

DISCOURSE STUDIES

Reverting to a hidden interactional order: Epistemics, informationism, and Conversation Analysis

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Abstract

This article critically examines the relations between *epistemics* in Conversation Analysis (CA) and linguistic and cognitivist conceptions of communicative interaction that emphasize information and information transfer. The Epistemic Program (EP) adheres to the focus on recorded instances of talk-in-interaction that is characteristic of CA, explicitly identifies its theoretical origins with ethnomethodology, and points to implications of its research for the social distribution of knowledge. However, despite such affiliations with CA and ethnomethodology, the Epistemic Program is cognitivist in the way it emphasizes information exchange as an underlying, extrasituational “driver” in social interaction. To document how the EP draws upon cognitivist conceptions of information and knowledge, we review examples from the corpus of transcripts analyzed in key publications on epistemics. Our reanalysis casts doubt upon the way EP analysis invokes an underlying order that supposedly drives the evident sequential organization of those transcripts.

Keywords

Cognitivism, Conversation Analysis, distribution of knowledge, epistemics, information exchange, propositional content

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Introduction

The Epistemic Program (EP) is concerned with the exchange of information in social interaction. The most ambitious presentations on the subject treat the interactional transfer of information not only as a topic to be addressed in the field of conversation analysis (CA), but also as a novel research program for investigating the organization of conversational actions. As John Heritage and others maintain, the Epistemic Program takes up the classic theme of the social distribution of knowledge and addresses it in a distinctive way by deploying conceptual and analytical resources from linguistics (Heritage, 2005, 2012a, b, c, 2013a,b; Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Sidnell, 2012; Stivers & Rossano, 2010). This interest in epistemics promises to breathe new life into CA's existing program of sequential analysis by means of "a reconceptualization of contiguity, nextness and adjacency" (Drew, 2012: 65). Accordingly, the EP presents an alternative machinery to that of the "turn-taking machine" (Sacks et al., 1974), which has been the hallmark of CA for decades. Heritage (2012b) dubs the new machine the "epistemic engine": a virtual apparatus that pervades the organization of talk-in-interaction and drives exchanges of information. As Heritage (2012a, b; 2013a) presents it, epistemics is an entire *order* of social action that requires a distinctive mode of disciplined research to investigate how "persons continually position themselves with respect to the epistemic order" (Heritage, 2008: 309).

To date, critical discussions of the Epistemic Program have been scant.¹ A featured exchange among Heritage and three commentators in the journal *Research on Language and Social Interaction* was more celebratory than critical. In their commentaries, Jack Sidnell (2012) and Rebecca Clift (2012) characterized the EP in glowing terms as a major breakthrough. Sidnell (2012: 59) suggested that the EP is more than a supplement to CA's established treatments of sequential organization: "Indeed, what Heritage describes is not another 'domain' like turn taking, sequence

organization, or repair. It's something more basic—one set of principles and assumptions that make these and other domains what they are.” In his commentary, Paul Drew (2012) raised some challenging questions (while denying that they are “criticisms” [p. 66]) about the reliance on cognitivism and the generality of some of the claims in EP, though he was no less effusive about the novelty and promise of the program. Like Sidnell, he noted that the EP is “quite radical,” adding that

... in any and every turn at talk speakers display and monitor (are cognizant of?) what they know in relation to what others know, what others may know they (speakers) know, and how each knows what they (claim to) know—and that there will always be imbalances or asymmetries in relative knowledge, albeit momentary or temporary imbalances. Indeed, the information flow in one turn to the next, from a prior turn/action to a response, then a response to a response, works to resolve those imbalances. (Drew, 2012: 63)

Drew and the other commentators agree that the EP proposes that a basic cognitive (knowledge-and-information-centric) operation “drives” sequence organization. We agree with them that the claims and analytical moves taken in the EP do indeed represent a radical move but, as we shall argue, it is a *regression* from what is, or was, radical about CA; a move that reproduces what Emanuel Schegloff (1988c: 455) once identified as a principal “shortcoming” of traditional conceptions of linguistic communication:

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of traditional approaches to talk in interaction is the degree to which they emphasize the information-transmission uses of talk. Even after the “revolution” introduced into philosophy by Austin’s focus on what utterances *do*, propositional content remains the bottom line for most analysis. Sociologists and anthropologists have properly insisted on the action properties of talk, although even in these

disciplines the treatment of talk as “communication” can subvert this enterprise. (Schegloff, 1988c: 455)

According to Schegloff, CA developed Austin’s “revolution” in a distinctive way by detailing how language use is irreducibly *interactional*: pragmatically grounded in sequential orders produced in and through talk. In this paper, we argue that the EP threatens to undermine this radical proposal about CA’s distinctive treatment of talk in interaction. After introducing and summarizing the epistemic program (EP), and discussing its linkages to earlier programs in cognitive linguistics and CA, we shall examine a few specimens of EP analysis (for further specimens, see Lindwall et al., 2016; Macbeth and Wong, 2016; and Macbeth et al., 2016). Our *data* are transcripts-under-analysis, and we shall use our reanalyses of these data to call into question the general claims and interpretive strategies that we have found to be characteristic of the EP.

Epistemic Framings

The term “epistemic” was used previously in the name for a cognitivist research program that addressed logical, sociological, and psychological issues in language and language use. A School of Epistemics was inaugurated at the University of Edinburgh in the late 1960s,² and later was renamed the Centre for Cognitive Science (CCS). The term “epistemic engine,” which Heritage (2012b) uses, also appeared earlier in a publication by cognitivist philosophers Patricia and Paul Churchland (1983). What we are calling the Epistemic Program does not explicitly attach itself to the cognitive sciences, but, we shall argue, it is cognitivist in the way it departs from Conversation Analysis to delve into motivated exchanges of information in social interaction.³

The explicitly acknowledged sources for the Epistemic Program include the CA literature, particularly Schegloff’s writings on sequential analysis and adjacency pair organization (1968, 1984,

2007),⁴ Sacks' (1992a,b) lectures on stories, particularly on "entitlements" to experiences conveyed through stories, Pomerantz's work on second assessments (1984) and "'my side' tellings" (1980), Goodwin's (1979) distinction between "knowing" and "unknowing" recipients to news announcements, and Terasaki's (2004[1975]) research on pre-announcement sequences. EP publications reference these CA sources, and integrate their findings with themes drawn from psycho- and socio-linguistics: Bolinger's (1957) "blinds-up/blinds-down" distinction between asserting versus requesting information; Labov and Fanshell's (1977) distinction between "A-events" (known to participant A and not B in a dyadic exchange) and "B-events" (known to B and not A); and Clark's (1966) and Clark and Haviland's (1977) given-new distinction (the presupposition by a speaker of whether the recipient does or does not already know a particular item of news or information).

Another major source for the EP is Erving Goffman's writings on territories of the self, particularly the dynamics of revelation and concealment associated with "information preserves" (Goffman [1971: 39]; see also Kamio [1997] and Hayano [2011] on territories of knowledge/information).⁵ At the start of his article on "action formation," Heritage (2012a: 1-2) presents two quotations. The first is from Schegloff (1984: 34-35), on the insufficiency of syntactic form to establish what a particular utterance is *doing* in a specific interactional environment (asking a question, setting up or presenting an invitation or request, etc.). Schegloff directs his argument against speech-act theory, and particularly the use of sentence grammar to identify "acts" accomplished through speaking. As noted in the companion paper in this issue on "action formation" (Lindwall, et al., 2016), Heritage treats the problem that Schegloff raises for speech-act theory (and related programs in functional linguistics) as though it is a problem that CA should attempt to *solve*,

rather than to *dissolve*. Heritage then offers the following quote from Goffman, apparently to adumbrate a possible solution to that problem:

At the very center of interaction life is the *cognitive relation* we have with those present before us, without which relationship our activity, behavioral and verbal, could not be meaningfully organized. And although this *cognitive relationship* can be modified during a social contact, and typically is, the relationship itself is *extrasituational*, consisting of the *information* a pair of persons have about the *information* each other has of the world, and the *information* they have (or haven't) concerning the possession of this *information*. (Goffman, 1983: 4-5, emphasis added)

Heritage goes on to say that such an extrasituational cognitive relationship is in the driver's seat of action formation. This relationship involves open-ended domains of personal information, directly experienced events, expert and proprietary knowledge, and entitlements to speak authoritatively about particular matters (see also Heritage, 2011: 160). Knowledge, in this sense, is a catchall category that includes expertise, particular news items, and proprietary information, as well as interactionally relevant aspects of understanding, perceptual orientation, awareness, recognition, evaluation, and experience.

This underlying *driver* of sequential interaction consists of relations between the cognitive states of interacting individuals; relations that motivate what someone can say, and how they can say it: "when a speaker indicates that there is an imbalance of information between speaker and hearer, this indication is sufficient to motivate and warrant a sequence of interaction that will be closed when the imbalance is acknowledged as equalized for all practical purposes" (Heritage, 2012b: 32). The deep source of surface action in conversation is thus, in Goffman's words, a "cognitive" and

“extrasituational” relationship, consisting of information possessed, controlled, and monitored by the interacting parties. Heritage does not mention that Schegloff (1988a: 92) had previously criticized Goffman’s approach for never quite freeing itself from a focus on “the drivers and their psychology” in favor of an analysis of the systematic organization of the “traffic” produced in and through interaction. As we shall argue, the refocusing of interaction from the traffic to the drivers in Goffman, and also in Heritage, is not simply a departure from a more thoroughly sociological vantage point. More importantly, it reverts to a hidden cognitive order that lies beneath or beyond the surface of talk-in-interaction (also see Macbeth and Wong’s [2016] discussion of “animating transcript”). This reversion (as Heritage [2012c: 80] seems to recognize) disattends the sharp distinctions Schegloff (1988a,b,c; 1991a,b; 1995, 2010) draws between CA’s treatment of the organization of *actions* in conversation and the interpretative treatments given by Goffman, as well as by many psycholinguists, information theorists, cognitivist philosophers, and mainstream sociologists. The key difference for Schegloff is that CA’s empirical approach demands that characterizations of conversational actions should be *demonstrably relevant to the actions of parties in the singular occasions of interaction under analysis*.

The Centrality of Information in the Epistemic Program

Heritage (2012b: 31) asserts that information-transmission—a theme that has been central for more than a century in communication theory, functional linguistics, and semiotics—has been “neglected” in conversation analysis,⁶ and he proposes to remedy that neglect by treating “information imbalance” as an omnirelevant⁷ concern that motivates speakers’ and recipients’ efforts to seek equilibrium in relation to the information at hand. In our view, this “neglect” was a deliberate and radical move away from an established conception of communication as a relay of information from one

individual to another and back. For CA, the conveyance of information or knowledge is occasional: it is relevant only some of the time and, when it *is* relevant, just what is relevant *as* information is embedded in the sequential organization of the particular occasion of talk-in-interaction.

Proponents of epistemics treat “the epistemic order”⁸ as an extra-conversational, cognitive scaffolding that underlies other “orders of analysis” in CA, such as sequence organization, recipient design, and repair. Heritage suggests that epistemics is “conducted through the entire resources of language and sequence organization” (Heritage, 2008: 309). The link between EP and sequential analysis is forged through a particular construal of adjacency pair organization. Adjacency pairs are sequentially ordered utterances, usually produced by different participants in a conversation. This organization involves the production by one party in an interaction of a “first pair part,” such as a greeting, invitation, offer, request, or question, which sets up the relevance of a “second pair-part” in response: a return-greeting, acceptance or refusal, or answer.

The first and second pair parts in adjacency pairs exhibit particularly strong sequential ties, but they do not exhaust the resources for organizing talk sequentially.⁹ Sacks et al. (1974) characterize a series of adjacency-pair types, such as greeting-and-return-greeting, question-and-answer, and invitation-acceptance/refusal, all of which organize particular phases and actions in conversation, but Heritage (2012a: 3) asserts that requesting or asserting information makes up “the ultimate paradigm of an adjacency-pair first action” (Heritage, 2012a: 3).¹⁰ In addition, he asserts that interrogatives (requests for information) and declaratives (assertions of information) enact ubiquitous interactional functions: “...nothing is more fundamental than determining whether an utterance is delivering information or requesting it” (Heritage, 2013a: 557). This assertion seems entirely inconsistent with what Schegloff (1988a: 110) had argued when criticizing Goffman’s treatment of question-answer

sequences “as prototypic[al of adjacency pairs].” Schegloff noted that “[t]he point of introducing the notion of ‘adjacency pairs’ is, in part, to circumvent the problem of treating some particular type of sequence unit as a serious prototype. In offering question-answer, greeting-greeting and offer-acceptance/refusal as three instances of pair types, three quite different types of relationship between first and second pair parts were included.” Although a prototype is not necessarily a paradigm, and a question is not necessarily a request for information, it seems unlikely that Schegloff would agree with Heritage that “requests for information” would be the paradigm of an adjacency pair first pair part. Schegloff further criticizes a “mistaken belief that CA claims that everything is a first or second pair part. Most turns are next to other turns; most turns display some understanding of the turn they are after [...]. But it should now be clear that this does *not* entail that most turns are first pair parts or second pair parts” (Schegloff, 1988a: 113, emphasis in original).

Heritage’s conception of interrogatives and declaratives, as the understory of the various interactional moves that organize conversation, links his version of CA to traditional conceptions of communication as information exchange. This conception sets up his argument that interrogative and declarative functions are not necessarily embodied in sentence forms conventionally associated with questions and assertions. This potential divergence of form and function is the crux of the “problem” of action formation that epistemics solves: how recipients (and professional analysts) can distinguish when a particular utterance is requesting or asserting information (Lindwall et al., 2016).

The status-stance distinction

According to the EP, conversation participants and professional analysts align function with form through determinations of *epistemic status* – a speaker’s assessment of what the recipient knows about a particular topic (compare to Button and Casey [1984]). The key “driver” of interaction is the

“‘known in common’ epistemic status of speaker and recipient relative to the targeted state of affairs” (Heritage 2013a: 534). An important feature of epistemic status is that it is presumed by the overhearing analyst to be omnirelevant, regardless of whether there is immediate evidence of it in the recorded talk. EP analysts *do* claim that epistemic status can *sometimes* be witnessed at the surface of interaction, and they use particular verbal tokens and grammatical forms, such as “oh” and “oh-prefaced assessments,” to “index” information preserves and transfers.¹¹ Their analyses also invoke (and claim that participants orient to) an open-ended array of contextual matters such as “the recency of a person’s information, its provenance, certainty, clarity, and extendedness, the independence of a person’s access to it, the person’s rights to know it in the first place, socially sanctioned authority to know it, and so on” (Heritage, 2012a: 5). Epistemic status is as much a presumption of rights and territories as it is a possession of discrete items of information, as persons are presumed to be entitled, in general, to know more than others about their own experiences, their family members, pets, jobs, personal hobbies, personal possessions, and the like.

For participants, such presumptive matters are “extrasituational” in Goffman’s sense: they are not immediately evident in the recorded and transcribed talk, and are instead inferred as background relevancies. Professional analysts, and readers of their published accounts, who examine a recorded episode or fragment must deploy their own judgments about what each party knows and knows of the other, their relative “rights” to particular domains of knowledge, and so forth, but with a much thinner biographical grounding than often would be the case for participants. Although, for professional analysts, evidence of epistemic status is fugitive and fragmentary, Heritage asserts that it is relevant to each and every turn at talk.

In principle, for Heritage (2012a), epistemic status differs from epistemic *stance* – the overt expression of a claim to know relatively more or less than the interlocutor does about the domain at hand. He adds that, most of the time, epistemic stance is commensurate with epistemic status, so that the overt expression of knowledge claims can usually be taken to *index* the underlying epistemic status in question. He then provides a simple, graphic model that represents relative epistemic status as a gradient between the party with more knowledge of the targeted matter (coded as K+) and the party with less (coded as K-).¹² A steep gradient means that the K+ party knows a lot more than the other, and a shallow gradient means that the K+ party knows just a little more than the other, and a flat gradient means that that they are roughly equivalent in what they know about the matter at hand (see Lindwall et al., 2016).

Analysis of conversation excerpts sometimes involves applying a binary code to a succession of turns in an exchange. For example (from Raymond & Heritage, 2013: 137):

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 01 Nik: | Wut are you doin tomorrow are< you goin downtown-? | |
| 02 Reg: → | Yeah. Are you gunna go down-town? | (K-) |
| 03 Nik: | .hh I don't know I'm bro:ke. | (K+) |
| 04 Reg: → | Oh °poo:per:° | (K- → K+) |
| 05 Nik: | I kno::w- | |

The commentary accompanying the transcript characterizes the action as follows:

Nikki's response (in line 3), which dashes [Regan's] hopes [that she would accompany her], is registered as news "oh," and assessed "pooper." In this way, interrogatives work to downgrade the rights otherwise asserted by a sequence-initiating action. [...] We use (K + → K-) and (K- → K+) to refer to these alternative relationships; their embodiment in the

grammar in languages around the world suggests that they are two basic occasions for action, and interaction, as such. (Raymond & Heritage, 2013: 137)

The difference between K+ and K- is relative, and equilibrium is a possibility when both parties can be presumed — each by the other and by the overhearing analyst — to possess equivalent knowledge.¹³ The coded state or status is cognitive, in the sense that it is defined in terms of knowledge the speaker possesses, or is presumed to possess, relative to the recipient. For example, in line 04 the expletive “Oh pooper” is coded by reference to the speaker’s change in epistemic status.

Also note that Raymond and Heritage’s commentary pursues information content as a baseline for characterizing the sequential structure and implications of the targeted utterances. Line 03 is coded as K+, perhaps on the assumption that Nikki has the “epistemic right” to address what she plans to do, despite her overt expression (“I don’t know”); an expression that could be heard as open to persuasion, and which might seem relevant less to an exchange of information than to the pursuit of an invitation. (One could then ask why Regan gives up so easily.) Note further how the commentary treats the sentence structure (“interrogatives”) in a “sequence initiating action” as the default locus of the interactional “work” and its effects.¹⁴

The epistemic engine is a hydraulic metaphor, likening information exchange to the flow of a fluid that seeks equilibrium.¹⁵ Momentary imbalances in information “drive” parties in a conversation to pursue equilibrium, motivating the K- party to request relevant information and the K+ party to convey it. According to Heritage, each party continually monitors the knowledge of the other relative to the topical domain at hand (he calls this monitoring the “epistemic ticker”): “Correspondingly, monitoring epistemic status in relation to each and every turn at talk is an unavoidable feature of the construction of talk as action” (2013a: 565), and “a nearly omnirelevant

background in action formation” (p. 573). And, “while the ‘epistemic ticker’ can never be switched off, it can be ‘guided’ by syntax” (Heritage, 2012c, 76). Heritage does not support this *general* claim with evidence – that is, the documentary evidence he uses does not, and cannot, support a claim at *that* level of generality.

Cognitivism and propositionalism

As noted earlier, Heritage does not explicitly embrace cognitivist conceptions of information processing in the way, for example, the Churchlands’ (1983) do. However, Heritage (2005: 185) does explicitly invoke “cognitive states” and “cognitive process.” He treats “cognitive process” (he uses the singular) as relevant to epistemics in two ways. First, he treats it as a topic or domain that participants in interaction “represent ... in their descriptions of everyday experiences and events.” Such representations are of interest for the way they “are driven by a desire to evidence the normality and reasonableness of the objects of cognition ...” (ibid). Second, he asserts that “cognitive process” is embodied in interaction, particularly with “the response particle *oh*, which is virtually specialized to the task of this embodiment.” Here, Heritage draws upon his long-standing treatment of the particle *oh* as a “change-of-state token” (Heritage, 1984; see Macbeth et al., 2016). In later writings in which he deploys the K-/K+ code, Heritage (2012a,b,c; 2013a,b) treats the token *oh* as a cognitive mechanism, in the sense that it embodies or indexes a change in the speaker’s epistemic state from K- to K+ (the terms “embodies” and “indexes” seem to be used interchangeably, though the former suggests a material display while the latter suggests a relation of signification).

The idea that participants *represent* or *embody* “cognitive process” in interaction appears to accept the existence of an underlying “process” that surfaces in, and even orchestrates the surface of, interaction; a process that is *indexed* by syntactic forms such as tag-questions, particular lexical

items such as “evidentials,” and particles such as the ubiquitous *oh*. This conception of communication as an ongoing process of information exchange is far from unusual in functional linguistics, but it is at odds with the radically interactionist conception of conversation that Schegloff, among others, has repeatedly emphasized. For example, in an article that critically addresses the theme of “socially shared cognition,” Schegloff (1991a) articulates a vision of CA that is deeply at odds with cognitivist treatments of language. He makes clear that talk in interaction is the primordial “home” of language; a “home” that provides speakers and recipients with resources for understanding that have no direct correspondence to the linguistic constituents of their communications: “the resources of natural language need not, for example, be unambiguous. They need not have invariant mappings of signs and symbols with their signifieds. They need not have a syntax that assigns a single interpretation to a given expression. They need not be limited to literal usage ...” (1991a: 155).

Although Heritage (2005) expresses general agreement with this view, his treatments of indexing and sentence grammar in specific cases deploys analytical language that is characteristic of long-standing traditions in cognitive science and analytical philosophy. Like others in CA, he emphasizes the contextual fields in which actions in conversation are produced, but unlike them (and more in line with linguists) he attempts to integrate a classical picture of linguistic reference, content, and formal structure with a conversation analytic conception of sequential organization.

In analytical and cognitivist conceptions of communication, language-use often is reduced to a conception of propositional content (a “message”) that is packaged in syntactic form, and conveyed by a speaker to a recipient. Frequently, decontextualized (and often contrived) sentences are used to illustrate the linguistic packaging of “speech acts,” an analytical practice that, as Heritage

acknowledges, Schegloff (1984) effectively criticized. Although Heritage never explicitly subscribes to a propositionalist treatment of communicative action, he occasionally trades upon it, such as when he sets up the EP treatment of action formation by arguing that epistemic stance “is prominently expressed through different grammatical realizations of propositional content,” and illustrates this with three ideal-typical “utterances” (sentences): “Are you married?” “You’re married, aren’t you?” “You’re married” (2012a: 8; 2013a: 558). He notes that, when used as an interrogative first pair-part in a question-answer adjacency pair, these three formulations express distinct epistemic stances: “the same propositional content” is expressed in the three sentences, while “the epistemic stance encoded in the grammar of these three sentences is quite different” (2012a: 7). Although he goes on to argue that epistemic *status* is sometimes incongruent with morphosyntactic form, his analysis preserves a classic linguistic analysis of sentence form akin to that of speech-act theory (Searle, 1969), while asserting that epistemic status “trumps” sentence form in cases in which they diverge. Heritage thus does not treat propositional content as the core of (meaningful) sentences, and he does not treat transformations of core sentential grammar as determinants of “speech acts” in conversation, but neither does he disavow that legacy from analytical philosophy. Instead, he supplements it with another “level” of analysis that involves “epistemic” attributions made by participants and by overhearing analysts (compare to Schegloff, 1984; 1988c, 1991a; 1995; 2005; 2010).¹⁶

Underlying orders

If anything is characteristic of the treatment of social action in ethnomethodology and CA, it is the refusal to substitute theoretically postulated, abstract “levels” of analysis for the constitutive understandings of participants in social actions. This is a refusal to countenance what Eric

Livingston (2008: 246) has called a “sociology of the hidden order.” Programmatic writings in CA about this issue emphasize criteria for characterizing actions. These criteria involve the identification of “notable absences” – actions that do *not* happen on a particular occasions but which are in one way or another made relevant by the parties to the occasion *as* absent. They also involve the “next turn proof procedure” to confirm an overhearing analyst’s characterization of a particular action in conversation by reference to how it is taken up and developed in the subsequent turns-at-talk.¹⁷ As Schegloff has argued repeatedly, CA’s analytical procedure differs from those in virtually every other mainstream social science and humanities research program. It differs in its overall aim to characterize actions with terms that recover what conjoint actors intelligibly do and demonstrably understand, and in its specific procedures for confirming such characterizations in particular instances.

Schegloff (1996: 164) contrasts CA’s “disciplined study” of conversation to other treatments of social actions by noting that “actual action—and particular actions—have been curiously absent from sociological inquiry and discourse.” He adds that in conventional sociological treatments such actions “appear to be virtually epiphenomenal expressions of ‘underlying’ factors, processes, and variables—norms, rationality, conformity, power, system functions, and the like, but important largely as the public face, the accessible display and indicator, of those underlying forces.” He then notes that, even for Goffman, actions “are cast as the official or ostensible version of what is going on, a veil whose penetration and revelation is the true calling of the sophisticated, perspicuous sociologist or anthropologist. But in these quarters no more attention was given than elsewhere to whatever persons might be thought—or observed—in *the first instance* to be doing” (Schegloff, 1996: 165).

Heritage (2012c: 80) denies that his analysis reverts to a hidden order of motivation, and yet he frequently uses mechanistic metaphors, refers to abstract gradients and scales, and makes highly general assertions about the omnirelevance of information transfer and the continual monitoring of epistemic status. In addition, he repeatedly asserts that grammatical forms and utterance particles “index” underlying knowledge “states,” thereby invoking a cognitive background that is (allegedly) presupposed but not concretely evident at the surface of interaction.¹⁸ Heritage (2012c: 80) acknowledges that the Epistemic Program risks losing the hard-won empirical grounding of sequential analysis, and may “start to produce generalizations that become unfalsifiable,” but he then asserts that “the gains to be made . . . make the risks worth taking.” Whether or not the risk-benefit analysis resolves in favor or the EP remains to be seen. But, as we have argued, the EP not only risks making unfalsifiable generalizations, it is *founded* on such generalizations about speakers’ motivations, intentions, moral claims, territorial rights, preferences, and presuppositions, all of which supposedly “drive” the sequentially organized details of conversation, while remaining hidden beneath those details. We might say that the epistemic engine is a ghost within the conversational machinery.

Epistemics in Analytical Practice

In his commentary on Heritage’s (2012a, b) articles, Drew (2012: 61-62) cites the maxim, “the proof of the pudding is in the eating,” and he refers to the impressive “stream of research articles” on epistemics and related subjects in recent years as evidence of “the importance and generativeness” of the program. While we certainly agree that Heritage and others have produced abundant and visible publications, another form of evidence seems at least as salient. The EP presents itself as an empirical program, in line with CA’s distinctive treatment of recorded materials. The key

publications analyze numerous extracts of transcribed data drawn from the CA corpus.

Consequently, those publications invite readers to assess whether or not their treatment of such materials passes the “test of the adequacy of a description of some practice” that Schegloff (1991a: 153) defines as “its capacity to yield convincing analysis of singular episodes of conversation.”

To assess the EP in terms of Schegloff’s test of adequacy, we examined and reanalyzed much of the corpus of transcribed fragments (some very brief, some fairly lengthy) presented in the previously cited EP publications. Heritage and his co-authors refer to collections that are substantially larger than the selections presented in their articles, but we are only able to examine those (already an impressive number) that are presented and discussed in publications. Some of these publications include upwards of fifty fragments, many of which are reproduced multiple times both within and across EP publications. *Our* corpus comprised approximately 40 transcripts-under-analysis: textual sequences consisting of prefatory remarks, often including some background detail about the parties and the occasion to be discussed, a transcribed extract from a tape recorded conversation, and a commentary on the transcript. When possible, we consulted sound recordings of the transcribed extracts, and we also consulted analyses of the same fragments in publications by other conversation analysts. Given the length and complexity of our data samples, we can only present a few brief examples from this corpus in this article. Our re-analysis will pay particular attention to the way (1) EP analysis of the particular exchanges reverts to a hidden (extrasituational, often competitive) cognitive relationship, and (2) by doing so misses or misconstrues what seems immediately relevant in those exchanges. Other examples are presented in the companion papers in this special issue (Lindwall et al., 2016; Macbeth et al., 2016; Macbeth and Wong, 2016), and we invite readers to examine further instances in EP publications.

Three fragments under analysis

Heritage (2012a: 4) refers to three fragments, each of which had been analyzed earlier in at least one (and often many) conversation analytic studies:

In some cases, as when a speaker says “I forgot to tell you the two best things that happened to me today” (Terasaki, 2004: 176) or “Jesus Christ you should see that house Emma you have no idea” (Heritage and Raymond, 2005: 17), the speaker is laying claim to an absolute epistemic advantage in which the recipient is, projectedly at least, entirely ignorant of what is to be described. In others, as when a speaker says “It’s a beautiful day out isn’t it?” (Pomerantz, 1984: 59), the speaker implies equality of access to the referent situation. Thus relative states of knowledge can range from circumstances in which speaker A may have absolute knowledge of some item, while speaker B has none, to those in which both speakers may have exactly equal information, as well as every point in between.

Terasaki and Pomerantz had presented the fragments in analyses of particular sequential phenomena – pre-announcements in Terasaki’s case, and second-assessments in Pomerantz’s. Heritage (2012a: 4) proposes a more general treatment of these and other phenomena identified in the linguistics literature as “concepts” that allow analysts to “consider relative epistemic access to a domain or territory of information as stratified between interactants such that they occupy different positions on an epistemic gradient (more knowledgeable [K+] or less knowledgeable [K–]), which itself may vary in slope from shallow to deep.”

The three sequences mentioned here are worth revisiting, in the order mentioned in the above quotation, to get a clear sense of the radical revision of sequential analysis that the EP intends.

(1) Heritage discusses the first of these early in his (2012b: 31) article (from Terasaki, 2004):

- 1 Ron: I fergot t'tell y'the two best things that
2 happen'tuh me t'day.
3 Bea: Oh super.=What were they
4 Ron: I gotta B plus on my math test,
5 Bea: On yer final?
6 Ron: Un huh?
7 Bea: -> Oh that's wonderful
8 Ron: And I got athletic award.
9 Bea: REALLY?
10 Ron: Uh huh. From Sports Club.
11 Bea: -> Oh that's terrific Ronald.

In his commentary, Heritage briefly notes that Bea's utterances in lines 7 and 11 illustrate a "universal or close to universal" ordering principle in English conversation:

Here, at lines 7 and 11, the very first element of Bea's turn acknowledging Ron's news is to register it as "news" with the "change of state" token "oh." Only subsequently does Bea go on to register its valence (as good or bad ...) with affiliative assessments. These two responses address what Schegloff has termed the "double-barreled" nature of many conversational actions (Schegloff, 2007). The ordering of the two—register something as news before doing anything else with it—appears to be universal or close to universal in English, and perhaps in other languages as well (Hayano, 2011). 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

3. Emma: [I bet it's a dream.

Recall that Heritage (2012a: 4) characterizes Lottie's utterance (lines 1-2) as "laying claim to an absolute epistemic advantage in which the recipient is, projectedly at least, entirely ignorant of what is to be described." He refers to an earlier article in which Heritage and Raymond (2005: 17) discuss the sequence at greater length: "... a second speaker struggles to find a basis for affiliating with a first assessment whose very construction ('you sh'd see that house E(h)mma') denies the access necessary for building agreement." Heritage and Raymond (2005: 17) add that "Emma's response in line 3 ('I bet it's a dream.') projects an agreement with Lottie's assessment of the house, while simultaneously thematizing her lack of first-hand experience. Lacking that experience, she manages raw affiliation with Lottie's evaluation by an utterance that expresses, at best, a simulacrum of agreement." The same extract also is presented in Heritage (2011: 160), where again it is made out as a strategic interaction in which Emma struggles in vain to achieve epistemic parity with her sister: "Patently lacking the resources to enter into a direct appreciation of the house by the very terms of Lottie's assessment, Emma aligns with Lottie's evaluation by means of a subjunctive expression of her likely evaluation, thereby achieving a simulacrum of agreement."

Numerous questions can be raised about the analytical characterization and parsing of the transcript in these commentaries (also see the discussion of this fragment in Macbeth and Wong [2016]). Of interest for us is the way those commentaries project *epistemic access* and *territoriality* into the details of the transcript, so that what seems like an agreement sequence becomes a struggle over cognitive territory. We are led to ask questions such as: does Lottie have *absolute* epistemic advantage and is Emma *entirely* ignorant of what Lottie is describing? That is, does Emma entirely lack "resources" with which to appreciate the "terms of Lottie's assessment"?¹⁹ Is there evidence of

a “struggle”? We also wonder if Emma actually is “thematizing her lack of first-hand experience,” and if so, how she does so. Further, we wonder how she “manages [to express] raw affiliation.” We can agree that Emma has not seen the house (at least not from the inside), and does not intimate that she has seen it. She takes Lottie’s word for it, and more: she provides a term “a dream” for the assessment that Lottie alludes to. But is that not a way of agreeing and affiliating? Is it *necessary* for Emma to have first-hand experience of the house before she can express more than a “simulacrum” of agreement? Does Lottie’s account of the house not provide Emma with “resources” for an authentic agreement?

Lottie’s initial characterization also provides materials for affiliation; it does not *deny* “access” except in the sense that it presumes that Emma has not seen the house in question. The contrast Heritage (2011) uses between Lottie’s absolute advantage and Emma’s complete ignorance is disengaged from the details of the transcript, not to speak of the longer recording from which the fragment is drawn, in which the house is a recurrent topic. The same can be said about Heritage and Raymond’s (2005) characterization of a “struggle” in which one party “denies” access to the recipient, while the other strives to redress the imbalance but can only do so with a “simulacrum.” Must we assume that a full agreement (which would not be a “simulacrum”) requires first-hand access to the relevant experience (of the house in this case). This is as much a conceptual question concerning what it means to agree as it is an empirical question. Even if we accept Heritage’s conceptual distinction between *agreement*, requiring first-hand access to a referential object or experience, and *affiliation* based on an understanding and appreciation of an interlocutor’s description of a familiar kind of object, it is not clear that the former necessarily should be a measure of the authenticity of the latter. We are reminded that, in ethnomethodology and CA, “[s]hared

agreement” refers to various social methods for accomplishing the member’s recognition that something was said according-to-a-rule and not the demonstrable matching of substantive matters. The appropriate image of a common understanding is therefor an operation rather than a common intersection of overlapping sets (Garfinkel (1967: 30, italics in original). If, as seems to be the case, this applies to Emma’s action, then she is not producing a “simulacrum” of agreement. To summarize our re-analysis of this instance, we have taken issue with the way epistemic analysis: 1) imposes a preconception of strategic territorial struggle on instances that do not clearly exhibit such struggle; 2) makes exaggerated claims about *absolute* epistemic primacy and *absolute* ignorance; 3) and deploys an ideal notion of “real” agreement based on equivalent “access” to a substantive “referent situation” as a normative standard for analyzing actual agreement and affiliation. Again, the epistemic analysis asserts that an extrasituational cognitive relationship, and a territorial one, *somehow* drives the sequence, but we see no convincing evidence in the sequential details that it does so.

(3) The third fragment, which Heritage (2012a: 4) mentions as an example of an instance in which “the speaker implies equality of access to the referent situation,” also is discussed in Heritage and Raymond (2005). This is an exchange in which (J) “uses a tag question to downgrade a declaratively produced assessment of the weather, thereby indexing the similar rights available to a copresent participant” (Heritage and Raymond, 2005: 23).

1. J: -> T’s tsuh beautiful day out isn’t it?
2. L: -> Yeh it’s jus’ gorgeous ...

Heritage and Raymond then comment: “In response, L agrees with J’s assessment while similarly declining to assert primary rights in the matter. By initiating her turn with ‘Yeh’, L satisfies the

constraints set by J's tag question and thereby accepts the terms set by J's first position assessment [...]. In this respect, L's responsive assessment is wholly occupied with agreement" (pp. 23-24).

As a simple surface matter, L follows J's assessment of the weather as "beautiful" with a token of agreement and a similar, perhaps slightly upgraded, assessment ("gorgeous"). It is a canonical instance of agreement through the production of first and second assessments, as Pomerantz (1984) describes. For both parties, it is a beautiful day, evidently. However, Heritage and Raymond's commentary complicates the matter by introducing an abstract, formal order into the analysis. In the first line, J's "downgrade" is not done in relation to a prior utterance in the local context of talk-in-interaction. Instead, the "downgrade" achieved through the use of the tag question is relative to a *formal linguistic* but locally counterfactual alternative: a direct assertion of information (propositional content), such as "it's a beautiful day out." Accordingly, a "first position assessment" can act as an upgraded or downgraded assessment, in relation to an imagined alternative in a formal cognitive 'space' (also see Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Raymond and Heritage, 2006). According to Heritage and Raymond's commentary, in this instance J and L have equal access to the weather outside, and thus equal "rights" to make assessments of "the referent situation." In this circumstance, the tag question seems to be an unremarkable call for agreement, though there certainly are circumstances in which the parties work out, in and through their interaction, *just what* is evident, notable, and mutually available in "the referent situation." Presumptions about relative "rights" also frame the characterization of L's action as "declining to assert primary rights." There are, of course, many things that her response does not do without having *declined* to do them. The salience of the declined action, and the motivation for declining it,

is set up by the presumptions about an underlying environment of epistemic rights and preserves, and seems otherwise unavailable to a reading of the surface features of the exchange.

These are but a few of the many examples presented in the EP corpus. The companion articles in this special issue (especially Lindwall et al., 2016, and Macbeth and Wong, 2016) examine numerous other instances. As we have argued, EP commentaries on such instances deploy formal linguistic conceptions of information exchange. A *literary* version of language (words, sentence forms, propositional content) together with presumptions about epistemic rights and statuses, provides an *a priori* apparatus through which the epistemic engine turns out its analytical product. The critical issue is not that information exchange is irrelevant but that it is *occasionally* relevant in conversation, and that how it (or any other organization of actions) is relevant on any occasion needs to be *demonstrated* by reference to the participants' constituent actions and understandings (Schegloff, 2009: 366).²⁰ Although Heritage analyzes singular cases, he does so by administering an abstract apparatus of scales, gradients, tickers, and idealized grammatical forms. Assumptions about the primacy of information, the unitary character of "knowledge", and the underlying "states" and "statuses" that are indexed at the surface of communicative actions, together with the collections of data fragments organized in terms of formal linguistic properties, make up a circular operation in which model and data confirm and elaborate one another. Heritage does not treat decontextualized questions and statements as autonomous forms that determine actions in conversation. Instead, he reduces the "context" that activates, channels, and sometimes overrides the latent possibilities contained in formal grammar to a simple binary representation of epistemic status.

Conclusion

The key claims made in the Epistemic Program are, first, that in almost every utterance in a conversation speakers express their epistemic stance toward relevant information and domains of knowledge. Second, that what speakers say at the surface of a conversation almost always *indexes* underlying epistemic status, and, third, that epistemic status is the “driving force” for overt actions, and for declining or aborting alternative forms of action. In this and in our companion papers on “oh” and “action formation,” we have noted that the epistemic status/epistemic stance distinction is difficult to maintain (Lindwall, et al., 2016; Macbeth et al., 2016; Macbeth and Wong, 2016).

In addition, we have argued that EP analyses of singular conversational fragments make *ad hoc* use of assumptions about the ubiquity of “information,” “information transmission,” “information preserves,” and competitive motivations or orientations. The epistemic analyst freely imputes to participants background understandings and expectations about who knows (or has rights to know) what, and about what a given speaker assumes on behalf of the interlocutor(s). Such analyses also treat tokens and grammatical organizations as indexes of underlying rights, states and statuses. Our argument is that the interpretative license the EP deploys when reverting to such underlying orders tends to misconstrue what otherwise seems apparent from reading the transcripts (and, when possible, examining the recordings) that supposedly exhibit those orders.

Heritage at times addresses some of these problems with the EP, but quickly bypasses them. For example, he asserts that “on the question of motivation, we have luckily passed through the massive inoculation of ordinary language philosophy and ethnomethodology. These tell us that ‘motivation,’ in its first and primary layer, is a matter of social accountability, through which other or more personal subterranean motives are glimpsed by refraction” (Heritage 2012c: 79-80, citing J.L Austin, Kenneth Burke, Harold Garfinkel, A.R. Louch, C. Wright Mills, and himself). Heritage

(2012b: 49) similarly disavows having assumed “a universal predilection among humans for giving and receiving information,” and (alluding to Wittgenstein and Garfinkel) avows instead (p. 50) that there is “nothing ‘occult’ about what is being described. It is present in plain sight as an object of massive orientation by interactants at all times. However, for being continuously present in plain sight, the epistemic engine can easily become a ‘seen but unnoticed’ feature of interaction.”²¹

The “inoculation” comment is questionable in at least two ways. First, reading or even closely studying Garfinkel, Winch, Wittgenstein, and the others, does not license the use of *ad hoc* interpretations, attributions of motive, coding schemes, and abstract gradients that supposedly access a hidden driver of surface actions. Second, Heritage’s reference to “personal subterranean motives” that are “glimpsed by refraction,” implies that Garfinkel and the others make such a hidden order visible, albeit indirectly through refraction, rather than consigning that hidden order to irrelevance. This seems to reify the very subterranean layer (the private domain) that Wittgenstein treats as a gratuitous academic construct — in Garfinkel’s (2002: 127) terms, a product of “generic representational theorizing and methods of constructive analysis.” Heritage (2012c: 80) goes on to claim that the EP is focused on accountability and not underlying motivations, but this claim is belied by the analytic language used again and again, both for setting up the analysis of specific instances and commenting on those instances.

The Epistemic Program also is vulnerable to familiar logical-empiricist criticisms of analytical programs that invoke hidden orders. Heritage mentions that the EP faces “risks of circularity” and “unfalsifiability” (Heritage 2012c: 80). Although he does not dwell on this point, these “risks” appear to hold serious implications, not only for interpretations of specific instances, but also for building collections of (arguably) equivalent or analogous cases. An anecdote told by

Popper (1963: 64) about a conversation with the psychiatrist Alfred Adler is worth repeating in this context:

Once, in 1919, I reported to [Adler] a case which to me did not seem particularly Adlerian, but which he found no difficulty in analysing in terms of his theory of inferiority feelings, although he had not even seen the child. Slightly shocked, I asked him how he could be so sure. ‘Because of my thousandfold experience,’ he replied; whereupon I could not help saying: ‘And with this new case, I suppose, your experience has become thousand-and-one-fold.’

One needn’t be a Popperian to appreciate the point of this anecdote. Sizeable collections of transcribed instances are invoked in EP (and elsewhere in CA), not only to support generalizations, but also to make normative claims. It is not clear how these collections are assembled. However, a careful review of the many illustrative cases presented in published articles indicates that the cases are placed under the jurisdiction of specific interpretations of form and function, and that these interpretations are based, at least in part, on patterns found in collections. But then, if as we have suggested, the interpretations seem to have a doubtful grip on the particular cases presented to illustrate the generalities, then one might wonder how any next instance (akin to Adler’s “thousand-and-one-fold” case) is placed in a collection of similar or equivalent cases.²²

Perhaps the most fundamental problem with the Epistemic Program is the *abstraction and generality* of its assertions about the ubiquity of information exchange, as both a motivation and contingent achievement in conversation. Both the generality at which such claims are cast, and the way they are brought into play as omnirelevant processes, motivations, expectations, presuppositions, states, statuses, and “tickers,” provides analytic license to search for and ‘confirm’ their overt or

covert ‘presence’ in virtually any instance. Again, we are not denying that information transfer and differential and proprietary knowledge are *occasionally*, and even commonly, relevant; the problem is the assumption that they are *always* (or almost always) relevant for analyzing the “design” of participants’ actions. This assumption provides an incorrigible basis for analytical attributions that, in any given instance, turn out to have a dubious hold on what the participants are *doing* then and there. Our claim on that score is contingent. We invite readers to examine further transcripts-under-analysis in the EP literature, and to form their own judgments, and to do so in light of the distinctive “epistemic stance” developed in CA. Instead of reverting to abstract “drivers” and “tickers”, the aim, as Sacks (1984: 22) put it, is “to describe methods persons use in doing social life.”

Notes

¹ See Sormani (2013) and te Molder (2016) for some cogent criticisms of the EP.

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemics> (accessed 13 August 2015).

³ Cicourel’s (1973) cognitive sociology could be viewed as a predecessor to the EP but is not acknowledged as such. Other approaches that have a nominal relation to the EP are Teun van Dijk’s (2014) “discourse epistemics,” and Jeff Coulter’s (1989) “epistemic sociology.” There are major differences between these approaches and the EP. Like Heritage, van Dijk and Coulter draw upon studies of language use and critically engage with the sociology of knowledge, but their research is differently grounded, in critical discourse analysis in van Dijk’s case, and ethnomethodology and ordinary language philosophy in Coulter’s case. Cicourel, and in a different way van Dijk, take what van Dijk calls a “sociocognitive” approach to discourse, whereas Coulter is relentlessly critical of cognitive science (see also, Button et al., 1995; Coulter & Sharrock, 2007).

⁴ Although Schegloff is cited frequently in the EP literature, his critical retrospective on Goffman, and his critical comments on articles by Enfield (2007), and Stivers and Rossano (2010), are rarely if ever mentioned (Schegloff, 1988a, 2009, 2010, respectively).

⁵ This thematic borrowing is paired with a promotion of Goffman’s standing as a predecessor of conversation analysis. For example, Heritage and Clayman (2010) present Goffman alongside Garfinkel as progenitors of CA. This treatment contrasts with an earlier review by Maynard and Clayman (1991), that mentions Goffman in passing without placing him squarely within the lines of

development of ethnomethodology and CA. Heritage (2012a: 80) also promotes philosopher of language H.P. Grice into membership of the “three G’s” (Garfinkel, Goffman, and Grice); a trio he gives foundational status for the epistemic program.

⁶ Information transmission is not a new theme for Heritage. As noted by Macbeth et al. (2016), Heritage (1984: 304) refers to the function of the speech particle *oh* for “the transmission of information from an informed to an uninformed party.”

⁷ Omnirelevance is a familiar concept in CA. For example, Schegloff (1995) argues that an orientation to “action” is omnirelevant for participants in conversation. Schegloff (2007: 2; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 299) also argues that the question “Why that now?” — i.e., what is the interlocutor *doing* just now, is an omnirelevant issue for organizing a response, as well as for analyzing sequential organization.

⁸ Heritage (2008: 305) takes up Goffman’s (1983) conception of “the interaction order” and differentiates it into a series of “orders of analysis” that involve “investigation of its constituent practices in terms of their fundamental aspects of conversational and social organization.” In both Goffman’s and Heritage’s conceptions of institutional orders there are echoes of Talcott Parsons’ theories of social action and social structure, but we will leave that issue for another occasion.

⁹ Schegloff (1988c: 454) observes that adjacency pairs are “specialized” and “upgraded” instantiations of the more general salience of “positional adjacency” in conversation.

¹⁰ Heritage cites Schegloff’s (2007) book on sequential analysis to support this claim, but gives no page reference.

¹¹ Te Molder (2016: 83-84) quotes Heritage’s (2013a: 513) assertion that “[f]or many domains of knowledge, the epistemic status of the interactants is an easily accessed, unquestionably presupposed, established, real and enduring state of affairs,” and questions why it is necessary for a conversation analyst to presume what the participants actually know, and know of each other’s cognitive states. She adds that the distinction between epistemic status and epistemic stance (the proximal expression of epistemic status) breaks down in practice and is out of keeping with the “post-cognitivist” bent in CA. To this we would add that, even if one grants the salience of background knowledge for how participants produce and understand actions in talk, tape-recorded and/or transcribed fragments of conversation are unlikely to provide a reliable basis for detecting and demonstrating such knowledge.

¹² Heritage (2013a: 556) references two main sources for the K+/K- coding scheme: Labov and Fanshel’s (1977: 100) distinction between A and B events, and Pomerantz’s (1980) distinction between Type 1 and Type 2 knowledge.

¹³ See Schegloff (1991a, 152) for a discussion of the problematic character of the notion of “common or shared knowledge.” He refers to Garfinkel’s (1967) “procedural sense” of how common knowledge is interactionally constituted for all practical purposes. Given the claim that

epistemic stance is indexed, or embodied, in linguistic forms, one could suppose that the epistemic program develops just such a procedural sense of how members achieve common knowledge, but “attributions” of epistemic *status* appear to require more elusive inferences about ‘extrasituational’ cognitive relations and territories of knowledge corresponding to linguistic forms and tokens that index them.

¹⁴ Raymond and Heritage’s commentary raises a nest of puzzles for us. One puzzle has to do with the fact that the first and last lines in the fragment are not ‘coded’, though it would seem to follow from the EP scheme that the first line would be coded K-, and line 02 would be parsed into a “second position” K+ response (“Yeah.”), immediately followed in the same turn (or line of transcript) by a “first position” interrogative (K-). What also seems notable about line 01 is that it is hearable as a pre-invitation, and hearing it in that way can lead us to question whether information exchange is the salient activity here. The uncoded line 05 (“I kno::w-“) should seem to be K+, but despite the words it seems relevant less as a reassertion of a “knowing” epistemic status, and more relevant as an expression of agreement with Regan’s disappointment (and, perhaps, also an admission of being a “party pooper,” as “pooper” in the prior line could suggest). Another puzzle has to do with the treatment of the question in line 02 of the transcript as “sequence initial,” when it evidently is part of an ongoing sequence as a reciprocal question to the one that preceded it. Raymond and Heritage (2013: 169, n. 3) try to explain how “sequence initial” actions that apparently are *not* initial can nevertheless be counted as such. However, in this case, Nikki opens up the possibility of going downtown in line 01, and furnishes the terms of Regan’s return question (or reciprocal pre-invitation) in line 02, so that characterizing the latter turn as “initial” seems unwarranted. Still another puzzle has to do with how Raymond and Heritage assign “epistemic rights” to generic sentence forms in “sequence initial” position (“rights asserted by these grammatical forms and the putative rights of the speakers who deploy them as a sequence initial action” [p. 137]). From what they say, the “default” or “unmarked” form is furnished by sequential position plus interrogative or declarative grammar, except on occasions where the analyst detects a mismatch between a speaker’s epistemic status and her use of a grammatical form in a particular position. Our puzzle turns on the related puzzle of how the overhearing analyst determines epistemic status independent of epistemic stance.

¹⁵ Note, however, that Heritage (2012c) willingly acknowledges the dubious precedent for hydraulic metaphor provided by Freud.

¹⁶ Heritage (2011: 176) also invokes propositional form as a contrastive backdrop to “response cries”: vocalizations such as “ouch”, “oh my god”, or “hooray”, that evidently express an immediate feeling of pain, sympathy, or joy. “By responding to reports of events non-propositionally, they advance closer to the lived reality of the feelings the reported events have (or may have) aroused in others.” He adds that “response cries normally pave the way for more propositional and substantive forms of understanding and affiliation.”

¹⁷ Levinson (2013: 103) reconceptualizes the next-turn proof procedure by insisting that recipients necessarily must recognize the grammatical structure and implicature of prior turns before

formulating a response, and to do so instantly: “If A’s turn was a question, B’s turn is expectedly an answer; if an offer, an acceptance or rejection is in order. So action ascription by B of A’s turn is a prerequisite for the design of B’s turn – the very ‘proof procedure’ that makes CA possible.” This is a puzzling reversal of the logic of Schegloff’s procedure, as it seems to solve by fiat the professional analyst’s characterization problem that motivated that procedure in the first place. Clayman and Heritage (2014: 56) cite Levinson on this point and explicitly adopt his “terminology in referring to recipients’ understandings of actions as ‘action ascription’ in order to draw attention to the fact that the recognition of action is a complex process [...]” Among other things, this emphasis on individual “ascriptions” reduces interactional organization to a cognitive operation performed by individual participants to recognize the intrinsic character of the prior utterance before performing the next.

¹⁸ The notion of “indexing” contrasts markedly with Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) on “indexical expressions.” An index is a referential sign (a number, a word, a token) that points to something definite, whereas an indexical expression relies upon the recipient to find the sense of a reference, and the professional analyst does not stipulate what it refers to in advance of the recipient’s uptake. In addition, terms like “it”, “they”, “here” etc. can be used without referring to a particular object, while nevertheless exhibiting orderly properties *as indexicals*; not despite their evidently vague form, but because of it (Garfinkel et al., 1981: 135ff.).

¹⁹ After reviewing a copy of the audiotape and Gail Jefferson’s transcript of it, we are convinced that the answer to this question is “No”.

²⁰ For an alternative view of the relevance of “information” in ethnomethodology and CA, see Watson and Carlin (2012).

²¹ For further caveats, see Heritage and Raymond (2005: 34, n. 10), and Raymond and Heritage (2006, 701-702, n. 2). Heritage’s reference to Garfinkel’s phrase “seen but unnoticed” should not be taken seriously. As we understand Garfinkel’s use of that phrase, it refers to taken-for-granted phenomena that *can be*, and in some circumstances *are*, made recognizable without need to resort to an underlying analytical order. As we hope to have demonstrated in this and the other articles in this issue, when reviewing the illustrative extracts in light of the analytical commentaries in EP publications, we continue to have great difficulty recognizing the agonistic struggles, ubiquitous tickers, extrasituational relationships, and “inexplicitly indexed” priorities that make up the epistemic order.

²² See Watson (2008), and Schegloff (2009) for further critical commentary on how cases are extracted from transcript to make up the instances placed in collections.

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