

PRE-INDEXING AND CONVERSATIONAL ORGANIZATION

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With increasing regularity, attention is being given to how interactants methodically organize everyday conversation. Rather than dismissing language-in-use as ordinary and therefore uninteresting, research efforts are oriented toward an understanding of how interactants "work through" and assemble turn-taking sequences.¹ Viewing conversation as a turn-organized medium for *getting things done* in face-to-face settings, interactants have been shown to construct and use a wide variety of methods to accomplish the practical activities of everyday life.²

In this study we address one general class of utterances, *conversational 'pres,'* and their relevance to the organization of everyday language use.³ Exam

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¹An insightful description of ordinary conversation as "workably built and turn-organized" may be found in Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking in Conversation," *Language*, 50 (1974), 696-735. They argue that analyses of turn-taking should "determine, at least, the shape of the turn-taking organization device, and how it affects the distributions of turns ... on which it operates." (p. 696).

²A collection of studies displaying how these models work may be found in three useful anthologies: George Psathas, ed., *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1979); Don Zimmerman and Candice West, eds., "Language and Social Interaction," *Sociological Inquiry*, 50 (1980); George Psathas and Richard Frankel, eds., *Interactional Competence*, (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1982).

³A preliminary discussion of conversational "pres" may be found in Harvey Sacks's lecture notes, Department of Sociology, University of California-Irvine (Lectures #8 and #9, October 31, November 2, 1967). More examples drawn from diverse conversational settings will be used to display the embedded and sequential workings of "pres,"⁴ especially as revealed through five speech acts possessing "pre" status: hints, prompts, teases, conditional disclosures, and (more generally) small talk. Our concerns rest with how interactants rely upon their commonsense knowledge to *set-up* and thereby *pre-organize* subsequent turns-in-sequence, the functions and forms "pres" might take (i.e., the methods used to accomplish setups), and how interactants respond to "pres."

Three reasons can be provided as to why these concerns require an examination of the ongoing management of identities and understandings during interpersonal exchange, as well as a consideration of the complex relationships among speaker intentions and hearer inferences as "pres" contribute to the shaping of social order. First, as with most conversational structures, "pres" are usefully depicted as *explicit* displays of *implicit* dimensions of social reality. Researchers and lay persons alike observe various forms of conversation-as-behavior, drawing inferences about how speech

recently, Schegloff has noted that "pres" represent a wide variety of "recurrent types of turns that are heard as prefiguring a particular possible type of turn next; there are "pre-requests," "pre-announcements," "preoffers," and others, which can be grouped under a generic term, "pre-sequences" or "pres" for short." See Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Preliminaries to Preliminaries: Can I Ask You a Question?" *Sociological Inquiry*, 50 (1980), 114.

⁴Data resources included audio-recordings, transcripts, overheard and reconstructed dialogues experienced by the authors, TV series, and movies.

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acts reflect tacit underpinnings (i.e., unspoken presuppositions). It is in this sense that Garfinkel describes the "documentary method of interpretation," whereby "The method consists of treating an actual appearance as 'the document of,' as 'pointing to,' as 'standing on behalf of,' a 'presupposed underlying pattern.'" ⁵ In the following conversational examples, we examine how interactants organize and connect behaviors (as "pre" structures) with codes (commonsensical reasons for using and responding to "pres"). Consequently, our analysis suggests that commonsense reasoning is evident *within* interactant's methods for assembling turn-taking sequences. Second we recognize that interactants organize their turn-taking in practical ways for practical reasons. As will be shown, "pres" can function to retrieve information, maximize persuasion, and minimize social embarrassment.⁶

Although we do not intend to argue that "pres" are (in all cases) consciously calculated, they are often strategically employed.⁷ Finally, we also recognize that conversational "understanding" need not always be synonymous with "successful and effective" communication. While "pres" may be integral to the accomplishment of shared social meanings, they may also promote misunderstandings, confusion and ambiguity, apathy, and even anger. Disjunctures

⁵Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 78.

⁶It is normal for "pres" to be used in the process of building and maintaining a positive "face" (i.e., to act "poised"), and to anticipate and avoid face-threatening acts when expectations are unfulfilled and embarrassment is likely. See Erving Goffman, "On Face-Work," *Interaction Ritual* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), pp. 5-46.

⁷Questions can be raised as to the extent to which pre-indexing methods are a priori vs. improvised "on the spot" utterances. A general discussion of these issues is provided by Esther Goody's edited introduction to *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 8.

can and do occur as "pres" function to set-up sequences of utterances.

As will become clear, the analysis invites questions about the indexical nature of language-in-use. *Indexicality* refers to the context-specific nature of social occasions, the features of given settings, and how interactants organize these features to create and sustain a specific sense of social structure.⁸ In everyday language use, indexical work is necessary to ensure that utterances and their meanings are situated and understood. Because conversational contexts possess multiple and potentially equivocal meanings, the ongoing work of members is to disambiguate specific utterances and make sense of the turn-organized formats encompassing them. Conversation is considered orderly and meaningful according to how utterances-in-context are produced, interpreted, and sequentially inserted or placed, i.e., indexed. Herein we will refer to this work of producing and interpreting utterances and the meanings constituting them as *indexing*, and the focus on *preindexing* methods will display how preparatory strategies are themselves context-bound. Utterances indicative of hints, prompts, teases, conditional disclosures, and small talk evidence the routine nature of pre-indexing and thus the need

⁸For a discussion of indexicality and its properties, see Yehoshua Bar-Hillel, "Indexical Expressions," *Mind*, 63 (1954), 359-379; Garfinkel, *Studies*, especially chapter one; Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions," in *Theoretical Sociology: Perspectives and Developments*, John McKinney and Edward Tiryakian, eds., (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 337-366; and Don Zimmerman and Melvin Pollner, "The Everyday World as a Phenomenon," in *Understanding Everyday Life*, Jack Douglas, ed., (Chicago: Aldine, 1970), pp. 80-103. Since conversation can be understood as situating and shaping social circumstances, and simultaneously being shaped by them, indexical properties are *reflexively* grounded. See Kenneth Leiter, *A Primer on Ethnomethodology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), Ch. 5.

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to examine their communicative properties.

We will proceed in the following manner. First, a review and application of preindexing research will be provided to demonstrate that many of the essential elements of conversational "pres" have been laid bare. Second we will integrate and extend these empirical findings for purposes of analyzing how the speech acts noted above are practically accomplished.

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON PRE-INDEXING METHODS

Researchers have expressed concerns about how utterances function to preindex contexts of interaction. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson provide an encompassing framework for understanding how *pre-sequences* are used in ordinary conversations. Searle's *indirect speech acts* reflect the meanings and functions performed by utterances. Hewitt and Stokes promote *disclaimers* as specific pre-devices for coping with potentially problematic social situations. Brown and Levinson argue that *politeness forms* have emerged, in part, as strategies for minimizing face-threats prior to their occurrence.

Pre-Sequences

Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's work on conversational sequences is the most systematic treatment of one general orientation to pre-indexing-the presequence.⁹ Figure 1 portrays research

⁹In respective order, see Sacks, Lectures #8 and #9; Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Sequencing in Conversational Openings," *American Anthropologist*, 70 (1968), 1075-1095; Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place," in David Sudnow, ed., *Studies in Social Interaction* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 75-119; Harvey Sacks, "On the Analyzability of Stories by Children," in John J. Gumperz and Dell Hymes, eds., *The Ethnography of Communication* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston,

efforts and their implications for understanding how conversation is practically organized. Pre-sequences have been shown to be integral components across a variety of related topics. The placement of utterances influences (and is influenced by) how members sequence their conversation and shape social order. Pre-sequences are not limited to specific functions, since they are used to accomplish different social tasks (e.g., summonses, closings, openings). Nor are they isolated occurrences, given that they are sequentially dependent upon prior talk and generally used to set-up following speaking turns. By considering one group of next-speaker selection techniques, utterance pairs, and how pair-parts may be expanded into larger conversational sequences, Sacks laid the groundwork for future research. He observed how utterances collectively form sequential units that are basic structures of ordinary conversation, and how these structures frequently occur in pairs. Answers often (but not always) follow questions; greetings are typically reciprocated; requests tend to produce grants or refusals. Current speakers can use a first pair part to orient (and in some cases, obligate) the next speaker to a set of alternative response choices (e.g., offer-acceptance, request-grant), and in so doing "select" the next speaker who can both respond and set-up the next speaker's choices and obligations. For example:

- (1) A: Are you feeling well tonight? (Question)
 B: Ya, fine. How about you? (Answer and Question)
 A: O.K., I guess. (Answer)

This sequence illustrates the chaining

Inc., 1972), pp. 325-345; Emanuel A. Schegloff and Harvey Sacks, "Opening up Closings," *Semiotica*, 8 (1973), 289-327; Sacks et al; Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Identification and Recognition in Telephone Conversation Openings," in Psathas, ed., pp. 23-78; and Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Preliminaries."

Figure 1
Emergence of the Notion "Pre-Sequence" in Conversational Organization

Author(s)/Title	Date	Related Topic(s)
		<u>Contributions to an Understanding of "Pre-Sequencing"</u>
1. Harvey Sacks:	1967 Lectures #8, #9	
2. Emmanuel Schegloff:	1968	"Sequencing in Conversational Openings"
3. Emmanuel Schegloff:	1972	"Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place"
4. Gail Jefferson:	1972	"Side Sequences"
5. Harvey Sacks:	1972	"On the Analyzability of Stories by Children"
6. Schegloff and	1973	Sacks: "Opening up Closings"

Utterances pairs and expansions; presequences.

Summons/Answer and Question/Answer sequences.

Accomplishing insertion sequences and locational formulations.

Accounts of sidesequences as deviations from ongoing sequences of talk.

Categories and descriptions in children's stories.

General relationship between utterance (or adjacency) pairs, their implicative nature, and how utterance pairs get expanded by placements or insertions of utterances before or between these pairs.

Elaboration of utterances as sequentially dependent units, how these units are explainable as conditionally relevant and inferential structures, and how summons utterances may be viewed as a general "pre".

Descriptions of various insertion sequences and their placement between utterance pairs, question-answer and direction giving actions as pre-sequences, and how pre-sequences may be viewed as departures from paired organizations of utterances.

Discusses alternative devices for generating and terminating side sequences, noting that side-sequences are subunits of larger conversational sequences. Although pre-sequences are not discussed directly, it becomes clear that side-sequences are different than "pre's" or insertions, and thus another significant sequential variation in talk.

Overviews the notion of sequential order, some basic rules of conversational sequencing (e.g., Q-A "chaining rule"), and views "slots" as classes of relevance rules.

Formulations of the problems of "closings" in conversation.

7. Sacks, Schegloff, 1974 and Jefferson: "A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking in Conversation"
8. Schegloff: "Identification and Recognition in Telephone Conversational Openings"
9. Schegloff: "Preliminaries to Preliminaries: Can I Ask You a Question?"

Turn-taking systems
as organized activity.

The doing of self-identifications in phone calls.

Why do people ask to ask questions?

Clarifies how utterance placements influence conversational sequencing, how pre-closings function to set up ensuing occasional actions, and the relationships between procedures for selecting next speaker, sequential implicativeness, and pre-closings.

Proposes a model of conversation as turn-organized, various features and properties of turn-taking, and examines how members display understandings of prior turns-at-talk.

Stresses how turns constrain following turns, how the term presequence is a global reflection of a wide range of "pre's", and how one use of a pre-sequence is the avoidance of dispreferred second pair parts.
Extends the notion of pre-sequencing to second-order prefigurings, namely, the "pre-pre", and displays how members project pre-questions to questions and thus prepare a setting for understanding references.

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rule (i.e., Q-A-Q-A ...), a series of interlocked utterance pairs. As Sacks notes, utterance pairs are implicative in that first pair parts tend to promote certain types of outcomes or consequences within second pair parts.

However, paired-utterances are frequently embedded within larger sequences. Sacks observes:

The pairs themselves are located in more extended and different sorts of chains of actions. It turns out that all sorts of structures are built up around these pairs to deal with some of the alternative chains that are involved in any one of them. One such build up involves what I'll talk about as an "expansion" of some pair sequence, where that pair gets a "pre-sequence" before it. So you have requests, acceptance and rejection, you get a sequence built before it which has pre-requests. There are pre-request sequences, pre-invitation sequences, pre-warning sequences, pre-offer sequences, etc.¹⁰

Thus, a request and grant like

(2) A: Could you loan me ten dollars? B: Sure.

could be pre-sequenced and expanded by

(3) A: Are you short on money now? B: Not really.
A: Could you loan me ten dollars then? B: Sure.

Similarly, an invitation and acceptance like

(4) A: Wanna take a break and go for a ride? B: Great idea, let me turn the stereo off.

could be pre-sequenced and expanded by

¹⁰Sacks, Lecture #8. Also, in the following conversational examples, notice how the word "but" functions as an *incompletion marker*. See Malcolm Coulthard, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, (Hong Kong: Longman Group, Ltd., 1977), pp. 74-75.

In short, paired utterances can be expanded to accommodate a presequence before them. In examples (3) and (5), A's initial questions function as *fishing devices* to set-up more direct subsequent queries.

Responses to Pre-Sequences

But recognize that pre-sequence expansions, such as the pre-request and pre-invitation below, are contingent upon responses to the "pre":

(6) A: How's your budget this month? B: Empty!

A: You're not the only one.

(7) A: Finished reading?

B: Hardly. I just don't have good concentration tonight.

A: Oh, just wondered how you were doin'.

In examples (6) and (7), Speaker A's intentions of requesting a loan and inviting B for a ride are implicit. In response to B's response, A's original goals (i.e., borrowing, going for a ride) were aborted-at least for the moment-and an improvised utterance was offered in each sequence to *cover-up* his original intentions.

However, attempts to cover-up can also be *short-circuited* (or pre-empted):

- (8) A: Short on money now?
B: Are you kidding? I'm broke! Why'd you ask? A: Just curious.
B: Curious my ass! How much do you want? A: Is ten dollars OK? B: No, but I'll loan it to you anyhow.
A: Thanks. I get paid by the end of the month.

Because Speaker B did not accept A's "Just curious." at face value, the inference was drawn that there was obviously more to A's "Short on money now?" than "met the eye." This is one of the many cases where background understandings make a significant difference in interpreting the *conditional relevance* of a given response to an utterance. Part of A and B's friendship involves common knowledge about "borrowing" inten-

(5)

- A: Are you done with that article yet?
B: Just finished. Why?
A: Well, wanna take a break and go for a ride? B: Great idea, let me turn the stereo off.

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tions and behaviors, and the sequence in (8) reflects how this knowledge is practically used.¹¹

It is not uncommon for members to proceed cautiously and strategically by using pre-sequences, and then act to cover-up original intentions when an unexpected or undesired response results. Pre-sequencing set-ups and postsequencing adjustments can prolong, minimize, or even avoid the possibility of losing face and social embarrassment.¹² Consider the classic situation where a male student (Speaker A) would like to date a female classmate (Speaker B), doesn't know her very well, and is unsure if he would be "turned down" if he "asked for a date." After class one day, he "tests the water":

- (9) A: Sounds like that test next Monday is gonna be a killer. You gonna be studying this weekend for it?
B: I *should* be, but my boyfriend and I are supposed to drive down to see his folks. I prob'ly won't have time ...
A: Ya, well, I plan on reading this stuff over again and going over my notes. I really need an 'A' in this class ...

Prior to his "testing the water," A was unaware that B had a boyfriend. Had this fact been known, there may have been no need for A to have held a dating intention and to have enacted the presequence. Upon this discovery, he improvised ("Ya, well . . .") to create the appearance that his major concern really *was* the class test. Depending upon his poise in camouflaging his possible surprise, B may have never become aware of A's dating intention. If A's pre-sequence

¹¹For a discussion of the sequential nature of *conditionally relevant* utterances, see Schegloff, "Sequencing," p. 1083. Similarly, this type of work reveals the "extended implicativeness" of utterances-in-sequence: interactants actively make sense of the unspoken in conversation, relying upon commonsense knowledge in the process of structuring exchange. See Garfinkel and Sacks, "Structures," pp. 343-348.

¹²See Footnote 6.

was a successful strategy for 1) gathering information about B, and 2) disguising his intention in the process, then future usages of pre-sequences in similar occasions will likely be reinforced.

Example (9) supports Schegloff's observation that pre-sequences are often used to avoid dispreferred seconds, including rejections, put-downs, and many other undesirable utterances.¹³ As pre-expansions to utterance pairs, presequences are integral features of a model of conversational sequencing.

Indirect Speech Acts

Speech act theorists offer an alternative perspective on pre-indexing.¹⁴ In contrast to the work by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (e.g., turn-taking sequences, utterance pairs and expansions thereof), Austin, Searle, and Grice have provided a framework for examining the kinds of acts performed by utterances as well as the meanings (intentions, inferences) underlying them. Specific attention is given to: *locution* (the propositional content of utterances or "what is said"); *illocution* (the underlying intentions of actors or "what is done"); and *perlocution* (the result of the act or "what is communicated").¹⁵ Garvey suggests that speech acts are constructs of linguistic pragmatics and appeal to researchers of language use "because that construct promises to relate the

¹³This is not meant to imply that using "pres" is necessarily "easy," nor that all members use "pres" competently. See Schegloff, "Identifications," p. 49.

¹⁴Interrelationships among conversation analysts and speech act theorists are drawn by Aaron Cicourel, "Three Models of Discourse Analysis: The Role of Social Structure," *Discourse Processes*, 3 (1980), 1-30; Scott Jacobs, "Recent Advances in Discourse Analysis," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66 (1980), 450-60; and William Labov and David Fanshel, *Therapeutic Discourse: Psychotherapy as Conversation* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1977).

¹⁵See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962); John

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functional and formal aspects of language. The construct links the motive force (the communication of social intentions) with the development of a means (the linguistic code) for the expression of meaning ... [A speech act is] a linguistically encoded social gesture by means of which a speaker is able to convey to a hearer a possible message."¹⁶

As displayed below in example 10, multiple speech acts can occur within a given utterance:

<i>Speech Acts</i>	<i>Utterances</i>	Request/Question	A: Can I borrow your car tomorrow? Grant/Question	B: Yes. What's your schedule like?
Pre-Request				
Answer/Response	A: Pretty free for the most part.	Request/Question	B: Can you pick me up? Grant	A: Ya. Acknowledgement/ B: Good. We'll go to the 'Y' at Extension
Extension				seven then.

This example illustrates Searle's concerns with *indirect speech acts*.¹⁷ Speakers are not always direct and straightforward, preferring instead to approach acts such as "requests for favors" indirectly and often subtly. Speakers can and do prepare contexts wherein hearers will be requested to perform certain actions. Preparatory speech acts, such as the

Searle, *Speech Acts* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); John Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in P. Cole and J. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1975), III, 62-83; H. P. Grice, "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions," *Philosophical Review*, 78 (1969), 147-177; H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in Cole and Morgan, pp. 41-58; and Catherine Garvey, "The Contingent Query: A Dependent Act in Conversation," in Michael Lewis and Leonard A. Rosenblum, eds., *Interaction, Conversation, and the Development of Language* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977), pp. 63-93; Catherine Garvey, "Requests and Responses in Children's Speech," *Journal of Child Language*, 2 (1975), 41-64; Kent Bach and Robert M. Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).

¹⁶Garvey, "Contingent Query," pp. 63-65.

¹⁷Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," pp. 67-73. Similarly, Garvey's work on requests in child discourse includes an analysis of how pre-requests work, what Garvey calls the "preparation of propositional content." See Garvey, "Requests," pp. 57-60.

pre-request in (10), do not necessarily reveal speaker's intentions underlying the production of a given utterance. This can be problematic for hearer's interpretations of speaker's intentions, of course, since the motives and force behind a given utterance are frequently difficult to decipher.¹⁸

In contrast to example (10), the following conversation illustrates how preindexes can recur across a series of utterances rather than being embedded within just one turn-at-talk.¹⁹ This sequence was observed on the television series *Beaver*, as Beaver meekly approached his father, Ward, to ask him for a loan:

(11) Beaver: Dad, can I ask you a question?
Ward: Sure, Beaver. (Ward continues to work at his desk.)
Beaver: It's the kind of question I want you to listen to when I ask it.
Ward: Oh, O.K. (Ward looks at Beaver and "acts" interested.)
Beaver: Do you promise not to ask *why* I ask it?
Ward: (Patiently) I guess so if it's that important to you.
Beaver: May I have a dollar and fifty cents?
Ward: (Smiling) I guess your credit here is good enough for that. (Reaches into his pocket to get the money.)

Beaver's first three utterances pre-index his final utterance, the loan request. Schegloff would characterize Beaver's first turn as a second order prefiguring, or a "pre-pre."²⁰ His second turn (a request) and third turn (a request, a question, and a conditional disclosure),

¹⁸Grice's notion of conversational *implicatures* helps to clarify the interpretive work involved as hearer's attempt to draw inferences from indirect speech acts. See Grice, "Logic and Conversation." Similarly, Searle repeatedly stresses that hearers must rely upon contextbound presuppositions and shared knowledge to minimize ambiguity as they reflexively infer speaker intent. See Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts."

¹⁹Analyses of across-turn speech acts are provided by Susanne Bleiberg and Lindsey Churchill, "Notes on Confrontation in Conversation," *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 4 (1975), 273-278.

²⁰Schegloff, "Preliminaries."

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although intentionally used by Beaver to set-up his father for a loan, were nevertheless indirect and likely successful in hiding his intention from Ward until Beaver was sure that the stage was set properly for the loan request.

The relationships among speaker intentions, indirect speech acts, and hearer inferences are certainly varied and complex. Speakers can use utterances in pre-indexing fashions, influencing (but not entirely controlling) implicatures drawn by hearers. Indeed, preindexes are designed to increase the likelihood that certain inferences will be drawn, while others will be avoided and/ or deemed irrelevant. In turn, implicatures influence responses to pre-indexes and contribute to the shaping of social interaction.²¹

Disclaimers

An examination of pre-indexes reveals a recurrent theme, namely, that interaction can be strategically managed so as to maintain positive impressions of individual's identities. Hewitt and Stokes build upon this theme by analyzing *disclaimers*, i.e., "a verbal device employed to ward off and defeat in advance doubts and negative typifications which may result from intended conflict."²² Disclaimers are used in problematic or potentially problematic social situations, as *prospective* hedges to the force of

²¹See Herbert H. Clark, "Responding to Indirect Speech Acts," *Cognitive Psychology*, 11 (1979), 430-477. Clark focuses upon contrasts between literal and indirect meanings, and how listeners use at least six sources of information in deciphering these meanings and planning responses to indirect utterances.

²²John P. Hewitt and Randall Stokes, "Disclaimers," *American Sociological Review*, 40 (1975), 3. They confront five basic types of disclaimers: 1) *Hedging* (e.g., "I'm no expert, of course, but ... "); 2) *Credentialing* (e.g., "I'm not prejudiced-some of my best friends are Jews-but ... "); 3) *Sin Licenses* (e.g., "I know this is against the rules, but ... "); 4) *Cognitive Disclaimers* (e.g., "I know this sounds crazy, but ... "); and 5)

upcoming face-threats.²³ Members *know* that their utterances provide data that can be used by others to (in Schutz's terminology) "typify" them. It is normal to seek out cues in language use, in order to categorize and assign specific identities to speakers. This knowledge of typifications and their consequences leads to "imaginative preconstructions of conduct" on the part of the individual, and are used to anticipate forthcoming responses. Disclaimers function as verbal counterparts to these "imaginative preconstructions."

We conclude that disclaimers, as preindexes, have a wide range of strategic possibilities. Although we are somewhat limited in the attention we can give to disclaimers as pre-indexing forms, consider how disclaimers can possess utterance-repairs and qualifications:

(12) A: This probably won't make any sense to you well, maybe it will-but ... (or)

A: I doubt if you'll understand what I'm going to say-not that you're stupid or anything-but...

and also be used to initiate, sustain, and terminate topics:

(13) A: This doesn't really relate to the topic, but

(14) A: I want to listen to what you have to say, but if we're going to stick together this is going to have to be taken care of first.

(15) A: You may not understand this, but I'm feeling terrible and would appreciate it if we could discuss these problems tomorrow.

Finally, as with a current TV soap opera, disclaimers can function to pry and stimulate arguments:

(16) A: I know you're going to say this none of my business, but what you're trying to do with her/

B: I think she's a great girl, and I'm going to

Appeals for the Suspension of Judgment (e.g., "Don't get me wrong, but ...").

²³For examples of *retrospective* hedges to face threats, especially excuses and justifications, see Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman, "Accounts," *American Sociological Review*, 33 (1968), 46-62.

marry her if I can. A team like the two of us/

A: Don't you think that's a little selfish?

B: Why don't you just stay out of this and leave us alone?!

As strategic pre-devices, disclaimers function as anticipatory moves during conversation. Building positive impressions and protecting identities are basic to conversational organization. Disclaimers can be used to regulate the impact of utterances, as well as perceptions and typifications of language use.

Politeness Forms

Brown and Levinson provide an insightful analysis of politeness forms and their strategic implementation.²⁴ Their work takes into account at least three of the phenomena discussed earlier: the practical reasoning of speakers and hearers as they work toward achieving interactional goals (rationality); the need for approval and acceptance in a variety of interactional settings (face-work); and how interactants' attempt to disambiguate and make sense of other's intentions (working with unspoken presuppositions). Arguing that all natural language users are influenced by the characteristics of rationality, face, cooperation, and implicature, Brown & Levinson differentiate four politeness categories: bald on record (direct); positive politeness; negative politeness; and off-record (indirect). These strategies are used to discern and plan-out conversational goals, to maintain positive self-images, and to have actions unimpeded by others. Similar to Hewitt and Stoke's "disclaimers," Brown and Levinson's model reflects how language users cope with facethreatening acts and how such acts are initiated and managed through conversational politeness.

²⁴Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena," in Goody, ed., pp. 56-289.

Language users design and implement rather intricate politeness strategies, several of which require pre-indexing moves. For example, within the "positive politeness" category, one strategy for establishing common ground involves noticing and attending to hearer's condition in the process of setting-up the situation:

(17) A: Goodness, you cut your hair! By the way, I came to borrow some flour.

Similarly, members often project friendship by using such ritualistic strategies as greetings before moving to the purpose-at-hand:

(18) A: How are you gents doing?
B: Oh, pretty good overall.
A: Would you happen to have a Centrex directory?
B: Help yourself-it's on top of the file.

And within the category of "negative politeness," Brown and Levinson discuss how "apologies" can be offered-often in disclaimer form-prior to addressing the topic(s) at hand.²⁵

(19) A: I hate to intrude, but ...
(or)
A: Excuse me for interrupting, but ...

In short, pre-indexes are integral strategies for organizing everyday politeness. Brown and Levinson offer a systematic description of politeness phenomena as a series of speech acts used to carry out interactional plans. The following section addresses how speech acts can themselves possess pre-status, and how these speech acts are used to regulate identities and understandings in conversation.

SPEECH ACTS FUNCTIONING AS "HINTS"

It is normal for pre-indexing methods to be intentionally constructed and produced in order to create a particular

²⁵Ibid., p. 193.

sense of social structure. This normality is evident in the five speech acts examined below. Hints, prompts, teases, conditional disclosures, and small talk should be recognizable to natural language users. Although differences among these speech acts will become apparent, they do share similar strategic possibilities. First, there is an overwhelming tendency to convey intentions by implication and thereby withhold explicit references while pre-indexing a sequence of utterances. These withholdings function to postpone, forestall, or simply "draw out" interaction and the underlying goals constituting exchange. Second, as members frequently know how directness and explicitness are useful strategies in given contexts (e.g., being assertive and outspoken), they can also recognize how their purposes are best served by being indirect, subtle, and even devious. In such cases, speakers rely upon hearers' abilities to recognize presupposed intentions in hopes that they will cooperate and help the speaker to

attain certain goals, or pre-index the conversation in such a way that hearers will be unable to decipher and recognize that they are being set-up for particular actions.²⁶ These sequences tend to induce involvement in the turn-taking system, instigating members to organize their conversations around the pre-indexing methods used to set-up subsequent turns.

Hints and Prompts

One alternative for analyzing hints and prompts is by functional comparison with requests and indirect requests. Jacobs and Jackson argue that hints and prompts are dissociated from the requests they are intended to replace, since what is being said and done (the utterance-act relationship) is not always

²⁶These strategies are similar to Brown and Levinson's discussions of "inviting conversational implicatures" and "being vague or ambiguous," pp. 218-232.

recognizable as a form of request.²⁷ However, the issuer of the hint or prompt nevertheless assumes that the recipient will understand the presupposed nature of the utterance. Because the issuer's goal is an offer and not a grant, hints and prompts should not be considered synonymous with requests. Rather, following the work by Brown and Levinson, hints and prompts are designed to be *off record*, i.e., performed acts whereby the speaker cannot be held directly responsible or committed for purposely influencing the hearer to accomplish a given act.²⁸ Thus, hints and prompts are intended to make indirect reference to the preconditions of accomplishing a given desired action—the felicity conditions of a given speech act and avoid possible consequences of having a request rejected due to its overly direct (or even undesirable) nature. Hints and prompts do not appear to lead up to a given request, but instead possess the quality of substituting the request function (20):

- (20) A: Are you going to be free this afternoon?
B: I guess so.
A: Yeah, 'cause I need to get those papers from you.
B: Why don't you come *by my* office after I'm done with my two o'clock? A: Okay.

In this case, the desired action was offered without a direct request being made. Of course, off-record utterances can also increase the likelihood that a desired action will not be carried out. Jacobs and Jackson provide examples of how hearers may pre-empt hints or prompts by offering competing requests or even "calling out" the act being referred to.

In this sense, the enactment of hints

²⁷See Scott Jacobs and Sally Jackson, "Strategy and Structure in Conversational Influence," a paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, New York, 1980.

²⁸Brown and Levinson, pp. 216-218.

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and prompts should not be seen as automatically effective. **In** fact, speakers and hearers are often knowledgeable enough to not only recognize off-record strategies, but also to actively negate or avoid them:

- (21) (A is working in his study, and knows that B is doing dishes in the kitchen.)
A: Are you close to the 'fridge, honey?
B: You know I am. Get it yourself for a change...
- (22) (An exchange between two surgeons on M*A*S*H.)
A: If I could only get away for the evening ... B: Good try, but no cigar pal. See you on the operating table. (Audience laughter)

These examples are similar to *shortcircuiting*, where the hearer "guesses" the speaker's intention(s) and punctuates the excha5e before it can be elaborated. In so -fk lng, recipients of the hint or prompt respond in unambiguous ways, conveying specific intentions informing the issuer that they were not influenced by the strategic device employed.

Another alternative is to make functional distinctions between hints and prompts, rather than to define them synonymously. We claim that the accomplishment of hints presupposes intentionality on the part of the initiator. In examples (20)-(22), the initiator has a specific goal in mind and hints that the hearer perform an action that will somehow be of help and benefit: get the papers; get something out of the fridge; and get off work for the evening. In these and similar cases, hints are strategic devices for avoiding directness yet gaining reward. Thus, hints are intentionally grounded and request-relevant.

Prompts, on the other hand, need not be dependent upon specific intentions or goals for their performance to be socially meaningful. Expectations of hearer compliance or non-compliance are not necessarily relevant, because the initiator's attention is focused more upon the utterances and their implications-for-self

than upon a response or action. Put simply, utterances may be self-reflective in nature yet still be classified by others as a prompt that induces involvement and instigates further turn-taking. As a result, utterances void of request intentions can nevertheless possess sequential implicativeness:

- (23) A: Gee, if we only had some extra time ...
B: Why?
A: It'd take too long anyhow ... B: What would?
A: We're almost out of money too ... B: Soooo?!
A: But wouldn't it be fun to stay a few more
days and travel along the coast?
- (24) A: Too bad.
B: Too bad what? A: Just too bad.
B: *What's* too bad.
A: That we didn't get to spend more time with
those folks.

In examples (23) and (24), the initiator's self-reflective utterances function to prompt the hearer's need for clarification and further information. No hinting takes place within these sequences. And requests are hearer-initiated (Speaker B), being straightforward and direct in each case. Churchill notes that all questions are, in a technical sense, requests for information.²⁹ Consequently, unlike hints, prompts such as these are request-relevant only as topics for clarification and elaboration, rather than intentional strategies for influencing hearer's actions. This is not to say that the initiator's in (23) and (24) could not "appear" to be self-reflecting, and *really* be seeking hearer involvement in the process. Such deception strategies are also common in everyday conversation. But the point is that for utterances to serve prompt-like functions, they need not be consciously strategic nor intentionally projected as is the case with hints (at least in a majority of cases).

²⁹Lindsey Churchill, *Questioning Strategies in Sociolinguistics* (Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1978), pp. 64-68.

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Teases

Conversational *teasing* is yet another type of pre-indexing that is functionally unique. In teasing, initiators formulate utterances that may be indirect and subtle, but are also intentionally playful, devious, and/or even annoying at times. Initiators manipulate by purposely "baiting" hearers with relevant information, and then proceed to withhold or postpone giving the "bait" in moves like the following:

- (25) A: Did you hear about ... (pause) B: What?
A: Never mind ...
B: What did you say? A: Nothin'.
B: You did too, now *tell* me! A: About what? B: About what you heard. A: What did I hear? B:
OOOOHHHHH!!!
- (26) A: Wanna know a secret?
B: Sure.
A: How bad? B: Pretty bad.
A: How bad is that?
B: Bad enough. Just tell me.
A: It's not much of a secret anyhow. I think
you're great.

Of course, if hearers decide not to play the game for any of a number of reasons (e.g., not enough time, bad mood), then teasing can also be *short-circuited*:

- (27) A: Would you like to know what I got you? B: Umhum.
A: I bet you would.
B: Just leave me alone, would ya? I've got to get this work done in less than an hour.
- (28) A: I'm gonna tell you a surprise.
B: I'm not in the mood for surprises. A: Then I can't tell ya.
B: Listen, I've had a headache all day and don't
want to play right now.
A: All right. You're no fun. Guess where we're
going next week?

Although teases are accomplished in numerous ways, hearers often come to recognize when they're being set-up and played with, how to work within a given teasing context, and how to terminate or minimize the teasing efforts if so desired.

(These attempts are not necessarily successful, however, as is often the case when brothers and sisters nag each other continuously.)

Teases may also function as set-ups in disclaimer form. Disclaimers need not be employed only as hedges against upcoming (or perceived upcoming) facethreats, as was mentioned earlier in light of the approach taken by Hewitt and Stokes. Disclaimers can also be constructed as teases for gaining hearer's attention and building curiosity into the turn-taking system:

- (29) A: You probably won't believe this, but/
B: Yes I will.
Come on (pause), tell me. A: Well...
B: *Come on.*
A: O.K. Well, the other night I heard that ...
- (30) A: I could say something, but I won't.
B: Why not? Get it off your chest. I'll be O.K. A: It can wait.
B: Sure it can, but I don't want it to. A: All right ...

Note that hearers recognize speaker A's first utterance as either incomplete or leading up to something implicit within the tease itself. If the hearer is attentive enough, the tease will be followed by a clarification or request for additional information. However, if the hearer is passive, apathetic, or purposely strategic in order to gain the relevant information, the following sequences might arise:

- (31) A: You probably won't believe this/
B: You're right, I won't.
So why tell me?
A: Thought you might be curious. B: You thought wrong.
- (32) A: I could say something, but I won't B: O.K. Don't.
A: Well, maybe I should tell you...
- (33) A: I don't really want to talk about this now,
but I think you should know.
B: Not now. It's been a long day and I want to
relax for awhile. A: Good idea.

Similar to our earlier discussion of pre-sequence expansions, teases and their influence are dependent upon how

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hearers respond to initiator's utterances. Hearers can *short-circuit* the relative force of a tease by interpreting the tease as though it were literally stated (31), engaging in reverse psychology (32), or simply requesting that the tease (and its implicatures) be postponed for awhile (33). Both teases and responses to teases reflect member's conversational methods of sense-making.

Conditional Disclosures

It is a common occurrence for speakers and hearers to essentially negotiate a contract of pre-understanding. Such contracts require (at least in theory) future commitment to the present agreement and delimit the hearer's future relay of the disclosed information. The speaker attempts to secure the hearer's confidential "signature" for the *conditional disclosure* contract, and will usually tell the hearer what he plans to tell him/her *only* if he/she agrees-explicitly or implicitly-not to tell anyone else what he/she hears (that is, beyond the person(s) specified in the contract).

An example of the explicit type of conditional disclosure can be observed in the following dialogue:

- (34) A: Wanna know a secret? B: Sure.
A: Promise not to tell anybody? B: Ya.
A: O.K., when I was talking with Bill the other day...

This conditional disclosure is explicit in that the actual contract is mutually negotiated prior to the disclosures occurrence. However, a conditional disclosure need not be made explicit across utterances. Implicit conditional disclosures occur when the speaker embeds the contract in his utterance in such a way that the hearer, unless he/she clearly states otherwise, agrees to the contract

by simply not objecting to the following disclosure. So, a speaker may initiate an implicit conditional disclosure by saying:

- (35) A: Grandma told me something about Uncle Joe that I'd like to share with you, but let's keep it in the family. You see, Uncle Joe ...
(or)
A: What I'm about to say can't go beyond you and me. It's a strong possibility that ...

In such implicit contracts the speaker artfully (though not necessarily intentionally) secures the hearer's commitment to a contract, defining and delimiting the appropriate audience for the information to be disclosed.

By definition, conditional disclosures are negotiated prior to the disclosure itself. Yet a speaker may interject a belated contract through embedding:

- (36) A: Guess what? Roger asked Mary to the party Saturday night.
B: Wait 'til Sue hears about this.
A: No, don't tell her, it's s'pose to be a secret, O.K.?
B: I guess so. (or)
A: Please don't tell anyone else about this, except maybe your wife.

Conditional disclosures may also be used in conjunction with teases:

- (37) A: (Taunting) I know something you don't know, I know something you don't know ...
B: No you don't! A: Yessir. B: What is it?
A: I'm not tellin' cuz I told Shari I wouldn't. B: I won't tell anyone. A: Cross your heart and hope to die? B: Yeah (as she nods and crosses her heart).
A: O.K., I heard that Jerry got in bad trouble for missing school ...

In this example A's first teasing utterance sets-up B's interest, eventually leading to A's securing of B's commitment not to tell anyone about Jerry's missing school. This illustrates how prior disclosure agreements influence current pre-indexing moves. While it cannot be determined whether B will abide by the contract in future discussions, A tried to insure that the privi-

leged information would remain secret. Here it is seen that conditional disclosures can be used to control information dissemination and as strategies for saving face. In short, A wanted B's commitment so Shari would not find out that A had broken *his* earlier contract. While this type of circular practical reasoning underlies this example of a conditional disclosure, each contract is negotiated according to the indexical particulars of each given interactional context.

Small Talk

In face-to-face interaction, small talk can occur for its own sake or as conversational work that pre-indexes or leads up to some rather clear purpose of one or more of the speakers. Knapp discusses the role(s) of small talk as members both initiate and sustain relationships.³⁰ Although contexts such as cocktail parties, formal meetings, and initial discussions are stereotyped as being comprised (at least in part) of small talk, this is *not* to say that small talk per se is unimportant.³¹ Rather, small talk often fulfills important interpersonal functions such as maintaining a low-risk environment, uncovering interesting topics, and discovering or setting-up subsequent purposes for interaction. Functioning as a social lubricant, small talk can allow members the opportunity to "ease" into more pertinent concerns in the relationship.³² Moreover, small talk recurs in

³⁰Mark L. Knapp, *Social Intercourse: From Greeting to Goodbye* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1978), pp. 111-121.

³¹We recognize, of course, that small talk *can* be threatening and altogether filled with discomfort. At times it is difficult to maintain superficial conversations, and it is not atypical for members to avoid certain situations for this reason alone.

³²In this sense, small talk can be likened to behaviors indicative of the "entry phase" in relationship development. See Charles R. Berger and Richard J. Calabrese, "Some Exploration in Initial Interaction and Beyond: Toward a Developmental Theory of Interpersonal Communication," *Human Communication Research*, 1

established relationships for the simple reason that all of our time cannot be spent discussing intimate and "heavy" topics.

Our concerns rest with small talk as one form of strategic pre-indexing, i.e., as used to accomplish

set-ups and goal attainment. As noted in example (18), greetings are often employed to initiate a conversation and set-up following requests. In example (38), note that greetings can also be used as pre-indexes to small talk, while small talk pre-indexes the request and underlying purpose for the discussion:

- (38) (Without appointment, a student (A) knocks and enters a professor's office during nonoffice hours.)
A: Hi, how ya doin'?
B: (Surprised) Oh, pretty good, just grading papers.
A: Isn't this weather just great?
B: Yeah, for January you can't beat temperatures in the 50's.
A: Really. I can't believe how mild this winter has been so far. It's gonna be an awfully dry summer if we don't get any snow.
B: Yep. What can I do for you?
A: Could I ask you some questions about the test?
B: Sure, have a seat.

Although the small talk about the weather could have lasted even longer, B terminated the topic ("What can I do for you?") by directly asking A about his intentions. Actually, A used *three* pre-indexes in example (38): the greeting; small talk about the weather; and a "pre-pre" ("Could I ask you some questions about the test?"), similar to Bea

(1975), 99-112. Small talk is also omnipresent in *orienting* and *forming* phases in small group decision making. See R. R. Bales and R. L. Strodbeck, "Phases in Group Problem Solving," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 46 (1965), 485-495; W. G. Bennis and H. A. Shephard, "A Theory of Group Development," *Human Relations*, 9 (1956), 415-437; Bruce W. Tuckman, "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," *Psychological Bulletin*, 63 (1965), 384-399; and B. Aubrey Fisher, "Decision Emergence: Phases in Group Decision Making," *Speech Monographs*, 37 (1970), 53-66.

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ver's first utterance in example (11) ("Dad, can I ask you a question?"). These moves in (38) collectively reveal a strategy for dealing with the test as a topic. Further, a comparison of examples (11) and (38) suggests that when members feel hesitant or reticent about making a request, it is possible to employ multiple pre-indexing moves to gradually "soften" the impact of that request. The more uncertain a speaker is about the ramifications of his actions, the greater the likelihood that pre-indexes will be employed to avoid or minimize dispreferred outcomes.

However, small talk needn't reflect hesitancy, reticence, or uncertainty. The following example displays how small talk can precede the major purpose for a phone conversation:

- (39) (Speaker B calls Speaker A to obtain copies of a manuscript.)
A: Hello
B: Hello
A: Who is this?
B: Who do you think?
A: Well, C. Jay, what's up? B: A lot of snow.
A: How much did you get?
B: Seventy-eight inches.
A: No kidding?! We only got three here, although I was hoping for more.
(They continue talking about their skiing activities, and then discuss the manuscript in question.)

In this example a greeting, a tease ("Who do you think?"), and small talk about snow and skiing precedes discussion about the manuscript. Although the manuscript was an important issue, small talk allows members to pay relationship dues and respect to one another. Discussing common interests and activities through small talk enables members to "maintain a sense of community."³³ It also provides an environment for handling business in a care-free manner.

One final example involves Speaker B

³³Knapp, p. 113.

calling United Airlines for a plane ticket reservation. Small talk again functions as strategic pre-work, leading to the ultimate purpose of finalizing plans for a trip. Notice that B could have made his or her purpose explicit in his or her *first* utterance, but chose instead to pre-index with a question about A ("How are you today?"):

- (40) A: United Airlines. This is Jeannie speaking.
May I help you?
B: Hi, this is Joe Smith calling. How are you today?
A: Oh, fine, thanks. We aren't as busy now as during Christmas season.
B: Yeah, I tried to make reservations before Christmas, and was put on hold for twenty minutes.
A: Yeah, isn't that terrible? Our customers get impatient sometimes, and for a good reason. B: Yeah, especially when you get disconnected after waiting twenty minutes.
A: Oh, really?! (Laughter) Sorry about that. B: No big deal.
A: What can I do for you today?

(A and B begin discussing the reservations.) In the final utterance, A terminated the small talk in a fashion mirroring the professor's strategy in example (39). When small talk is used to set-up a rather specific goal or purpose, too much small talk can have negative consequences. As one form of pre-indexing, small talk might best be used with discretion: too much of a good thing can undermine the value of drawing out exchange, influencing the attainment of interactional goals as well as the maintenance of a positive face during conversation.

CONCLUSION

An understanding of everyday conversation necessitates an examination of how members routinely organize particular sequences of utterances. We focused on pre-indexing phenomena as practical, situated accomplishments, and have demonstrated that members use preindexes in methodical ways, for numerous purposes, and in a variety of con-

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texts. Communicatively, pre-indexes can function: to initiate sequences or as embedded utterances used to structure sequences; in subtle, indirect, direct, devious, playful, effective or ineffective fashions; as strategies for creating or "setting-up" a sense of social structure conducive to understanding, and in so doing "drawing out" or forestalling exchange; as attempts to maintain a

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sense of community among members; and as moves intended to avoid or minimize face-threatening responses. These communicative possibilities, and their organizing functions, suggest that the study of pre-indexing methods holds important implications for researchers investigating the machinery of natural language use.