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Early Social Interaction

When a young child begins to engage in everyday interaction, she has to acquire competencies that allow her to be oriented to the conventions that inform talk-in-interaction and, at the same time, deal with emotional or affective dimensions of experience. The theoretical positions associated with these domains – social-action and emotion – provide very different accounts of human development and this book examines why this is the case. Through a longitudinal video recorded study of one child learning how to talk, Michael Forrester develops proposals that rest upon a comparison of two perspectives on everyday parent–child interaction taken from the same data corpus – one informed by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, the other by psychoanalytic developmental psychology. Ultimately, what is significant for attaining membership within any culture is gradually being able to display an orientation towards both domains – doing and feeling, or social-action and affect.

MICHAEL A. FORRESTER is a Reader in Psychology at the University of Kent. His academic interests are in child development and language and, particularly, children's developing conversational skills.

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University of Kent

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To
Ella Sbaraini

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Preface

This book brings together various threads of the research work I have been involved with over a number of years. This research is based on a longitudinal video recorded study of one of my daughters as she was learning how to talk. The impetus for engaging in this work arose from a sense that within developmental psychology and child language, when people are interested in understanding how children use language, they seem over-focused or concerned with questions of formal grammar and semantics. My interest is on understanding how a child learns to talk and through this process is then understood as being or becoming a member of a culture. When a young child is learning how to engage in everyday interaction she has to acquire those competencies that allow her to be simultaneously oriented to the conventions that inform talk-in-interaction *and* at the same time deal with the emotional or affective dimensions of her experience. It turns out that in developmental psychology these domains are traditionally studied separately or at least by researchers whose interests rarely overlap. In order to understand better early social relations (parent–child interaction), I want to pursue the idea that we will benefit by studying both early pragmatic development *and* emotional development. Not surprisingly, the theoretical positions underlying the study of these domains provide very different accounts of human development and this book illuminates why this might be the case. What follows will I hope serve as a case-study on the interdependence between the analysis of social interaction and subsequent interpretation.

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