Confirming Illusions: A literary practice in 'latter-day' conversation analysis

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Abstract
This paper is part of an ongoing dispute on the topic of Epistemics in Conversation Analysis (CA). Epistemics is a conceptual framework that has been used in recent years to trace the organizational relevance and implications of differential knowledge and information in conversation. This particular paper is a response to a series of articles recently published in a special "rebuttal issue" of the journal *Discourse Studies*. The special issue defended Epistemics in the face of an earlier special issue of the same journal on "the epistemics of Epistemics," which included a series of articles and comments that critically examined the conceptual and empirical grounds of Epistemics (see http://radicalethno.org/documents.html). The rebuttal issue presents an abundance of dismissive and denunciatory assertions by authors defending Epistemics, but it also brings into relief some fundamental issues on how professional social science characterizations of social actions relate to vernacular understandings of those actions. The present paper focuses on the central claim made in Epistemics, which is forcefully reiterated in the rebuttal issue. The claim is that imbalances in knowledge are "ubiquitous", "omnirelevant", and "omnipresent" aspects of sequential order in social interaction. Contributors to the rebuttal issue insist that competent analysis of epistemic organization requires the use of collections of transcribed fragments of recorded talk rather than a merely vernacular understanding of single episodes. By re-presenting an instance used in one of the articles in the rebuttal issue to demonstrate the virtues of the collection method, this paper suggests that, at least in the particular case, the literary practices that exemplify that method obscure the practices through which parties produce the sequences it is used to analyse.

Introduction

Two years ago, a meeting was held in this building at MMU on "radical ethnomethodology," and the year before that I gave a talk at the Mind & Society meeting.[1] One thread that ran through both of those meetings, and today's as well, is a critical review of work in Conversation Analysis (CA) on "epistemics" in social interaction. A few months following the 2016 meeting in Manchester, the journal *Discourse Studies* published a series of articles and two commentaries on epistemics, which appeared in the October 2016 issue (Vol. 18, No. 5, entitled "The epistemics of Epistemics").[2] The articles were all co-authored pieces and, while the combinations of authors differed in each article, all of the articles arose from a lengthy series of weekly or fortnightly discussions among Doug Macbeth, Jean Wong, Oskar Lindwall, Jonas Iverson, Gustav Lymer, Wendy Sherman Heckler, and me. Wendy did not co-author an article, due to load of work she has in the Otterbein University administration, but she participated in the discussions and she also did major organizational work for last summer's meeting of the IIEMCA at Otterbein in Columbus Ohio, which included some sessions on the topic.

What concerns me today is another special issue of *Discourse Studies* that was organized to rebut our criticisms of epistemics.[3] It was not published until January of this year, but we learned that it was in the works shortly after our special issue was published. In the interim between the two issues, a debate of sorts continued online. A few weeks after our special issue was published, John Heritage, the leading proponent of epistemics, posted online a version of his rebuttal article (Heritage, 2016). Over the next several months, we posted three responses to Heritage's paper (I recently revised and re-posted my response to Heritage's rebuttal to take into account changes in the published version).[4] At that time, we did not know who else was

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[1] Copies of relevant papers and a podcast of the meeting are available at a website – radicalethno.org. I'm grateful to Alex Dennis for setting up and managing the site.

[2] The articles in the special issue on "The epistemics of Epistemics," were: Lindwall et al. (2016); Lynch and Wong (2016); Macbeth and Wong (2016); and Macbeth, Wong and Lynch (2016). The issue also included critical commentaries by Graham Button and Wes Sharrock (2016) and Jacob Steensig and Trine Heinemann (2016).

[3] The special issue, entitled "Epistemics – the rebuttal special issue," was guest-edited by Paul Drew, and appeared in *Discourse Studies* (Vol. 20, No. 1, 2018). It included articles by Bolden (2018); Clift and Raymond (2018); Drew (2018b); Heritage (2018); and Raymond (2018).

[4] Responses (Lymer et al., 2017; Macbeth, 2017; Lynch, 2018) to Heritage (2016, 2018) are posted on two websites: academia.edu and radicalethno.org.

writing articles for the rebuttal issue and we were specifically not invited to take part in it or publish a response to it in a later issue of that journal.

Again, deferring for a moment what 'epistemics' means in this context (itself a matter in dispute), a few other preliminaries are worth mentioning. An article in the rebuttal issue by Maynard and Clayman (2018) takes aim at "radical ethnomethodology" – the theme for the meeting here two years ago – while leaving it to other authors to rebut the arguments we made about epistemics. M&C use as a template a series of ideal-types presented by Egon Bittner (1963) in an analysis of radical social movements, which they apply to their (mis)construal of the "group" that met here in 2016. The themes they borrow from Bittner (and their application to the case at hand) are the following: "the search for meaning" (of what "radical ethnomethodology" could possibly be or become); reverence for "charismatic founders" (romantic versions of Garfinkel and Sacks); attacks on a "vulnerable adversary" (Heritage); and a secretive emphasis on "in-group loyalties" (loyalties among the "select group" that convened at MMU, including the half-dozen of us who held frequent conversations on epistemics over the previous two years).[5] On this last theme, readers who have been associated with ethnomethodology for a long time might recognize uncanny parallels between M&C's treatment of "radical ethnomethodology," and Lewis Coser's (1975) presidential address to the American Sociological Association in which he likened ethnomethodology and CA to a religious cult characterized by a secretive and disdainful attitude toward the norms of science.

M&C's strained effort to use Bittner's categories to define the group (whether the small group of authors of articles in the 2016 special issue, or the larger group of participants and audience in attendance at the two-day meeting at MMU) leads them to exaggerate the extent of secrecy and to ignore the several public presentations and invitations for criticism that we made prior

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[5] Bittner's article is an interesting example of what I once called "proto-ethnomethodology" (Lynch, 1993), as it discusses Garfinkel's and Schutz's distinction between the "attitude" of science and that of everyday life. Bittner makes some interesting critical points about prior sociological accounts of radical movements, but then goes on to present an explicitly functionalist analysis of radical social movements. The categories that M&C adopt from Bittner's article in their polemic against self-styled 'radical' ethnomethodologists are designed along the lines of Weberian ideal types.

to the publication of that special issue. They mention that we invited Heritage to write a commentary on our articles in the 2016 special issue, but they imply that this was not a sincere invitation, given the highly restricted time and space we provided for him to do so. They do not mention that we invited others besides Heritage who also declined for different reasons (or for no stated reason). Admittedly, there was not much time after we had drafted papers that were complete and stable enough for critical commentary before the deadline we were given for submitting final drafts for the scheduled publication. We were grateful that Steensig and Heinemann were willing to write such a commentary in that amount of time, and that Button and Sharrock also were willing to do so. M&C also fail to mention that we suggested to Heritage, after he declined for reasons of lack of time and space, that he write a rebuttal to be published in a subsequent issue. He apparently convinced the editor of *Discourse Studies* to provide space for another special issue in which he and others would present their rebuttals, and the editor also informed me that there would be no further opportunity for us to respond in the journal, either in that issue or a later one. So, having been blocked from publishing our reactions in the same journal, we have been using online forums and talks like this one for further discussion of the matter.

To add to my bafflement about M&C's charge that those of us in the 'anti-epistemics' group operated in secret in order to protect ourselves from criticism, for more than a year prior to the publication of our special issue we gave public presentations at the ASA and IIEMCA meetings in 2015, and at LANSI (Language and Social Interaction Working Group) in 2015 and 2016, and at Manchester in 2015 and 2016.[6] Moreover, following a brief and testy exchange with Heritage in the question session following the talk I gave at the 2015 ASA meeting, the co-chairs of the EMCA section invited the two of us to present our arguments in a more formal way at the 2016 meeting. I accepted but Heritage declined. I was told by one of the section chairs that he had good reasons, though I was not told what they were. We also encouraged criticism from the

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[6] M&C describe the 2016 meeting as closed to all but members of a loyal "in group" of self-styled "radical" ethnomethodologists. This is inaccurate. One day of the two-day meeting at MMU in June 2016 was a workshop for invited participants to critically discuss the idea of a radical ethnomethodology, but the second day was a public meeting that was videotaped and posted on the radicalethno.org website.

audience during the 2015 IIEMCA meeting, and there was ample time for discussion, but we got very little direct criticism of our version of epistemics. We *were* given encouraging words, occasionally by individuals who were reluctant to publicly express such support, given the hold that Heritage (our alleged "vulnerable adversary") and his close colleagues have on the university departments, publication outlets, and professional associations in which CA thrives.

With the exception of Galina Bolden's (2018) paper, which presents an argument and some examples to support her favorable view of epistemic analysis, the contributions to the rebuttal issue begin with polemical assertions that dismiss and denounce our special issue. They also repeat assertions without addressing how we had previously addressed those assertions. For example, in a presentation here three years ago, I began with a list of 'nots' (as John O'Neill once characterized a rhetorical practice commonly used in academic presentations).

- What this is not:
    - This is not a critique of CA as an entire field.
    - This is not a matter of drawing a line between ethnomethodology and CA.
    - This is not a matter of contrasting early Sacks and later CA.
    - This is not an attempt to discredit Heritage as a leading authority on Garfinkel, ethnomethodology, and CA. But, a critical examination of his publications is unavoidable if we are to address the questions I raised. (Lynch, 2015)

It is clear from reading the rebuttal issue that these 'nots' were not taken seriously, and most likely were viewed as insincere rhetoric that we used for presenting:

- a critique of CA reiterating arguments in series of papers some 20 years ago that David Bogen and I co-authored (e.g., Lynch and Bogen, 1994), which focused an attack on original work by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson;[7]
- which is based in a contestable version of Garfinkel's (2002) post-*Studies* 'ethnomethodology's program', and a so-called 'radical' or 'post-analytic' ethnomethodology;
- is ignorant of developments in CA since the 1980s;
- and is a personal attack on Heritage.

[7] I don't mean to abandon what David Bogen and I said years ago. For a long time, some of us who are generally sympathetic with CA and have drawn heavily upon it in our own research, have raised concerns about the technical-vernacular distinction, the use of collection-based inferences, and the formal-structural emphasis in CA (see also Anderson & Sharrock, 1984; Watson, 2008). Although these concerns continue to be relevant, the 2016 special issue on of epistemics in CA pursues a more circumscribed set of issues.

We were not surprised that Heritage's colleagues and former students would rally to his defense, but the construal of our arguments about 'epistemics' as a personal vendetta by the 'Lynch group' is a distraction. As I have said before, I joined a conversation that was ongoing in 2015. I wasn't much interested in delving into the latest work in CA at the time, but from attending meetings in which such work was presented, I had noticed that Heritage, his students, and other current practitioners of the art were taking an explicit interest in linguistic features of particular utterances, emphasizing interrogative and declarative forms, and making use of micro-functionalist idioms in their characterizations of exemplary fragments. I also noticed that many of the current practitioners seemed completely uninterested in the phenomenological legacy of ethnomethodology and in the philosophy of social science more generally, and were comfortable with pursuing a normal social science. It seemed that what CA offered for them was an established method with which to contribute to one or another social science: sociology, social psychology, and subfields of linguistics and the more technical strains of discourse analysis. At the time, Macbeth, Ivarsson, Lymer, and Lindwall were more favorably inclined than I was toward CA, and particularly toward Manny Schegloff's version of it, and Jean Wong who joined our discussion a few months later, received a PhD in Applied Linguistics at UCLA with Schegloff as an advisor. Our ongoing discussion led me to read and re-read a large amount of work by Schegloff, and I gained a deeper appreciation of his work as a result. I also read and re-read many of Heritage's and related writings on epistemics and other recent developments, and this deepened the puzzles I had about them.

As we have said repeatedly, our criticisms are framed more narrowly than those that David Bogen and I made in the 1990s. The criticisms turn on the question of whether or not, and how, 'epistemics' is in line with CA's analytical constraints as repeatedly argued by Schegloff over the years. This question involved a combination of conceptual and empirical issues.

To add to the list of nots in light of the rebuttal issue:

- We did not categorically deny the relevance of the *phenomena* glossed under the rubric of "epistemics". I cannot emphasize this enough. What we criticized was the specific "analytical framework" (to use Raymond's [2018] term) and the way it was deployed in specific cases. Related to this, we took issue with the extraordinary scope and relevance claimed for that framework; a scope that several of the rebuttal articles reaffirm and even 'upgrade' with assertions about the "omnirelevance" and "omnipresence" of knowledge asymmetry and information transfer in ordinary conversation.
- Our criticisms of epistemics in CA are not based in a rejection of the use of collections of transcribed fragments extracted from various recorded conversations. We allowed that such collections could be valuable for gaining insight into specific organizational features. Clift & Raymond (2018: 96) acknowledge that we said this in the introduction of the special issue (Lynch and Macbeth, 2016: 496), but they discount this as "mere lip service" belied by our proposal to devote attention to singular instances presented in publications on epistemics. Although, as we shall see, we do have issues to raise with the "collections method," as exemplified by C&R's own rebuttal paper, the reasons for focusing on singular instances in our paper were two-fold. First, the instances we reanalyzed were originally presented to demonstrate general claims and exemplary categories in the key articles on epistemics by Heritage and Raymond that we discussed, whereas the collections from which they were drawn were not available in those publications. Second, as we argued, many of those instances did not clearly support the analytical claims made about them in those articles. These two reasons are significant for CA, given the long-standing insistence in that field that (1) analytical claims can be, and are, made demonstrable and transparent to readers of published articles, including those who might criticize those claims; and (2) such demonstration is made by reference to the vernacular 'analysis' produced by the parties in and through the details of singular interactions.

Some background on epistemics in CA

In our 2016 special issue, we briefly summarized what we called the "Epistemic Program" in CA (see, for example, Lynch and Macbeth, 2016: 494-495), and various summaries were presented in others of our articles. One thing that surprised us when reading the rebuttal issue was that there were such strong objections the very idea that there is an "epistemic program." In their commentary in our special issue, Steensig and Heinemann (2016) made some relatively mild objections to the idea that epistemics constituted a "program" in CA, and their objection was upgraded in Heritage's (2016) online rebuttal paper and again in several of the articles in the rebuttal issue. In my response to Heritage's rebuttal, I discussed this objection at some length

(Lynch, 2018: 10ff), but remained puzzled about why he and others found the word "program" so objectionable. Bolden (2018: 160,n4) provides a possible hint as to why, when she denies that her research is part of a "'program' or agenda to discover epistemic phenomena." She insists instead that her account "evolved inductively through a close examination of each case, the collection as a whole, and the subcollections within the collection." Apparently, Bolden associates "program" with a theory or model that furnishes a conceptual framework that motivates and guides analysis.

In my response to Heritage's (2016) online rebuttal, I professed no particular attachment to the word "program," but noted that Heritage presented his version of epistemics (and, as I noted, there are other versions) as a systematic synthesis of a range of discursive phenomena, many of which had been described by others in piecemeal fashion (Lynch, 2018). In his rebuttal paper, Raymond (2018: 64) does us a service by concisely outlining what he calls "an analytic framework" developed by Heritage to consolidate prior work in linguistics and CA on particular sequential organizations, recipient design, and other phenomena. Raymond's overview clearly presents the basic conceptual terms, metaphors, and distinctions we critically examined, and he also provides us with an apt label, alternative to "Epistemic Program" (EP): "Epistemic Analytic Framework" (EAF). Readers who care to examine our prior work on EP are invited to substitute EAF, and to consider if the change makes any difference.

Drew (2018a) in his introduction, along with several other authors of articles in the rebuttal issue, also objected to the extent to which our criticisms of the EAF focused so strongly on John Heritage's work. Drew observes that not only did we focus on relatively recent publications of Heritage's which were explicitly about epistemics, two of the papers in our special issue (Macbeth et al., 2016; Macbeth and Wong, 2016) covered his writings on the "change of state token, 'Oh'" and "'Oh'-prefaced" turn-construction units dating back to 1984. This focus, Drew suggests, is clear evidence of personal animus directed against Heritage. Again, Geoffrey Raymond comes to our rescue. Raymond could easily claim credit as co-author of the foundational papers (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006), but he defers to Heritage as the singular innovator and authority on the EAF. Heritage (2018: 34) also

acknowledges that he and Raymond 'systematized' the previous work on 'oh-prefacing' and 'negative interrogatives' when developing the EAF, thus providing justification for why we focused so strongly on Heritage's earlier as well as more recent research in our reviews and criticisms. Happily, for us, by joining Heritage in defense of the EAF and further demonstrating and celebrating his achievement, all of the contributors to the rebuttal issue have allowed us to focus on a collectively endorsed framework, which was what we had intended to do all along.

Raymond's (2018: 64) overview of the EAF is very brief, but I believe I can safely say that the other rebutters endorse it as, at least, an adequate presentation of the framework. It also seems consistent with other overviews, such as those presented by Heritage (2012a, b; 2013a, b), and, not incidentally, it also seems consistent with the overviews we re-present in our special issue. Raymond presents two basic conceptual elements of the framework – epistemic status and epistemic stance – and briefly suggests how their interaction shapes "the relevancies set in motion by an FPP [a first pair-part of an adjacency pair] composed using a declarative and interrogative" (p. 64). An interrogative, according to Raymond requests information, while a declarative conveys information.

According to Raymond, epistemic *status* has to do with the contextually sensitive recipient design of FPPs, and specifically with assessments of differential *knowledge*. Quoting a key article by Heritage (2012a: 4)[8] on the topic of action formation, Raymond mentions an "epistemic gradient" that Heritage uses to represent the "more knowledgeable [K+] or less knowledgeable [K-]" status to participants in reference to a relevant domain. A graph representing a such a gradient appears in Heritage (2012a: 7) and also in Heritage (2013b: 378), where it represents gradations in epistemic *stance*: "different grammatical realizations of propositional content" illustrated by the utterances "Are you married?" (which takes a K-stance); "You're married, aren't you?" (also K-, but grading toward K+); and "You're married" (K+). Epistemic *stance* has to do with the overt design of an FPP composed with a declarative or

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[8] Raymond's citation is to Heritage (2012a: 6), though the quoted passage appears on page 4 of that article, and Heritage also discusses the gradient in connection with epistemic *stance* on pages 6 and 7. Apparently, the image of a gradient and the K+ and K- notation is usable for denoting either or both epistemic status and epistemic stance.

interrogative format, but not necessarily with its actual pragmatic function.[9] Other lexical and grammatical elements of an FPP (evidentials, modalities, tag questions, etc.) can be used to position the speaker of an interrogative or declarative utterance higher or lower along the slope of the gradient.

Drew (2018) stridently insists (and Raymond and Heritage apparently agree) that such assignments of relative knowledge are made by the parties themselves in their talk – in the way they speak and respond to their interlocutors – and that plotting a speaker's and recipient's immediately relevant epistemic status along the epistemic gradient does not require the professional analyst to infer what each individual party *actually* knows. Drew insists that it should be obvious to any competent (and sincere) reader that this is a matter of participants' *attributions* of knowledge to one another. And, presumably, professional analysts' commentaries correctly attribute such attributions to the participants in the particular fragments of conversation under study, though it often seems that the attributions in question are 'tacit' or implicit background understandings, sometimes 'indexed' by particular expressions.[10]

With regard to the interaction between the epistemic stance and epistemic status embodied in declarative and interrogative FPPs, Raymond (p. 64) adds that there is a "preference for a congruent relationship between epistemic status and stance" – that is, speakers with K- status typically use interrogatives (requests for information) while K+ speakers use declaratives.

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[9] Epistemic stance is not as straight-forward as it might seem. If it refers to a FPP that a competent member of the relevant language community 'designs' and places in a relevant sequential context as a recognizable question, invitation, command, insult, etc., the fact that in some cases a question takes a syntactic form that looks like an assertion would be a feature of the 'stance' presumed by the speaker and recognized by the recipient. Ambiguity might arise for an overhearing grammarian who insists that communicative function should follow syntactic form, under the presumption that we should speak in well-formed sentences. But when the expression is placed in the context of an ongoing conversation, no ambiguity may be evident to the parties.

[10] Heritage and other authors in the rebuttal issue cite Garfinkel (1967: 26ff.) on the relevance of common background understandings, but they either miss or gloss over the point that Garfinkel makes about the hopeless task of specifying to an uninvolved 'auditor' just what happens to have been relevant to the parties who produced the verbal exchange preserved in a particular transcript. The characterization problem is not technically remediable through, for example, employing a video or multimedia recording. It is important to keep in mind, though, that this intractable problem is not internal to the conversation, as it arises from the intervention of an uninvolved reader of the transcript.

However, when "there is a mismatch between epistemic status and stance, the speaker's status 'trumps' the default orientation of the grammatical form" – that is, a speaker with K- status who uses a declarative FPP will be heard as requesting information, while one with K+ status who uses an interrogative FPP will be heard to be asserting information or posing an 'exam' question (a question, such as one that a teacher might ask to test a student's knowledge, where both parties assume that the teacher knows the correct answer).

For my purposes, what is especially helpful about Raymond's overview is the way it so clearly highlights some of the themes we critically discussed in our special issue. Several of the rebuttal papers (including Raymond's) expressed incredulity at the very idea that the EAF was abstract and cognitivist, and that it treated information exchange as a (perhaps *the*) central relevancy in sequential interaction.

'*Cognitivism*': Several of the rebuttal articles took issue with the attribution of "cognitivism" to the EAF, particularly in the article in the special issue by Jean Wong and me (Lynch & Wong, 2016). Clift and Raymond (2018: 92) express surprise that anyone would confuse CA with Chomsky's explicitly cognitivist approach to generative grammar. Accordingly, "a basic methodological practice, that of assembling collections" enables "us to see cognition not as a 'hidden' order (Lynch and Wong, 2016), 'operating in the background' (Macbeth and Wong, 2016: 585-586), but rather as lodged firmly – and publicly (Garfinkel, 1967) – in sequences of interaction." Drew also emphasizes that epistemics is not "about individual cognition, or about what individuals actually know or do not know. Put simply, it is about *attributions* of knowledge, to self and others, in the public domain that is constituted through interaction" (165). Drew further argues that the EAF makes no reference to the individual mind or brain, but instead focuses on overt communicative conduct. Heritage (2018: 24) objects specifically to our treatment of his long-standing characterization of "oh" as a "change of state token" (a characterization that recently was featured in a special issue on comparable "change of state tokens" in multiple languages). While acknowledging that "oh" is treated *by participants* as a sign or index of the speaker's "state" of knowledge, information, or awareness, Heritage provides a 'distributional' argument that "96% of the time" he avoided characterizing "oh" as a

direct index of cognitive states, and instead made clear that speakers *propose* specific uses of

"oh" as a change of state, and recipients *take it as* a change of state.

What we had hoped to make clear about 'cognitivism' is the following set of points.

1. While mentioning that "epistemics" and even the specific term "epistemic engine" were established terms in cognitive science, we also specifically said that Heritage's use of these terms differed from them (Lynch & Wong, 2016: 528). We did not suggest that Heritage was invoking mental or neurological structures to explain interactional phenomena.
2. The "cognitivism" we attributed to epistemics in CA had to do with an overriding and undifferentiated focus on *knowledge*, lumping together various states and statuses of *knowledge*, rights to *knowledge*, territories of knowledge, and *information* transfer. It also had to do with the treatment of "requests for information" as the paradigm case of an adjacency pair FPP (Heritage, 2012a: 3).
3. When we spoke of a "hidden order" that was invoked in EAF interpretations of transcribed interaction, we were not suggesting that this "epistemic order" was proposed to be hidden behind the individual's skull, but rather that it consists of a schema or abstract construct that is remote from the "data" that continually confirm its "omnirelevance".
4. While acknowledging that information exchange, differential knowledge, and various other epistemic distinctions and phenomena in many ways are featured in language-in-interaction, we question the claim that 'epistemics' is a coherent and omnirelevant domain that subsumes the many ways in which knowledge, information, experience, etc. are *occasionally* relevant in social interactions.

Raymond's summary helps make this point for us in the way it places such an overriding emphasis on the conversational parties' orientations to knowledge and information transfer in their interactions.

"*Abstraction*": As presented by Raymond, the epistemic analytic framework includes abstract components that are not directly evident in transcribed interaction: epistemic rights and entitlements, relative gradients of epistemic authority, and positional indicators of primacy. Epistemic status applies to domains of knowledge, information, epistemic privileges (differential rights to talk about personal experiences, family members, pets, etc.), and epistemic stance is primarily defined in terms of Interrogatives and declaratives: "basic alternative grammatical forms" that make up "a wide range of FPPs".   The K+/K- code and the

metaphoric "gradient" between them abstractly represent a broad range of (attributed) topical domains, states of knowledge, modes of expertise, and entitlements to tell.

"*Hidden Orders*": Despite the lack of concreteness associated with concepts of rights, authority, and status (epistemic or otherwise), several authors of rebuttal articles emphasize how the constituents of the analytical framework are materially evident, on the surface of transcribed interaction. Heritage (2018: 41), for example, asserts:

> Moreover, as noted by Steensig and Heinemann (2016: 5), an 'expression of epistemic imbalance' is hardly a 'hidden order of motivation': on the contrary, it is right out there on the surface of interaction. I would add that the proposal that such expressions have sequential consequences is not formally different from the idea that adjacency pair first actions have sequential consequences.

This way of putting the issue raises at least two problems that we have discussed at length. The first is that overhearing analysts' assignments of epistemic status, epistemic rights, and territories of knowledge appear to us to be problematic *in detail*. The second is that the claim about the lack of formal difference between epistemic status, rights, etc. and "the idea that adjacency pair first actions have sequential consequences" miscasts the conditional relevancy achieved through the co-production of adjacency pair sequences as being a relationship between a "first action" and its "consequence" (whether logical, causal, or empirical/correlational).

"*Informationism*": by this we meant an exclusive, or virtually exclusive, focus on exchanges of information in conversation. To be clear, we did not take issue with the fact that many conversations do indeed involve exchanges of information (in a vernacular sense of information), and that many questions can be recognized as requests (or even demands) for information. We also did not contest the idea that many exchanges importantly involve differential knowledge – indeed, we have examined such exchanges for many years in our studies of laboratory 'shop talk', interrogations of expert witnesses, classroom sessions, second-language acquisition, and related topics. The claims we contested were those that asserted or implied the near-universal salience of information exchange in conversational interaction, and the flattening of diverse concepts and relevancies in terms of a single gradient

of 'knowledge'. When examining fragments of transcript that were characterized in EAF publications, again and again we found them to be miscast as exchanges of information, and the assignments of K+ and K- status often seemed forced. In addition, when reading Drew's (2018b) rebuttal, we found that his analytic characterizations of specific sequences often leave unclear whether he is referring to epistemic status, epistemic stance, or both. The authors of articles in the rebuttal issue deride our "analyses" as "mere interpretations," but rarely engage with what we said in detail.

Heritage has said that CA "stood aside" from the long-standing interest in information and information exchange in linguistics: "These elemental conversational phenomena have not been much remarked on in the literature of conversation analysis. Rather they have tended to be subsumed under the topic of 'recipient design' or lumped into an amorphous category of 'sequence-closing thirds' (Schegloff, 2007)" (Heritage (2012b: 31). Interestingly, the section of Schegloff (2007) that Paul Drew cites as an "endorsement" of Heritage's treatment of the "oh" as a "change of state token," provides a highly differentiated treatment of sequence-closing thirds. "Oh" is significant in Schegloff's treatment less as a "change of state token" than as an expression used in a third-turn expansion of an adjacency pair that acknowledges receipt of information. And, far from lumping informings "into an amorphous category of 'sequence-closing thirds …'," Schegloff differentiates the way "oh" is used as a receipt for "information", while other "minimal post-expansion" tokens such as "okay" follow adjacency pairs that are occupied with requests, invitations, or agreements. Unlike Heritage and Raymond, Schegloff treats information, and the practices of conveying information, as being *occasionally* and *contingently* relevant in conversation sequences, and not as a "default" or "omnipresent" feature that pervades interaction.

The problematic epistemological status of 'epistemic status': When distinguishing the EAF from other lines of work in CA – particularly sequential analysis – we questioned the way 'overhearing analysts' (professional conversation analysts) attributed epistemic status to particular speakers. In any given instance, assignments of "K+" or "K-" stance and/or status are assumed to be commonly recognized by speaker, recipient, and overhearing analyst. In their

re-examination of a fragment that Heritage (2012a: 23) had analyzed, Lindwall et al. (2016: 511ff) use a digital copy of the recording from which the fragment was drawn, and they call into question Heritage's assignment of K+ status to Shelly, when she defends herself against her friend Debbie's complaint that she (Shelly) only goes out with her friends when her boyfriend goes along. Heritage invokes commonsense grounds for his assignment, which is that speakers have 'epistemic rights' to speak authoritatively about their own lives, their families, pets, and so on. A simple (and also commonsensical) point that Lindwall et al. make is that Debbie's complaint is not referenced to second-hand knowledge, but to her own observations of Shelly's behavior on prior occasions, which she claims are shared with those of her friends. In his rebuttal, Raymond (2018: 76ff) goes on at length about the particular fragment, but never addresses the simple point about the problematic assignment of K+ status to Shelly. Bolden (2018) also addresses other fragments of the same transcript, but does not acknowledge the particular argument about analytical assignments of epistemic status. Lymer et al. (2017) underline this point in their response to Heritage's (2016) rebuttal.

The problematic epistemological status of epistemic stance: Epistemic stance appears to present less of a problem for analysis, in so far as it has to do with the overt grammatical form of an FPP and various constituent "practices," such as those listed on p. 70 of Raymond's article. However, note that Raymond defines interrogatives and declaratives as "the two basic alternative grammatical forms that adopt contrasting *epistemic stances*" that "in their default usage" are to request information or assert information, respectively. Although Raymond says that this basic pair of forms is used to compose "a wide range of FPPs," he does not specify what they do *not* cover. Presumably they would not cover greetings, or exchanges of insults, or rounds of jokes, requests for things other than 'information'. Or, perhaps they would, if we grant sufficient interpretative license to the overhearing analyst. The standard set-up for a joke, "Have you heard the one about the Irishman and the bottomless pint of Guiness?" is similar in some respects to the format of a pre-announcement. Is a joke "information"? Perhaps we might call it that. Or, if your child asks, "Can I have another scoop of ice cream?" is this a request for *information*? Is it the case that we must decide that it is a literal request for information before we can count it as a request for ice cream? And, do transfers of information,

not to speak of transfers of ice cream or transfers of misinformation, follow along the same lines of interactional grammar as transfers of "knowledge"? The epistemological problem with 'epistemic framing' is that the assumption that information transfer becomes "omnipresent" sets up a classic confirmation bias (as Drew [2012: 66] suggested, delicately, and Heritage [2012c: 80] briefly acknowledged). When granted such omnirelevance and omnipresence, the chimera of knowledge/information can be found anywhere and everywhere that interrogative forms, assessments, assertions, and so on are deployed.

There is much more to say on these and other issues, and we already have said much about them in our prior publications and online drafts. In the remainder of this paper, I will focus on a theme (and claim) that runs through many of the articles in the rebuttal issue. This is the idea that "collections" are essential to CA's analytical 'method'.

On the use of collections

In an explication on how collections of fragments are used in CA, Anderson & Sharrock (1984: 113) refer to "the production of equivalence classes of data (the collection of types) based on the treatment of some features as criterial for the class definition and hence inclusion, and some as irrelevant."[11] They add further:

> What this discovery procedure amounts to is the application of rubrics other than commonsense ones. Thematising data consists, therefore, in making a contrast between analytic and commonsense relevances with regard to data items, and then organizing the data according to analytic requirements. … [W]hen naively considered without the benefit of the analytic work that went into shaping up the data, many items which are co-classed would look thoroughly dissimilar if juxtaposed. Juxtaposing such dissimilar items and then demonstrating their "hidden unity" by "working up their relevance to the theme", reveals the analytic power that the framework possesses. It provides both another step in the analysis and a further instance of it. (ibid., 114)

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[11] Watson (2008: 200) also addresses "equivalence classing" and notes that a CA collection is an "equivalence class of isomorphs" (203). He contrasts "laic" analysis (a term he borrows from Livingston [1995]) with "the making and reading of textual objects" through work with collections of fragments (205).

Heritage (2018: 48, n. 24) includes Anderson and Sharrock's paper among sources (including Coulter, 2005; Lynch, 1993; Lynch and Bogen, 1994) that he characterizes as "critiques of errors attributed, depending on the author, to Sacks, Schegloff and others." Anderson and Sharrock explicate a particular publication by Schegloff, but they do not offer a "critique" or identify "errors" – in fact, they repeatedly disavow any critical intent and praise Schegloff's skilled and elegant presentation. Even if one were to suppose that they do critique Schegloff's paper in the sense of providing a reading that identifies conventional literary practices that are not formulated as such by the author, they certainly do not identify discrete "errors".

Considering what A&S say, there may seem to be good reasons for Heritage to complain about our criticisms of epistemics (which are indeed criticisms), in which we use programmatic statements by Schegloff as leverage for criticizing the conceptual rubrics and analytical moves that come into play in epistemic analysis. He and others point out that, like Anderson and Sharrock, Bogen and I once made similar criticisms of Schegloff. But then, how similar were those criticisms, if that's what they were? Anderson and Sharrock explicitly refer to Schegloff's procedure as "formal analysis". This characterization would be critical if it were assumed that CA somehow avoided formal analysis, or aimed to avoid it, but CA is, and long has been, explicit in its aim to produce formal analyses of activities that previously were relegated in the social science research and the philosophy of language to 'informal' or 'messy' analytical status. A&S say that the literary work of colligation juxtaposes fragments that might seem unrelated, at first glance, but that formal analysis of the collection develops "patterns" that justify placing the instances together – they are shown to be members of an equivalence class, or to be unified by an underlying order. By using collections to "colligate" diverse instances under a form, professional analysts can then expand their collections and identify deviant cases (which are then normalized by reference to the canonical forms).

In our treatment of epistemics in the 2016 special issue and related papers and presentations, we took pains to say that we were not criticizing the EAF simply for producing "formal analysis." Instead, we argued that the equivalence classes assembled through the use of the EAF did not stand up to scrutiny when illustrated with instances. Many of the dozens of instances

presented in key publications which were used to exemplify the salience and necessity of epistemic analysis, seemed to be intelligible without need for epistemic coding and indexing; moreover, epistemic characterizations often seemed at odds with our understandings of what the parties were doing in the particular fragments, and especially when those fragments were examined as part of the longer transcripts and recordings from which they were extracted. Authors of articles in the rebuttal issue dismiss our technical competence with CA materials,[12] but they miss the point that much of what we say about specific instances is not "technical". Instead, it calls upon our own, and invites others to deploy their own, vernacular competence with ordinary interaction. To substantiate this point, in what follows I make use of an instance that is presented in the rebuttal article by Rebecca Clift and Chase Raymond (2018).

An instance

Clift & Raymond (2018: 92), quoting from Macbeth & Wong (2016: 585-86), propose to demonstrate "how generalizations in CA emerge from 'actual, produced and constitutive detail'." Referring to our special issue, C&R argue that "their claim to analyze action is nonetheless severely undermined by their disregard for the practices that constitute it. Such an approach risks occluding the fact that actions are tethered in the details of practices; an account that floats free of the practices that produced it cannot, by definition, be an empirical account of action" (ibid.). They claim further that Epistemics adheres to this "theoretical and methodological foundation" and that, according to that perspective, "rights and obligations to knowledge are visibly made relevant and lodged firmly in the details of talk."[13]

C&R invoke a "basic methodological practice" in CA, which is that of "assembling collections" (ibid.). From such collections generalizations emerge that "allow us to see cognition … as lodged firmly – and *publicly* (Garfinkel, 1967) – in sequences of interaction" (ibid.). As noted earlier, Heritage, Drew and others who contributed to the rebuttal issue strongly insist that

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[12] Raymond's (2018: 59-64) condescending discussion of the ignorance displayed in Lynch & Wong's account of a particular sequence is perhaps the most extreme of the efforts to denigrate our technical competence.
[13] The idea that rights and obligations are of a piece with the details of talk might seem to be an instance of misplaced concreteness, akin to Ryle's example of equating a university with a collection of buildings.

epistemic analysis deals with what is "out there" in the interaction, and "lodged firmly in the details of talk," rather than being referenced to a mental or otherwise hidden order "behind" the talk. Although we had hoped that we made clear that we were not equating 'cognitive' with mental or neurological matters, this did not seem to get across to our rebutters. C&R provide a helpful lead for clarifying this point when they insist that the collection method allows them "to see cognition" in the details of transcribed interaction. But is *that* what they see, and if so *what* is it that they (and we) can see?[14] They then assert that "[i]t is thus collections of cases that, to quote Heritage (2018), *force* us to our conclusions" (93). This seems to imply that their "analytic work" (as Anderson and Sharrock [1984] call it) is compelled by the data.

To set up their argument, C&R refer to Schegloff's (1996) analysis of a conversational phenomenon that he calls "confirming allusions." C&R (p. 94) present a fragment that Schegloff (1996: 183) discusses, which was taken from an interview with a writer Susan Shreve on US National Public Radio concerning her recent novel. E = Bob Edwards, interviewer; S = Susan Shreve):

[1]

```
1   E   Why do you write juvenile books.
2       (0.5)
3   E   ['s that- b- (0.?)    [hav]ing [children? ]
4   S   [Because I love child[ren].   [I really do:]=
5       =.hh I enjoy children:, .hh I started writing: (.)
6       juvenile books fer entirely pra:ctical reasons, .hh
7       (.)
8   S   [u- u-
9   E   [Making money::.
10  S→  Making [money
11  E          [yes ((+laughter))
12  S   that- that practical reason hhh
13      (.)
14  S   I've been writing juvenile books for a lo:ng..
```

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[14] The issue here is that retaining "cognition" as a reference point to an analysis of interactional grammar ignores what Wittgenstein (1958) called "the autonomy of grammar". For discussions of how ostensibly 'cognitive' phenomena such as remembering, forgetting, and 'seeing' cannot be preserved as constituents of a logically coherent cognitive domain (whether located in heads or in overt linguistic conduct) see Coulter (2005) and Lynch and Bogen (2005).

C&R then summarize Schegloff's argument:

> That candidate observation can, on further inspection of the prior talk, be seen to have its origins in what the recipient has herself said – an allusion to circumstances that are explicitly formulated in that observation. So when, in (4), Susan Shreve says 'I started writing: (.) juvenile books fer entirely pra:ctical reasons' (lines 5–6), she alludes to, but does not formulate explicitly, the objective of 'making money.' (95)[15]

C&R (p. 95) use this instance and others from Schegloff (1996) to establish the point that Schegloff's discovery of a "methodical interactional device" relies upon his analysis of a collection of instances in which the "same practice of repeating prior speaker's turn" occurs. Having discovered the device, Schegloff then demonstrates that it is used to constitute the action of confirming an allusion. Far from being hidden, the relevance of the allusion is "*publicly and observably present*" (p. 95, emphasis in original) in each of the instances Schegloff presents in his published paper. C&R then use Schegloff's discovery to support a distinction "between confirming and agreeing" (p. 96) that is central to CA research on epistemics. That is, by repeating exactly what the interviewer suggests, Shreve does not only agree with his account, she confirms just what he says as her own account, all along. "Temporality is key, with the choice to do a confirmation over an agreement demonstrably indexing prior orientation to knowledge …" (p. 96).

Clift & Raymond, like other authors of articles in the rebuttal issue define us as technically incompetent, and suggest that our incompetence disqualifies our criticisms. Although I think we can mount a fair defense of our competence with CA, there's a deeper issue, which is that, competent or not with the techniques of CA, particularly with "collections-based analysis" and with the vast literature that exemplifies those techniques, we are pointing to the way the 'educated analysis' presented in epistemics tends to override and obscure the *sense* (the vernacular sensibility) of what the participants are doing in the fragments of conversation that are amassed in collections and selectively presented in publications.

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[15] As C&R acknowledge, their summary is less nuanced than Schegloff's analysis. One noticeable way it is less nuanced is that their commentary appears to suggest that the allusion to money is originally *in* Shreve's line about "practical reasons". Clearly, Edwards' explication in line 9 and Shreve's confirmation in line 10 together suggest that this is what Shreve 'meant all along,' but the temporal implication of the 'terms of allusion' is a contingent, prospective-and-retrospective interactive production.

However, as noted earlier, a broad discussion of collections is beside the point of our criticisms of the Epistemic Analytic Framework. Although there are issues to be joined about the use of collections, we do not take issue with C&R's arguments that (1) CA has used collections virtually from the outset, and (2) findings generated through the analysis of collections are answerable to single cases. However, I do not buy C&R's claim that the details of single cases "are altogether unanalyzable without reference to other instances"[16] and that collections are "as analytically essential as they are unavoidable," making up the "*sine qua non* of analysis; without them, all that remains is interpretation" (p. 97). Indeed, in their very effort to demonstrate the necessity of collections-based analysis, C&R demonstrate some of the hazards attendant to a reliance upon them. To pursue this issue, we need to follow a chain of characterizations of a fragment that was extracted from a phone call, starting with Heritage's characterization of it, proceeding to one by Lindwall et al., and then one by C&R, and finally to one in the present paper.

The fragment in question is taken from the start of a phone call in which Ida calls Jenny to tell her that some 'things' that Jenny had ordered have arrived from a department store.

```
[2]   [Rah:12:1:ST]

1     Jen:  °Hello?,°
2           (0.5)
3     Ida:  Jenny?
4           (0.3)
5     Ida:  It's me:,
6     Jen:  Oh hello I:da.
7     Ida:→ Ye:h. .h uh:m (0.2) ah'v jis rung tih teh- eh tell you (0.3)
8         → uh the things ev arrived from Barkerr'n Stone'ou[:se,
9     Jen:→                                           [Oh::::.
10          (.)
11    Jen:  O[h c'n ah c'm rou:nd,h[h
12    Ida:   [An'                  [Yes please that's w't=
```

Heritage (2012a: 8; 2013a: 560) uses this fragment to demonstrate how it is necessary to take epistemic status into account in order to ascertain the pragmatic action being performed by means of an utterance with interrogative or declarative syntax:

> In contexts where an utterance formulated with declarative syntax concerns information that is within the speaker's epistemic domain, the speaker will be understood to be doing "informing".

Lindwall et al. (2016: 508) question the necessity of taking epistemic status into account for recognizing that Ida is doing "informing" in line 8:

> This fragment is presented [by Heritage] as an example of a declarative utterance that is congruent with the speaker's epistemic status – the things talked about are within the speaker's epistemic domain, so that 'the things ev arrived from Barkerr'n Stone'ou:see' is duly heard as 'informing'. Here one could note that the phrase is preceded by 'ah'v jis rung tih teh- eh tell you' (line 7). This means that the lexical and syntactical construction alone provides an evident and unequivocal packaging of the declarative as an informing action. An account of the turn's recognizability can thus be constructed without reference to epistemic matters. In this respect, the fragment fails to demonstrate the *necessity* of determining the relative epistemic status of speaker and recipient before hearing the utterance as 'informing'. This first exhibit clearly raises a set of questions that will be our main concern throughout this section: is the invocation of epistemic status necessary, is it helpful, and does it do justice to the demonstrable orientations of the participants?

Clift & Raymond (2018: 100) note that Lindwall et al. point out that Ida's utterance, which is positioned immediately after the opening exchanges in the phone call, is explicit as an informing. C&R then refute this by focusing on the verb "to tell" and its positioning in line 7. They then present a fragment of a different transcript in which a speaker initiates a turn construction unit in the course of an ongoing conversation with the phrase "I tell you wha:'".

```
[3] SBL 3.5.R
01 Mil:    I've (0.2) pra̱yed aba̱ht i̱t'n evryone e:lse ez pra̱yed about
02         't fo̱r me? a:n' uh p tch khhhhhhhh°hh° EN THEY SA̱Y PRAYER
03         CHA:NGES EVRYTHI̱NG en (.) e- SO IT'S J'S WO^:NDERF'l UHhh
04         HU[hh
05 Gin:      [Tha::t's right[ °Mill]y°
06 Mil:                     [^u̱hh! ]hh-huh hu̱[h
07 Gin: →                                    [hhh We:ll 'ee wil hh I
08      →   te̱ll you wha:' wu- (.) eh-ihHe (.) Y̱ou haven't ea̱ten yet?
09 Mil: →   No̱ wir ji̱st[now]ea̱ting. ]
10 Gin:              [W'l]wẖy don'cb]u go ahe̱ad Milḻy hh
11         (0.2)
12 Gin:    En u-Ah:'Il sto:p o:n my̱ way down en:nif you feel like (.)
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```
13              coming with me fi:ne'n:d if y'[do:n't w h y]
14 Mil:                                     [Yer still go]↓*ing.
15              (0.3)
16 Gin:         hh Yeh I think ah'll go o:n.=
```

C&R refer to the relationship between this fragment and the previous one as a "direct comparison" (p. 101), when what they have done is to identify a few formal lexical and grammatical features that are (arguably) common to the two instances:

> Here, then, we have a direct comparison with the case that Heritage analyzes (and Lindwall et al. 're-analyze'): the beginning of a turn constructional unit (TCU) with the lexeme 'tell', followed by a pause and a few hitches, followed by a clause produced with declarative morphosyntax and response-mobilizing (Stivers and Rossano, 2010) intonation. How is it, then, that Jenny understands Ida's declarative as giving information in (8), whereas Millie understands Ginny's declarative as requesting information in (9)? Despite what Lindwall et al. would have us believe, the answer cannot be based in the 'tell you' part of the turn; as these data show, that does not disambiguate between the two action ascriptions in question, as it is common to both cases. What does disambiguate them, though, is epistemic status: in (8), the speaker (Ida) has K+ status regarding the delivery, and so is heard to be informing, whereas in (9), the speaker (Ginny) has K– status regarding her interlocutor's having eaten or not, and so is heard to be asking.

C&R construe the problem at hand to be a matter of identifying a series of specific features that enable an overhearing analyst to *disambiguate* between two "action ascriptions". The binary choice they set up is between hearing a particular utterance as an 'informing' in contrast to hearing it as a 'request for information' (alternatives that are presented in Raymond's [2018] concise version of the EAF). C&R reject what Lindwall et al. say as insufficient for solving the puzzle: specifically, the details they mention – "the lexeme 'tell', followed by a pause and a few hitches, followed by a clause produced with declarative morphosyntax and response-mobilizing … intonation" – are insufficient, whereas Ida's K+ epistemic status is decisive, for disambiguating the prior utterance.

As I read the point made in Lindwall et al.'s remarks, however, they are not proposing a technical answer to the question C&R raise about which particular features *disambiguate* Jenny's utterance as "giving" and not "requesting" information. Instead, the point they make is

that it is *unnecessary* to invoke epistemic status to recognize what Jenny is doing in lines 7 and 8 of the transcript.

The "direct comparison" that C&R make, to borrow what Schegloff (1984: 36) says about formal academic "distinctions," is not a comparison that is "made by the participants, for whom rather it appears that what is being done is quite straightforwardly available and analyzable." Consequently, it is *unnecessary* to make an independent determination of "the relative epistemic status of speaker and recipient before hearing the utterance as 'informing'." That is, Ida's utterance and the sequential context in which she produces it provide a sufficient basis for Jenny to hear it as a 'telling', with no need for an independent assignment of K+ epistemic status.

Aside from the few grammatical features that Lindwall et al. mention, we could add that Ida's utterance in line 8 is positioned and formatted as a 'reason for the call', and the telling (and not just the word "tell") provides the reason. And, no doubt, there are further features that could be glossed with an *etcetera* clause. For example, we may suppose that prior arrangements were made between Jenny and Ida, so that Jenny would immediately recognize what the "things" delivered from "Barker 'n Stone" would be (and she apparently does recognize what they are, and how they are relevant to her). Consequently, adding the K+ code into the picture seems gratuitous, since the ambiguity it would resolve arises from a truncated explication of the transcript.

C&R mention that the "exemplar" they presented was "drawn from a mini-collection of just 20 instances" (p. 101). Though the mini-collection was apparently casually assembled for the purposes of their rebuttal, the juxtaposition of the Jenny/Ida fragment with the instance drawn from the collection begs questions that Anderson and Sharrock (1984) and Watson (2008) raise about the production of equivalence classes. The common lexical, positional, and grammatical features C&R mention when juxtaposing the two instances are embedded in many obvious dissimilarities. The idiomatic phrase "I'll tell you what" in transcript [3] is not equivalent to Ida's "I've rung to tell you". C&R do not explicate the lines about prayer at the start of that

fragment, but it seems possible that "I'll tell you what" is projecting a further remark on the topic. In addition, it also seems plausible that the utterance prefaced by "I'll tell you what …" is not simply followed by "a pause and a few hitches," and then resumed. It appears instead that Ginny cuts off the incipient utterance, before initiating an insert sequence to check on whether the Millie had eaten yet. Although we did not have the recording available, it seems possible that what C&R place on one line as a single 'turn' interrupted by an internal 'hitch' actually the start of a turn that is cut off, followed by an insert sequence and the abandonment of the incipient turn.

C&R's transcript:
```
07 Gin: →                                        hhh We:ll 'ee wil hh I
08      →    tell you wha:' wu- (.) eh-ihHe (.) You haven't eaten yet?
09 Mil: →    No wir jist[now]eating. ]
10 Gin:                 [W'l]why don'cb]u go ahead Milly hh
```

Alternative transcript:
```
07 Gin: →                                        hhh We:ll 'ee wil hh I
08      →    tell you wha:' wu- (.)
09 Gin: →    eh-ihHe (.) You haven't eaten yet?
10 Mil: →    No wir jist[now]eating. ]
11 Gin:                 [W'l]why don'cb]u go ahead Milly hh
```

Consequently, the "direct comparison" C&R construct exhibits many notable differences besides the few features they isolate from the two cases.

None of what I have said thus far requires more than a vernacular understanding of the transcribed sequences.[17] As noted earlier, Anderson & Sharrock, in their discussion of colligation in CA, do not suggest that collection-based analysis is erroneous, or that it is intrinsically more accurate that 'commonsense' understanding. *If* juxtaposing instances that seem at first to be dissimilar results in non-obvious insight into features of particular cases that previously had been hidden (in the sense of not having been noticed), then so much the better. What we see in this case, however, is a set of equivalences forged through superficial

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[17] Raymond (2018: 64) perhaps would dismiss what I say here as mere commonsense speculation leading to: "impoverished interpretive claims about singular occasions (the adequacy of which cannot be verified without a collection of comparable cases; see Clift and Raymond, 2018) and few prospects for developing cumulative knowledge about them."

similarities (the lexeme "tell"), vernacular glosses ("a pause and a few hitches"), and dubious parsing (e.g., that line 8 in [3] is a continuous turn with "declarative morphosyntax," rather than the start of a turn that is cut off, followed by an inserted question).

After presenting their refutation by invoking their mini-collection, C&R cite Schegloff with a triumphant flourish: "Without such a collection, as Schegloff (1997) notes, one is not producing 'analysis', but rather 'mere interpretation' (p. 502, original emphasis)." Earlier, when analyzing the transcribed fragments, C&R state, "Ida's knowledgeable (K+) status regarding the information at hand allows Jenny to interpret her lines 7–8 as an informing action" (p. 100), and in note 15 (p. 112): "the proposed 'alternative' analysis invites the question as to how participants go about interpreting those turns that do not include some sort of overt lexeme like 'tell' – which, to be sure, constitute the vast majority of declaratively formatted utterances." So, it seems participants "interpret" the prior turn, whereas analysts using collections produce "analysis" and not "mere interpretation." In this case, however, the "analysis" using the mini-collection produces *worse* than a "mere interpretation" – it produces nonsense.

C&R continue with their demonstration of the value of collections by claiming, "[r]ather than being 'disengaged from the details of the transcript' (Lynch and Wong, 2016: 539) then, the details are precisely what provide the empirical grounding for concepts such as stance and status in conversation-analytic work in epistemics" (102). What C&R demonstrate with great lucidity through their use of a collection is that the comparison and the formal resemblances they invoke are indeed disengaged from the transcript in question. (I assume that Jenny is not privy to the particular comparison with Ginny and Millie's exchange when she responds to Ida's announcement.)

C&R proceed as though what Jenny and Ida are saying and doing cannot properly be understood until professional analytic work is brought to bear on the record of their talk. Now, it does take some training to be able to read a Jefferson transcript, or even to make out from a degraded tape recording of a phone call from decades ago just what the parties are saying. It

also can be a challenge to understand what is at stake for the parties whose ongoing actions are decomposed into a fragment of "data" extracted from a longer conversation. Nevertheless, one thing that CA has relied upon and demonstrated during its more than half-century of existence is that a 'vulgar competence' with natural language is both necessary, and at times adequate, for an initial understanding *and* as a basis for demonstrating findings. J.L. Austin's (1979: 185) famous reminder was that "[o]rdinary language is *not* the last word: in principle, it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it is the *first* word." C&R need a related reminder: while it may be the case that vernacular competence does not furnish CA with its distinctive findings, it provides the *prima facie* grounds of intelligibility through which such findings become recognizable and demonstrable.

Also, note how C&R propose that assignments of epistemic status enable the analyst (and presumably the recipient) to "disambiguate between the action ascriptions in question." What Lindwall et al. (2016) had argued was that there was *no need* for such "disambiguation" in the first instance. Quoting Schegloff (1984: 50), they argue (p. 505) that the "ambiguity" in question is "theoretically or heuristically conjurable." In this case, the "ambiguity" arises from a constructive-analytic treatment of the fragment: a comparison with a different transcribed fragment with a few formal-analytic similarities.

The point of going through this exercise is not to expose C&R's deficient mastery of the techniques and analytical vocabulary of CA. Instead, it is to show that their demonstration of the comparative method undermines what should be plain to see. Now, of course, such undermining can be the aim of a science – to replace common sense with rigorous, empirically based scientific knowledge – but as Ryle (2015) points out, such efforts (especially when presented in a polemical context) appeal to an illusory comparison between materially evident features of the 'everyday world' and technically and theoretically specified details of 'the world of science'.

Concluding Remarks

I have only touched upon many of the debatable issues raised explicitly and inadvertently in the rebuttal issue. Some of these issues are not unique to epistemics in CA, or even to CA as an entire field. Our overall 'campaign' might appear to some readers as a quixotic attempt to rescue CA from the grasp of its leading practitioners, but I can state categorically that we are not engaged in an effort to take ownership of CA. In any case, that prospect is not in the cards. What this ongoing dispute does provide is an opportunity to address, once again, the fundamental matter of how technical analysis relates to the endogenous analysis performed on the conversational floor.

The linguistics turn

Clift and Raymond identify themselves as linguists, a field they say (2018: 91) that I characterize with evident distaste when I suggest that epistemics represents a rapprochement with linguistics, psychology and other social and behavioral sciences (Lynch, 2016: 18). Heritage (2013b: 370) also mentions such a rapprochement, though with more enthusiasm, when he speaks of a "confluence" of psychology, linguistics and sociology. C&R are correct in saying that CA and linguistics have been associated for decades, and that much of the recent interest in CA and epistemics is coming from the side of linguists. Although such interest from a broader constituency is to be applauded, what concerns me about the linguistics turn in CA, as exemplified by C&R's rebuttal, is that it gives short shrift to the distinctive emphasis in CA on the ordinary analysis performed turn-by-turn by conversationalists. CA was, and to an extent still is, distinctive ("radical") in its effort to explicate what Watson (2008: 205) calls "laic" analysis.[18] It has long been observed that professional research on social life is largely a second-order investigation of activities that are already performed, understood, and articulated in daily life situations. But, whereas the social and administrative sciences have sought to

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[18] Watson credits Eric Livingston with originating this term. Livingston (1995: xvii) contrasts the "laic" work of reading with the cultivated readings made by literary critics. He gives the example of passengers on a train absorbed in whatever they are reading (newspapers, novels, and nowadays on-screen text messages), where the 'work' of fluent reading effaces itself in an ecstatic absorption in what the text 'says'. Similarly, 'laic analysis' is a gloss for the detailed and highly differentiated way that fluent speakers of a natural language find and express sense and relevance in each next thing said in a conversational exchange.

supersede actors' categories with more stable, rigorously defined, carefully administered analysts' categories and methods for deploying them, CA and ethnomethodology sought to investigate analysis 'all the way down' – that is, they sought to exhibit how laic analysis is bound up with, and indeed constitutive of, social orders. Clift and Raymond apparently understand this basic point, but they subordinate it to (and even subvert it with) an effort to explain actions by reference to a combination of sentence grammar, sequential position, and epistemic status.

"Shaping up the data" and "working up their relevance"

In the passage quoted earlier, Anderson and Sharrock (1984: 114) outline the expository work of "organizing the data according to analytic requirements." They describe a variant of the hermeneutic circle that involves material work with literary fragments. To describe CA in this way apparently offends the sensibility of practitioners who insist that findings "emerge" from the data, that analysis is not "mere interpretation," and that recordings, transcripts, and collections are means for getting reliable and precise access to intrinsic structures of naturally occurring talk-in-interaction. However, what Anderson and Sharrock describe is not a pernicious source of error, or a facile matter of shaping data to fit pre-set ideas, and they refrain from pronouncing judgments about validity. A close analysis of such analytic work *can*, however, in particular cases, be a source of critical insight, such as in our examination of Clift and Raymond's use of a collection. The criticism in such cases does not simply associate the research in question with "formal analysis" in the social sciences; instead, it questions the relation of professional analytic findings to the endogenous analysis performed at the site of the conversations studied.

Anderson and Sharrock's account of "shaping up the data" makes clear that the work involved is not limited to *interpretation*, and that the interpretation that is involved includes the materially enacted literary and editorial work of transcribing, extracting fragments from transcripts and placing them together in collections, selecting exemplary fragments for publications and providing readers with brief background glosses on identities and situations for the selected fragments. Data are further "shaped" through naming and categorizing

constituent features, identifying continuities and parsing analytical divisions between 'turns' and 'turn-construction units', and providing commentaries that assign orders to utterances and their constituents (e.g., "first position"/ "second position"; first- and second-assessments), and using lexical, sequential and grammatical particulars as tokens that index 'extra-conversational' sources of order, relevance, and status. These routine research practices do not necessarily result in 'errors' or 'bias', though in particular cases they can be brought under critical review and questioned for the way they bracket, select, and identify relevancies and thematic phenomena in particular transcripts. In our reviews of the epistemics literature, we found assignments of epistemic status, rights, positions and territories to be particularly contestable (for examples, see Macbeth et al., 2016; Macbeth and Wong, 2016; and Lindwall et al., 2016). In our view, the confirmation bias we found, again and again, in efforts to document 'epistemic' claims with exemplary fragments, arose from the presumptive ubiquity of the epistemic order, compounded by the abstract, interpretively flexible concepts that make up that order.

What's at stake?

From my vantage point, the rebuttal issue represents an effort to normalize the Epistemic Analytic Framework as a *bona fide* expansion of CA that, together with other expansions, further integrates it with the professional behavioral sciences. Other such expansions include recent, and not-so-recent, proposals to introduce coding, quantification, and experimental methods in CA. Supporting such expansions are ambitious and universalistic claims, such as those that are abundantly and boldly expressed in the epistemics literature. Several of the rebuttal articles reiterate and upgrade previous claims made in that literature, repeatedly emphasizing the *ubiquity* of epistemics, and the *omnirelevance* and *omnipresence* of epistemic phenomena.[19]

Many benefits can obtain (and already have obtained) from the promotion, enactment, and expansion of CA as a natural observational science of human behavior. A case can be made,

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[19] For example, Drew's (2018a, b) pronouncements about omnirelevance and omnipresence of epistemics differ from an earlier commentary in which he tempered his enthusiasm with detectable notes of skepticism about the generality of some of Heritage's proposals (Drew, 2012).

and has been made, that such an eventuality is exactly what Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson envisioned for CA. So, what's the problem? The problem that concerned us when we began to look into epistemics, and which continues to preoccupy us, is not that CA has taken yet another step toward "positivism" and away from the phenomenological and Wittgensteinian strains of ethnomethodology with which it once had uneasy affinity. Instead, if our reading of it is correct, the problem does not arise from deep philosophical differences, though there no doubt are such differences which should not be ignored. The problem is that the Epistemic Analytic Framework not only is incommensurable with CA's distinctive approach to the production of ordinary activities, it also delivers systematically misleading framings and interpretations of empirical "data" presented in the form of transcripts and analytical commentaries.

To understand this problem, it is necessary to take into account the exceptional status that CA has claimed, and largely secured, for its analytical procedures and empirical findings. CA does not present itself as an *interpretive* social science that delivers imaginative and speculative understandings of meaningful conduct. Nor does CA endeavor to treat the organization of human conduct as a previously unknown reality to be investigated through the analytical methods and instruments of a specialized science. Instead, CA claims to *recover* the "analysis" that is endogenous to the actions it examines. In line with that aim, professional analysts present explications of transcribed extracts from recorded conversations that describe how the parties to those conversations produce and orient to specific organizational features.

Partly because of the conceptual simplicity and abstractness of the Epistemic Analytic Framework, and also because of its claimed omnirelevance to everyday conversational activities, it is all too easily documented with fragment after fragment. Assumptions about the ubiquitous relevance of the framework encourage analysts to find evidence of knowledge and information transfer, not only in cases where they seem relevant, but also where their relevance seems forced and the evidence doubtful – at least to our readings and re-readings. Moreover, such interpretative license apparently feeds into the collections, although how this is done is not transparent, because the collections and the work of assembling them are not presented in the published writings. 'Distributional' arguments based on collections then

become a resource for identifying and confirming interpretations of further cases. In our reviews of instances presented in key epistemics publications, we argued that many of the claims about struggles over epistemic territories, and so forth, were not evident in our readings of the instances, and they became even more problematic when we had access to longer recordings from which the fragments in question were drawn. We did not expect readers to take our word for it, and we invited them to make their own judgments about the instances we re-analyzed. Authors of the rebuttal articles provide high-handed dismissals of our analyses and technical competence, but they rarely engage in the details and, when they do, their refutations tend to presume the relevance and validity of the conceptual framework they defend. Conceptual frameworks and the interpretive license that sustains them are far from unusual in the human sciences; indeed, they are ubiquitous. The larger problem is that by accepting and defending such a framework as exemplary of the best analysis that CA has to offer, contributors to the rebuttal issue undermine CA's exceptional epistemic status in the social sciences.

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