruption and (b) rude, are mutually interdependent. That is neither is either logically or temporally prior to the other, but each mutually supports and justifies the other. I will examine the issue of M's rudeness first and then return to the issue of interruption.

I believe that, as always, a variety of factors contribute to the interpretation of rudeness. I shall attempt to deal with these here in terms of what I would like to call the "concrete logic" of the unfolding situation in lines 1-5. I want to use this term because I do not want

to commit myself beforehand to any separation of the logic of ideas in this discourse and the working out of particular communicational behaviors. So I want to use the term "concrete logic" as a means of pointing to a stage of interactional experience in which observable behaviors taking place in the context of what other behaviors might conceivably have been manifested are not perceived as separable from what is being 'meant' or 'done' by the participants. This emphasis may seem strange to many linguists, but I want to suggest that the linguist's belief that linguistic form is somehow discretely alienated from semantic 'content' is not necessarily shared by ordinary mortals.

As we have already noted, B appears in lines 2-4 to be laying a groundwork for the making of a challenge. Now clearly those informants who heard only lines 1-5 could not readily infer that this was where B was heading. No one volunteered that interpretation at least. Nevertheless I believe it is possible to recognize B's talk there as in fact just what it is, namely the laying of a groundwork for the eventual doing or saying of something, presumably a something which would constitute a reply to M's first question. Notice that I am saying more than that we can tell B is not yet finished, although clearly those informants who saw M as interrupting B must have thought this, or at least taken this as the case. We are also saying here that M's interruption comes at what for B was a crucial place in his discourse, a place in which it is in fact crucial not to interrupt, except for certain special reasons.

There are a couple of reasons why it is important not to interrupt B here. One of these has to do with the understanding that B has in fact laid a groundwork necessary for us to understand the 'something' that is going to emerge out of this ground. Now one of the things about laying a groundwork is that if it is crucial for us to somehow have it 'in mind' (whatever that may mean) in order to understand a later act, then there ought not to be too much temporal gap between laying the groundwork and the doing of the consequent action. To interrupt just when M did is not only to interrupt him before he has finished, but to interrupt him at a critical stage in the working out of his themes. I am not claiming here that the gap might cause us to miss his point, forgetting what is essential in the groundwork, although of course this is possible. I do not believe we can effectively characterize the sense of incompleteness here in the usual cognitive terms of short-term memory, storage and retrieval of information, or attention. Although I cannot pursue this point here, I would suggest in passing that the sense of disturbance here arises out of an understanding or ex-

pectation that more is to come. There is an incomplete gestalt here, as if the first three "fate" notes of the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony had been sounded without the fourth being allowed to follow.

Another reason why it is critical for M not to take the floor from B at this point has to do with the framework within which B's discourse begins to unfold. That is, it is M who has in fact asked B to make a contribution. He has addressed him by name & directed a question to him. B has not refused M's direction here, but has accepted the opening M has provided him. He is cooperating with M, following his lead. In a certain sense B has placed himself under M's direction; i.e., one does not have to reply to a question. Now, although by answering one cooperates with the questioner, still an answerer has certain rights. The floor has been turned over to him and insofar as the question is in some sense (which we cannot really yet define) 'serious' then the answerer has rights to keep the floor for a reasonable time in order to provide an answer. But in B's reply to M's first question it is difficult to conceive that an expression of a view has yet been given, which is what was asked for. Thus M has given the floor to B within the particular framework of addressing a serious question and in line 5 taken the floor back again before B has had a chance to supply an answer. One does not usually treat adults this way in our culture. It is almost as if M's question "Sent by whom?" is delivered against an assumption that B is not able in fact to structure his own bit of discourse coherently. I believe that it is just because B's discourse is situated in just this place in the discourse that my informants so readily could see M as rude. It is because B's talk in lines 2-4 partakes simultaneously in two unfolding lines of thematic development, one which looks back in time to the framework set up by M's first question, and one which looks forward in time to the unfolding of a challenge, that I would suggest makes readily available the interpretations my informants made regarding the quality of M's interruption.

I want to point out that while the above argument suggests a background within the unfolding structure of the discourse itself for these interpretations, it is of course not the whole story. While I cannot give all of the story here I do want to mention another important factor which I feel contributes to the rudeness interpretation. This has to do with our judgments as to the kinds of persons M and B seem to be. I asked a few of my informants what they thought of M and B as persons. Two or three people suggested that B sounded ill at ease, was not as well-educated as M, and appeared to be having a hard time saying what he wanted to say. By contrast M appeared to at least have some higher formal education and to be a very

fluent speaker. What I want to suggest is that interpretations of the participants' relative skills at public speaking may well have played a role in making possible the rudeness reading of M's "Sent by whom?" If this is the case it would have to be so in a context of beliefs about how less educated people ought to be treated by more educated ones. In M's case we might say he ought to have been helping B to say whatever he wanted to say, and--given M's fluency--he ought to have been able to do this. Such beliefs of course grow out of large scale assumptions about the nature of racial and class equality in this country. Given such assumptions we might see M's act as more intensively antagonistic than he himself did.

As to why we might see B as relatively nonfluent here, we might mention briefly his self-correction, the awkwardness of the tonal phrasing, as for example breaking the clause "that were/ sent to the area/ into two tone groups, and the relative monotony of the tonal contours (not indicated in the transcriptions here) in which each close with a rise-fall-rise pattern. These features themselves might not give us an impression of nonfluency, but in the context of a panel discussion where efficiency and speed of delivery have a high premium, such features appear to be a handicap, particularly where M is by contrast so visibly on top of things. As a result of this contrast B may be seen as being at a disadvantage, as an underdog who already has enough trouble making his point without having to deal with interference from M.

In the light of our interpretation of the opening lines of (4) as unfolding a clash between two individuals over rights to take the lead in guiding the direction of the discourse, we can see the overlaps, hesitations, repetitions, etc. which occur in the following lines as an intensification, particularly as it appears that M repeats his prior behavior toward B, asking a question which B attempts to answer and then interrupting him in line 7 before B has had a chance to make anything like a full assertion. This exchange also involves intensification in that B is being led farther and farther from the groundwork that has already been set forth. The hesitation of B in line 8 may be seen as a sign of his struggling, not really being able to meet M head on as yet. What I am saying is that it is not surprising to find such structural features in the context of a clash; it would be difficult however to determine that a clash was in progress from observation of these kinds of structural features alone. In order to do so we would have to take for granted many of the assumptions, beliefs and expectations which I have already discussed and treat these as 'giv

I have argued that the interpretation of M's behavior in asking "Sent by whom?" as rude, etc., is grounded on

assumptions and behaviors which are manifold, such as certain general principles of social conduct, certain rules of politeness, certain assumptions about participants' ability to exert voluntary control and choice over alternative behaviors, etc. Some of the beliefs I have mentioned are probably culturally specific, such as our ideas about underdogs. The interpretations are also based on our familiarity with particular rhetorical patterns, such as the laying of a groundwork to provide the basis for understanding a later speech act. Some of the features we have noted are highly concrete, such as particular prosodic and syntactic patterns. At the same time, some of these structural regularities may be seen as highly abstract insofar as they represent behaviors that could have been performed but were not. Out of the assumption that M is interrupting B in some sense grows the interpretation that he is rude, belligerent etc. On the other hand, given the belief that M is in fact rude, our assumption that he has interrupted B has the appearance of having been 'verified' by the 'facts'. This is sometimes how practical reasoning works, as Garfinkel (1967) suggests, i.e. as a self-justifying, self-contained and self-perpetuating circular system. In some ways human discourse seems to resemble the cardio-vascular system.

IV. CUES; THE NATURE OF HUMAN DISCOURSE. One of the apparent disadvantages of the phenomenological approach to the interpretation of human discourse is that, compared to the structural approaches oriented toward a body of data out of the inductive-empirical school of science, the phenomenologist's interpretations of discourse will seem less than spectacular. Much more exciting those surprising correlations that structuralist approaches often come up with. The phenomenologist's interpretations often appear to tell us little more than what we already knew. Sometimes one finds phenomenologist writers compensating for this by cultivating a florid prose and a radical thought which is the modern equivalent of the mannerisms of a Sir Thomas Browne (e.g. Lacan 1968; Ricoeur 1970). Phenomenology has of course an answer to this dilemma. That is that the serendipity effect which sometimes accompanies structural-inductive studies is often shortlived. This is because there is a failure to capture for us the essential nature of human discourse, which in fact cannot be 'captured' at all, not if we think of capturing as being able to describe the essence of discourse in the same way we can describe physical entities which are outside of us and independent of our existence. Unfortunately I cannot pretend to be able to characterize adequately the essential nature of

human discourse either, but I would like to focus briefly on two aspects of discourse with a view toward projecting toward such a characterization in the future. On the one hand we need to know more about the interrelationships of the concrete phenomena which actually appear in discourse, those phenomena which some people have recently begun to treat under the rather general term of "cue." On the other hand it is important that we learn to think through the general nature of human discourse in terms of the relationships that people create between themselves within the medium of discourse (Within, not through or by means of) in terms of shared worlds of discourse.

A. CUES. Cues are often conceived of in a form-content, sign-meaning, signifier-signified framework which presupposes something like a Lockean theory of meaning in which manifest behaviors, verbal and non-verbal, are said to 'correspond' in rule-governed ways to ideas in a conceptual world somehow contained in the mind. This is an expected bias for those scientists who feel their main concern should be with empirical validation of hypothesized consistencies in some observed body of data. Cues in conversation or other forms of human discourse would in this view 'convey' or even 'force' a particular 'reading' which is the meaning or content that cue is associated with independently of its actual use in specific discourse situations. In fact a cue's ability to, as it were, 'contain' some piece of a conceptual world--as if cues were packages containing bits of information--is what would in this view distinguish a particular phenomenon as a cue.

There are of course other possible views of what a cue might be. One that I find most attractive, in the light of attempting to reveal something about the ontological structure of understanding in human discourse, is that offered by certain aspects of gestaltist theories of the 'field' as a totality of entities in relationship to each other as perceived by some interested party. The gestaltist conception offers two advantages in particular:

1. It is not necessary to see a field, such as a specific piece of discourse, as a self-contained unit cut off from relationships with the rest of the world. To do so would be to commit a cardinal sin against the gestaltist conception of world. This notion of a field allows us to think of linguistic knowledge within a framework of our other knowledge of the world. Or to be more accurate, what as linguists we call linguistic knowledge is actually an extrapolation of a particular kind (as determined partly by the exigencies of an academic discipline) from the totality of the knowledge, experience, and practices of human beings situated at every moment within

a historical context. Political, personal, psychological, social etc. realities which engage the interest of human beings at a variety of levels would in this view be most concretely 'manifested' in specific everyday interactional situations; therefore one of the best ways to understand such realities might be through the close study of discourse. I believe this argument was already seen, although from a slightly different angle, by Sapir (1949) when he said:

A further psychological characteristic of language is the fact that while it may be looked upon as a symbolic system which reports or refers to or otherwise substitutes for direct experience, it does not as a matter of actual behavior stand apart from or run parallel to direct experience but completely interpenetrates with it.

2. The gestaltist view encourages us to understand discourse as an unfolding of possibilities through time. This follows from the gestaltist conception of the kinds of relationships that hold between a totality or field and the entities which comprise it. This relationship can be viewed from two angles which complement each other as do the inside and outside of a glove (to borrow an image from Kierkegaard):

- a. The entities in the field receive their full definition only in the immediate context and only in terms of that context or totality and their place or relative position within it.
- b. The context, the whole in which the entities share only receives its definition in terms of both (1) the relationships between the entities within it and (2) its relationships to the larger context of which it is necessarily a part.

A human discourse would in this view be a development or working out of possibilities intrinsic to discourse, i.e. to 'language' itself. Linguistic and other behavioral phenomena which the social scientist may extrapolate from bodies of data would have to be seen as merely approximations of what actually occurs in concrete situations which we isolate with a view toward understanding both specific examples of discourse and discourse itself. This does not mean--in fact cannot mean--that the writing of rules which will enable to predict the 'function' of any particular phenomenon in terms of both what contexts it can enter into and what 'content' it will have upon entering is a realistic goal. Dreyfus (1972) contrasts these two very different approaches, referring to the latter approach

as making use of 'plans' or rules:

A gestalt determines the meaning of the elements it organizes; a plan or a rule simply organizes independently defined elements. Moreover, just as the elements (the beats) cannot be defined independently of the gestalt, the gestalt (the rhythm) is nothing but the organization of the elements. A plan, on the other hand, can be stated as a rule or program, independently of the elements.

Human discourse can be understood as the unfolding of specific sets of possibilities which are 'revealed' in the evolving relationships of the gestalt of the discourse itself. The phenomena of human communicational behavior share through the development of their interrelationships momentary, apparently evanescent roles in the thematizing or working out of the shared experience of the discourse world for and by the participants. This thematizing involves the participants in a continual unfolding of understandings and interpretations, some of which are mutual, as to their aims, their motives, their feelings, the meanings utterances have to them, the classifications they may make of particular discourse activities, etc., and in general their expectations, values, assumptions. The roles played by the particular behavioral phenomena of the participants--i.e. by linguistic, prosodic, kinesic, postural and other behaviors--can only be understood in terms of this thematizing, in terms of particular situated cases of thematization as the the concrete working out or 'actualizations' of lines of possibility. The goal is less the isolation of apparently recurrent phenomena with a view toward accurate prediction of meanings participants may find in a discourse, than with understanding how such phenomena enter into relationships which are understood by participants in just the ways that they are.

Regarding some of the phenomena of (1) we might note in passing that there is a contrast in register between B's "sent to the area" and M's "Sent by whom?" where the overall pitch register of M's phrase is noticeably lower than B's. If this register difference played a role in supplying a basis for my informants' interpretations, we would clearly want to describe it as a relational phenomenon rather than try to explain it in terms of the occurrence of a particular level of pitch register in M's "Sent by whom?" It is the contrast between two phrases in terms of register that is important; the 'meaning' of what M does needs to be seen in the light of what B has already done in this particular situation. Furthermore, what is crucial is that this relation develops just here in the talk where it is relatively clear that B has not finished. In addition other phenomena may play a role here, such as

M's use of 'whom' and his lack of hesitation relative to B's speech. A little hesitation, recycling, 'stuttering' or the use of a hedge like "I was wondering if you could tell us. . ." might well have forestalled the sense of impoliteness informants have here. It is important to note that this same configuration of prosodic phenomena might well support a different interpretation had they occurred in a different place. For example if M's question occurred immediately after B's utterance of the word "area," thus overlapping with his "in Hunters Point," M might have seemed even more rude. Or if the content of M's question had been more pertinent to B's making his point, rather than a shift in the direction of thematic development, these phenomena might have been understood as a way of being efficiently cooperative. Again, the point is that we cannot understand discourse phenomena, such as prosodic patterns, unless we are able to relate them to our interpretations of discourse totalities.

B. DISCOURSE AS A SHARED WORLD (CONCLUSION). I see interruptions as special cases of some kind of clash between the worlds of two or more persons within the framework of a human discourse (interruptions need not be verbal). Interruptions can be seen as accidental or deliberate; cooperative or antagonistic; nonserious or serious, etc. The quality and intensity of affect centered around one or a set of interruptions can vary across the whole range of the potential depth of the human capacity for affect. Parameters such as these offer only a rough characterization of certain features of the kind of fundamental and developing understandings centering on those particular manifestations of clashes which we sometimes label "interruptions."

But to talk of "clashes" is not particularly illuminating. An important question is not only what do we mean by the term, but also what can we say about the assumptions, expectations and values that provide a ground out of which clashes may arise? In particular, what do people expect to get out of engaging in discourse? Without pretending to be able to give an adequate answer to this question, I would like to point to what I consider to be an essential feature of human interaction that most discourse analysts (including myself) have tended to overlook. Some of the ethnomethodologists have well emphasized the concept that human discourse is something that is accomplished through the intentionality of persons. No one has yet been able to specify very much of both what is accomplished and how it is. I believe that those types of discourse which involve clashes of various kinds and degrees grow out of a set of expectations that, for the analyst at least, can be seen as arising in the

context of the intentional accomplishment of discourse. I like to think of discourse **as** not so much an exchange as a shared world that is built up through various modes of mutual response over the course of time in particular interactions. I offer this view as an alternative to the view of discourse as an economic system in which 'members' exchange object-like entities such as turns at talk, parts of adjacency pairs, speech acts, etc. (e.g. Goffman 1971; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). Rather than thinking of discourse on the model of this rather pale visual metaphor one might think of discourse in terms of touch. Though sometimes there is one who touches and one who is touched--so-called active and passive roles--the one who touches can be affected not merely by the response of the one touched, but by actually having done the touching as well. The same can be said for the one touched. There is room for varying degrees of reciprocity here and in any case it is much easier to think of touching as a creation of a mutually experienced world of discourse than as an exchange of objects or any other entities. Thus we can see human discourse of whatever form and mode as a shared world because the participants share both in the experience of it (not necessarily in identical ways of course) and in the creation of it. We come into human contact in various situations with certain unspoken assumptions and expectations regarding such issues as, how much we want to participate in the construction of this discourse world; how much responsibility for its construction we want to assume or feel called upon to assume; what value we place on this participation, etc. At least some clashes involve those cases in which some participants sense that they have not been able (or allowed) to share in the creation of the discourse as much as and/or in the ways they would have like to. I believe it to be fundamental for human beings to be concerned with self-responsibility for the articulation of their relations to others, to themselves, to the world.

When interruptions do occur, the understanding participants have of them will be heavily affected by their beliefs of the moment. If there is some reason for one or more participants to believe that he/she is losing some rights toward leading the discourse to some other person, whether one is willing to relinquish these rights gracefully, or whether one finds oneself foaming at the mouth, depends upon 'who' one is at that time. One may interpret the same behavioral phenomena as an interruption in one situation and as an accidental overlap in another. In the same way, in one situation an interruption may be seen as trivial or even cooperative, and in another as belligerent.

I suggest in particular that it is only in the light

of this groundwork of expectation, assumption and value that we can explain examples like (1) as an interruption, while examples like (2), although they may fit a structural definition of interruptions like that offered by Schegloff, are not. That is, the question of interruption in discourse is not so much one of recognition--which implies the somehow 'prior' existence of an object-like entity that the listener or speaker 'recognizes' when it 'appears' in physical form, but rather is it a question of a particular kind of interpretation arising in organized ways out of a background of particular possibilities which are evolving at that moment in the discourse as the participants work out a direction of thematic development and set forth a qualitatively shared world. (Exactly how this sharing is accomplished and to what 'ends' if any is still at present largely a mystery).

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