

Book Reviews

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

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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).

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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-

