

## Book Reviews

*Forms of Talk.* By Erving Goffman. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981. Pp. vi + 335. \$20.00 (cloth); \$7.95 (paper).

William A. Corsaro  
Indiana University

Erving Goffman appears to have two focuses in *Forms of Talk*. The first is in reaction to the kind of theorizing in sociolinguistics that attempts to capture the complexity of discourse by the use of highly formalized models. Goffman does not reject formalistic analyses but argues that they should be part of an approach that places talk in a broader interactional framework. A second and related focus is one that recurs in all Goffman's work; that is the demonstration that social interaction constantly involves self-presentation and maintenance. Goffman instructs the student of discourse to look beyond the idealized model of the speaker/hearer as a transmitter of information to the framing devices and strategies through which self is displayed, maintained, validated, or denied.

Toward these ends, Goffman skillfully exhibits the interplay of ritualization, participant framework, and "embedding" in face-to-face communication. In "Replies and Responses," the first of the five essays in this book, Goffman adds to what he calls the "system constraints" of the conversational analysts (e.g., the Sacks-Schegloff-Jefferson "turn-taking procedures") by introducing "ritual constraints." Ritual constraints govern how each individual should handle himself so as not to discredit his own or another's tacit claims to good character. A second important contribution in "Replies and Responses" is Goffman's discussion of discourse units and sequencing. Here his notion of embedding is most relevant. In general terms, embedding is part of our "linguistic ability to speak of events at any remove in time and space from the situated present" (p. 3). Because of this embedding ability, social actors have wide dramatic liberties. We can mimic, mime, reenact, and hide ourselves away from what we have said, are saying, or are about to say. Given this emphasis, Goffman offers a basic interactional unit composed of three moves: mentionable event, mention, and comment on mention. But Goffman does not mean to imply that discourse is simply a matter of chaining a series of interactional moves together. In fact, he argues that responses must have "references" and that "our basic model of talk perhaps ought not to be dialogic couplets and their chaining, but rather a sequence of response moves with each in the series carving out its own reference" (p. 52).

Permission to reprint a book review printed in this section may be obtained only from the author.

In "Response Cries" Goffman displays his fascinating talent for taking subtle, taken-for-granted features of everyday interaction and showing that these phenomena may not be what they seem to be and that they are much more important than we assume. Response cries are exclamatory interjections (e.g., "Oops!" "Whoops!" etc.) which, along with other types of self-talk and deprecations, are commonly seen as being purely expressive blurtings that often occur at times of stress. Goffman challenges this view and suggests that we "look to the light these ventings provide, not to the heat they dispel" (p. 120). For Goffman, these vocalizations "make a claim upon the attention of everyone in the social situation, a claim that our inner concerns should be theirs, too, but unlike the claim made by talk, ours here is only for a limited period of time" (p. 121). For example, consider response cries that serve as transition displays. These are uttered upon entering or leaving a state of marked discomfort: "Brr!" is the usual exclamation on leaving outside cold for inside warmth and "Ahh!" or "Phew!" the one used when entering a cool place from a hot one. Goffman's point is that these expressions are conventionalized as to form, occasion, and social function and experienced so commonly that they should be studied for what they tell us about social order in everyday life. But Goffman wishes to go a step further. He argues that ritualized versions of these expressions can themselves be embedded in standard conversational encounters. For example, "When a speaker finds he has skated rather close to the edge of discretion or tact, he may give belated recognition to where his words have gone, making a halt by uttering a plaintive *Oops!*, meant to evoke the image of someone who has need of this particular cry, the whole enactment having an unserious, openly theatrical character" (p. 117). In appreciating that these ritualized response cries become part of conversation, one will discover that they cannot be analyzed without references to their original functions outside conversation. Having taken the argument to this point, Goffman ends the essay by recommending "that linguists have reason to broaden their net, reason to bring in uttering that is not talking, reason to deal with social situations, not merely with jointly sustained talk" (p. 122).

For Goffman, a change in "footing" in discourse (the topic of the third essay) "implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (p. 128). The notion of changes in footing is offered as an alternative to the traditional categories of speaker and hearer. For Goffman, the notion of hearer is too global because it refers to a wide and undifferentiated range of participants. Therefore, Goffman introduces the notions of "participation status" (i.e., one's position regarding particular utterances) and "participation framework" (i.e., one's position regarding all other persons present during discourse). When discussing the term "speaker," Goffman argues that a more useful concept would be "production format." This notion refers to the multiple ways speakers can present themselves (e.g., as animators, authors, principals, or some com-

bination thereof). In "Footing," as in other essays in the book, Goffman ends by demonstrating that the topic at hand is even more complex than he has led us to believe. For changes in footing should not be seen as merely switching from one stance to another. Rather, because of embedding and ritualization, when we change footing "we are not so much terminating the prior alignment as holding it in abeyance with the understanding that it will almost immediately be reengaged" (p. 155). Therefore, one can hold the same footing across several turns at talk, and one alignment can be fully enclosed within another. "In truth, in talk it seems routine that, while firmly standing on two feet, we jump up and down on another" (p. 155).

In the last two essays Goffman applies many of the concepts he introduced in the first three papers. In "The Lecture," he analyzes this form of talk as a speech event and focuses specifically on the comparison of changes in footing in lectures with those of talk in other social contexts. Even though I have given and attended numerous lectures, I had trouble following his argument in this essay. Goffman does make several interesting points, but it is possible that this paper was more successful in its original presentation as a lecture than it is in print.

"Radio Talk" is an insightful and entertaining essay. Goffman begins by describing the special conditions of radio announcing that make speech errors or "fautes" highly noticeable and in need of self-correction. He then goes on to provide numerous examples of various types of fautes and announcers' strategies for dealing with them. An important feature of error correction in radio talk is that in attending to a fautive the announcer directs more attention to it and may make things worse:

Newscaster: "This is your eleven o'clock newscaster bringing you on the pot report . . . I mean on the spot report . . . I mean on the tot resort . . . Oh, well let's just skip it!" [P. 310]

Goffman's main point, however, is not just to provide us with amusing examples. He argues that an examination of radio talk can direct our attention to critical features of everyday informal talk that might easily go unnoticed. Informal talk, unlike radio talk, is highly flexible and allows speakers a considerable margin of error. In informal talk the speaker can from moment to moment during discourse "meet whatever occurs by sustaining or changing footing." And most important, he can select "that footing which provides him the least self-threatening position" (p. 325).

In sum, *Forms of Talk* is an interesting and insightful book. I recommend it highly to all of those who are interested in the relationship between language and social life and even more to those sociologists who are familiar with Goffman's dramaturgical approach but unaware of his recent important contributions to sociolinguistic theory.

*The View from Goffman*. Edited by Jason Ditton. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980. Pp. 289. \$25.00.

Ulf Hannerz  
*University of Stockholm*

Erving Goffman was one of the few individuals in contemporary sociology who have been genuinely innovative theoretical thinkers and who have, at the same time, had an intellectual impact outside their own discipline, or even outside the academic community. Yet there have been varied views as to the real nature of his theoretical stance and the worth of his contribution. Was Goffman a symbolic interactionist or a structuralist? Was he a pop sociologist with the footnotes left in, or a mid-century Simmel? From what class perspective did he really look at society? And so forth.

In *The View from Goffman* 11 scholars have undertaken a searching analysis of Goffman's work. Six are Americans, five (including the editor) British—evidence of a growing interest in Goffman in Great Britain since the 1960s. While all the Americans have published work on Goffman before, most of the British have not.

On the whole, the contributors are appreciative but not uncritical of Goffman's work. Gouldner's discussion of Goffman in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* is the point of departure for two who take positions opposing Gouldner's. Mary Rogers insists that Goffman had more to say on issues of power and inequality than he has been given credit for, while George Gonos proposes that the underlying class position of Goffman's social theory is not that of Gouldner's "new middle class." Gonos notes that Goffman's early writings come out of the same postwar period as those works of Mills, Riesman, and Whyte that are concerned with this expanding class. Goffman's own work, he suggests, takes the position of the lumpen-bourgeoisie, the remaining independent small entrepreneurs, who struggle to find their way through (or around) this new class structure. This class perspective has much in common with that of the lumpen-proletariat that is often the immediate source of Goffman's ethnography.

Gonos also describes Goffman as "an American structuralist." The reaction against the routine assumption that he represented only a somewhat odd variety of symbolic interactionism is recurrent in several of the contributions to this volume. Clearly Goffman's thought must be viewed against a wider background than that of homegrown American sociology. In analyzing Goffman's early writings, John Lofland emphasizes the strand of existentialism, while Randall Collins traces an intellectual network of considerable range. He notes the symbolic interactionism of Goffman's Chicago years but also the presence in Chicago of Durkheimian, social anthropological influences mediated by Lloyd Warner—influences which had already been present in Goffman's earlier academic milieu in Canada. Collins also mentions the ties to Simmel and Kenneth Burke, pays at-

