

Retro-sequence

Encyclopedia of Terms for EMCA/IL: Retro-sequence

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Term: Retro-sequence

Part of Speech: noun

Definition: A **retro-sequence** is a type of **sequence** that is launched (or ‘activated’) from second position (Schegloff 2007: 217-219). Retro-sequences operate backwards (or retrospectively, hence the name) and typically invoke a source/outcome relationship with what preceded them. Specifically, the first ‘visible’ component of a retro-sequence retroactively marks (and often locates) a prior utterance or action as its ‘source’ by presenting itself as an ‘outcome’ of that prior. In other words, the ‘source’ turn/action only becomes recognizable and is thus constituted as the ‘source’, once the ‘outcome’ turn has been produced. Schegloff (2007) mentions **other-initiated repair** as a prime example of this retroactive operation:

[SBL 2,1,8] (adapted from Schegloff 2007: 217)

01 Bet: Was last night the first

02 time you met Missiz Kelly?

03 (1.0)

04 => Mar: Met whom? Next-turn repair initiator (NTRI)

05 Bet: Missiz Kelly

06 Mar: Yes.

retroactively
marks & locates
as trouble-source

initiates repair
sequence

The **repair initiation** in line 04 marks and locates the **person reference** in line 02 as the ‘source’ for its production by treating it as a **source of ‘trouble’**. Note that this happens retroactively: Although Beth’s turn in line 01-02 engendered the **repair initiation**, it cannot be said to have made a **repair initiation** sequentially relevant next (indeed, her question projects an answer). This retroactive constitution of something earlier in the sequence as the ‘source’ for their production is the core feature of retro-sequential objects. Consequently, if the ‘outcome’ turn/action does not locate its ‘source’ (e.g., unsolicited laughter, sudden crying), it may attract a search for its possible source from the recipient (Schegloff 2007: 218).

At the same time, these turns/actions generally initiate sequences themselves and make some responsive action prospectively relevant next (in the above example, a **repair solution**). Sequentially, they are therefore janus-faced and can act as junctural, ‘pivotal’ or transitional devices (Küttner 2020). Retro-sequential objects need not be **first pair-parts** of **insert sequences**, however (see Kendrick 2019; Küttner 2020; see also Jefferson 1978 on ‘touched-off’ story initiations). The scope of retro-sequentiality as a more general feature of (certain) actions in interaction is still largely unexplored. Schegloff (2007:

219) mentions ‘**noticing**’ as an action-type that generally implicates retro-sequentiality and the invocation of source/outcome relationships (perhaps including the noticing of ‘trouble’ or ‘laughables’; see also Keisanen 2012; Kääntä 2014; Laanesoo & Keevallik 2017; cf. Pillet-Shore 2020). But it also seems to play a prominent role in **account solicitations** (both on- and off-record, Bolden & Robinson 2011; Raymond & Stivers 2016; Robinson & Bolden 2010; Sterponi 2003), **apologies** (Robinson 2004; Schegloff 2005; Heritage et al. 2019), **challenges** (Keisanen 2007; Koshik 2003), as well as turns that are (marked as) **offering inferential interpretations** of prior talk, such as **formulations** (Zinken & Küttner, under review.; see also Heritage & Watson 1979, 1980; Heritage 1985).

Additional Related Entries:

sequence

other-initiated repair

trouble-source

insert sequence(s)

noticing(s)

account solicitation(s)

challenge(s)

formulation(s)

interpretations

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