

Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

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Ethnomethodology (EM) and Conversation Analysis (CA) challenge the traditional perspective of the normative constitution of social action. Conventional sociological research has largely traded on the distinction between basis and superstructure. The regularities of action were to be explained vis-à-vis the dispositions and expectations the actors are subject to (Wilson 1970). Instead of seeking for the underlying normative structures, ethnomethodology (EM) and conversational analysis (CA) focus on the orderliness of actions as their emergent property. They re-specify the locus of social order. Both EM and CA examine the practices people are busy with in producing social actions that are regular and recognizable parts of cultural and social processes. For them, the orderliness of social actions is not to be found beneath the surface of action but in the actions and interactions ordinary members of society are involved in. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have summarized this perspective:

“We have proceeded under the assumption (an assumption borne out by our research) that in so far as the materials we worked with exhibited orderliness, they did so not only to us, indeed not in the first place for us, but for the co-participants who had produced them. If the materials (records of natural conversation) were orderly, they were so because they had been methodically produced by members of the society for one another, and it was a feature of the conversations we treated as data that they were produced so as

to allow the display by the co-participants to each other of their orderliness, and to allow the participants to display to each other their analysis, appreciation and use of the orderliness.” (P. 290.)

EM and CA provide a way to study mundane social matters as achievements. The topics of EM studies vary from the interaction patterns of aboriginals (Lieberman 1985) to proving mathematical theorems (Livingston 1986), but are unified by their focus on the details of the accomplishment of the action. CA targets the foundational role of talk and interaction for social action, both in everyday and institutional settings.

Ethnomethodology

Garfinkel tells the following story about the origins of the idea of ethnomethodology.

“In 1954 Fred Strodbeck was hired by the University of Chicago Law School to analyse tape-recordings of jury deliberations obtained from a bugged jury room. Edward Shils was on the committee that hired him. When Strodbeck proposed to administer Bales Interaction Process Analysis categories, Shils complained: 'By using Bales Interaction Process Analysis I'm sure we'll learn what about a jury's deliberations makes them a small group. But we want to know what about their deliberations makes them a jury.’” (Garfinkel, Lynch and Livingston 1981: 133.)

Garfinkel's ethnomethodology developed a response to Shils' complaint. It began investigating the properties of reasoning and practical action that are the participants' ways of producing this activity (Garfinkel 1967). The aim of EM distinguishes it from the standard science that surveys general and average properties of the phenomena. EM tries

to catch the defining features, the “just whatness” of mundane activities that makes them what they are; that is, what the methods, means and procedures are through which an activity like jury deliberation is being done (Francis and Hester 2004).

EM draws its inspiration from the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl and Schutz (Heritage 1984: 37-74), transposing phenomenological inquiries about the appearance of phenomena in the world onto studies of the members’ methods of doing *being-in-the-world*. The spectrum of EM studies may seem confusing. Research covers topics from jazz improvisation (Sudnow 1978), snitching and moral order at a half-way house (Wieder 1974), to “doing being ordinary” (Sacks 1992b: 215-221; for further studies, see Garfinkel 1986; 2002). All the studies concentrate on the methods of *doing*, if nothing else, then just *doing being ordinary*, how people manage their conduct to give an impression of being more-or-less like everybody else. Ordinarity is not to be seen as a statistical average, but as a skilled achievement.

The key for EM is the topic/resource shift (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970). The reservoir of tacit everyday knowledge normally taken for granted by the social sciences is to be opened up to research. The fundamental properties of social action should become the object of study, through which EM aims at re-specifying the foundations of social actions by analyzing situated practices at the face-to-face level (Button 1991). The central EM research assumption is that the meaning of a social phenomenon is equivalent to methodical procedures through which participants sustain its sense. Garfinkel suggests that for EM: "their central recommendation is that the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings 'account-able'" (Garfinkel 1967: 1). Accountability

is a central notion for EM. That is, the methods whereby members render and make their experiences accountable are the methods whereby they maintain the social order for which they are accountable. This “reflexive” and “incarnate” character of the production of social order inevitably makes members' methods and their common sense an rich and profound topic both for themselves and for research.

Other aspects of the EM program are related to the notion of accountable action. Consequently, social order is not given, but something that participants work to achieve. Nor are the meanings of language or social actions given, but context-bound, deriving from their context of production. Finally, rules and regularities are resources for interpretations that guide the participants as sources of understanding, but they are not external forces that mechanically compel actors. In any case, the idea is not to deny the existence of power relations, but to acknowledge that, whatever the social relationships are, they are subject to procedures and methods of reasoning. EM refuses to treat human beings as “judgmental dopes”, which is one of its best known slogans.

From the outset, the breaching experiments, in which Garfinkel (1963; 1967: 38-47) instructed an experimenter to behave in some ordinary situation in inappropriate and, by common standards, senseless ways, made ethnomethodology (in)famous. The experiments also highlighted the notion of accountability. In the experiments, the subjects "vigorously sought to make the strange actions intelligible and to restore the situation to normal appearances" (Garfinkel 1967: 47). These experiments demonstrated the participants' use of common-sense expectations, their accounting practices and the resulting moral force of cognition.

In more detail, Garfinkel's breaching experiments reveal the generic reflexive accountability of social actions. In the experiment in which the experimenter asked a subject to clarify the meaning of his/her commonplace remarks such as "how are you" or "I am tired", the subjects actually produced a wide range of responses. On some occasions, it was understood as an insult "Look! I was just trying to be polite. Frankly, I don't give a damn how you are." (Garfinkel 1967: 47); it could also be heard as a question "I don't know, I guess physically, mainly" (Garfinkel 1967: 43); or, it could be seen as one in a series thereby formulating the clarification requests into a larger activity "why are you asking me such silly questions?" (Garfinkel 1967: 44).

The responses generated in the experiment are not only realized by reference to the existing context, but themselves contribute towards the context for every "next" action (Heritage 1984: 242). In this vein, the orderliness extends to "order at all points", where each next action takes place in the context to which sense it contributes (Sacks 1992a: 484). That is, the responses contextualize clarification requests in various ways as insults, sincere questions or parts of a larger activity. Consequently, the responses contribute reflexively towards the understanding of the prior action and, further, create expectations concerning the next action.

Later development in ethnomethodology

From the outset, EM developed in two main directions. Harvey Sacks and his colleagues continued classical ethnomethodological studies in the mid sixties, and initiated a research program that was to be called conversation analysis (to be discussed later).

Harold Garfinkel envisioned further development of EM in the sixties that later was termed “radical” (Lynch 1993; Rawls 2002; Wilson 2003).

Radical EM started to mature within a distinct program of “studies of work” in the 70s. These studies analyze the specific, actual material practices that compose the ongoing situated day-to-day work practices (Heritage 1984: 293). In all they promised a rigorous analysis of materialised competencies of work activities in real time and in real settings (Lynch 1993). The themes of these studies include the achievement of team-work, the role and uses of artefacts for work practices, and the spatial organization of the workplace. EM studies have opened up the artful, interactional practices of team-work, as well as being concerned with roles and uses of artifacts serving as a resource for carrying out work tasks. They have shown how the co-ordination of work is supported by artifacts, such as procedural diagrams, maps, job descriptions and project plans. Further, EM studies acknowledge the relevance and constitutive role of spatial arrangement of the workplace for the organization of activities.

The program of studies of work has culminated in science studies (Garfinkel et al. 1981; Lynch 1985; 1993) and in so-called “technomethodology”, which applies EM to the design of information technology. In their article titled “Technomethodology”, Dourish and Button (1998) investigate the possibilities and consequences of approaching system design from the ethnomethodological perspective. Ultimately, they seek to establish for technomethodology “a foundational place in the very notion of system design, rather than simply being employed as a resource in aspects of the process, such as requirements elicitation and specification” (Dourish and Button 1998). For example, Dourish and Button introduce the notion of accountability for systems designers. In fact,

they invented an accountable computer. A word-processing application can be seen as an abstracted representation of code. When we click “save” we do not know which bit of code is operating. However, if the relationship between the representation and the code was accountable, the user would get a better insight into how the system was operating. The program in use would allow to see, as any programmer could, which bits of code were related to which operations. This could be used for reprogramming by revealing what became invisible in the initial programming. (Dourish and Button 1998; see also Dourish 2001; Crabtree 2003). In all, ethnomethodology has regained a prominent position in science and technology studies, which has also had a profound impact on research methods, as the ironical review title by Latour (1986) suggests: “Will the last person to leave the social studies of science please turn on the tape-recorder?”.

More theoretically, all later EM is based on what Garfinkel calls a rendering theorem (Garfinkel 2002: 135-137), which claims that (social) scientific activities can be described using the following theorem:

$$[] \rightarrow (),$$

where [] stands for the all social practices, which are made exactly what they are by exactly those methods and means they have to carry out these practices for whatever purposes they have. The term \rightarrow designates the operations social scientists carry out for their own purposes in order to describe and explain the members' practices. The term () is the findings of the social sciences, a description of the society. (c.f. Garfinkel 2002: 135-137). Thereby, social sciences provide a theoretical, constructed version of the social world.

In particular, the later version of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1996; 2002) has been interested in the "what more" there is to the findings of social science. In this fashion, Garfinkel has defined the task of EM as recovering phenomena of the social world that the social sciences, by his definition, have lost. According to Garfinkel (1996: 7) for the social sciences, "there is no order in the concreteness of things". "The FA (formal analytic,¹ I.A.) procedure ignores the enacted, unmediated, directly and immediately witnessable details of immortal ordinary society" (Garfinkel 1996: 8). In contrast, radical EM studies enacted local practices that "are in detail identical with themselves, and not representative of something else" (Garfinkel 1996: 8).

The exclusive focus on the actual situated order of the social world is the defining feature of radical ethnomethodology. The exclusive emphasis on 'just thisness', the unique features and lived sense of the activity define EM in a contrast to normal social science. Radical EM promises to offer "something more" to ordinary science, having delineated itself as a complement to mainstream science. However, it risks losing its capacity to communicate its findings to other scientists through the very skill of acquiring "something more". Button (1991: XI-XII) complained that ethnomethodological re-specification of the foundations of social sciences had been overlooked, ignored or misunderstood. For instance, EM is usually considered as a narrow "micro" discipline, whereas EM itself considers the very foundations of social order and sees the micro/macro split as just another invented construction. Nevertheless, EM may have become an asymmetrical alternative to the contemporary worldwide social science movement (to borrow Garfinkel's own terminology [1996; 2002]). However, various branches of ethnomethodological research may have established different relations with

main-stream social sciences. Conversation analysts tend to emphasize that they have opened up new areas for research that had been neglected. They can claim to form, broaden, detail and also correct previous understandings of social practices (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003), but do not set themselves up as an exclusive contrast to normal sciences.

Conversation Analysis

CA originally emerged as an offshoot of ethnomethodology that has developed into a systematic study of all interactional social behaviour which typically includes talk² (ten Have 1999; Silverman 1998). CA argues that everyday talk forms the foundation for intersubjective understanding of social actions (Heritage 1984). Hence, the study of talk itself becomes the basis of social analysis. CA ultimately attempts to go beyond common sense through a more fine-grained analysis of (verbal) co-ordination of social actions than social actors can articulate at the level of mundane reasoning.

The emphasis on studying talk as a way of *doing* links CA to EM. CA also shares with EM many background principles (Clayman and Maynard 1995). The meaning of a social phenomenon is seen as equivalent to the methodical procedures through which participants sustain its sense. Language use and social actions are considered indexical; since their understanding is bound to the context of their achievement. Social order as a whole is viewed as the participants' practical, methodical achievement in contrast to hidden, underlying structures. Rules and regularities are considered as resources serving

the participants as sources of understanding. The accountability of actions forms their constraint; the norms as such do not force people mechanically.

The distinctiveness of CA as a social scientific approach emerges from its topic. CA investigates turns at talk and interactional moves in their sequences. It inspects the ways in which a turn at talk treats a previous one, and what implications this poses for the succeeding turns. For CA, talk and action in interaction is a sufficient object for analysis in itself rather than a window on larger social processes or as a medium for data collection (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 21). CA data collection methods rely on the tape-recording of actual interactions, which emphasizes that social interaction is an autonomous reality *sui generis*. Traditionally, sociologists have not found talk relevant nor have they been equipped to deal with it. The use of naturally occurring interaction is also critical for the reliability of CA, which analyses real-life instances of interactions, since memorized or invented examples tend to lose or transpose significant details.

CA originated from Harvey Sacks's (1992a and b) reflection of the idea that talk is not just a string of propositions, but a methodical means of accomplishing actions. In 1963 Sacks worked with Garfinkel at the Centre for the Scientific Study of Suicide at UCLA. For their study, they recorded a set of calls to a suicide prevention centre, not yet knowing what to do with them. They knew that one of the call takers' tasks was to try to obtain the caller's name, but in the interest of caution about not losing the caller, the call takers avoided asking the caller's name directly. Usually they were successful in getting the caller's name by giving their name first. But then Sacks came across one particular call-opening (Sacks 1992a: 6; for discussion, see Silverman 1998: 98-99; Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998: 18-20; ten Have 1999: 13-15).

A: This is Mr Smith, may I help you

B: I can't hear you.

A: This is Mr Smith.

B: Smith.

Here, B, the caller, reports a hearing problem. Consequently, the place for a reciprocal giving of names never occurs. Once the caller had shown that he had solved his hearing problem by repeating the call taker's name, the call taker was no longer in a position to say his name to invite the caller to reciprocate. Subsequently, the call taker could acknowledge the caller's hearing with an item, such as "yes", and/or return to the opening of activity "may I help you". Unfortunately, Sacks did not show how this call went on, because the methodological canon of CA had not yet been established. The continuation of the call would have made his argument transparent, which is ideal for CA research. However, the other documented calls in Sacks's corpus support his analysis of this call. (Sacks 1992a: 6-76.) The reporting of a hearing problem seems to have in effect allowed the caller to "avoid giving his name without refusing to do so".

Thus, Sacks encountered a puzzle. Was this trajectory just an accident, or was it an achievement? At this point, a "wild" possibility struck him. Could the minutiae talk be composed of methodical ways of doing things? Following and developing Garfinkel's line of thought, Sacks started to build a sequential understanding of language use. Could talk consist of methods and procedures through which actions were performed? Was reporting a hearing problem a methodical means of "avoiding giving your name without refusing to do so"? Sacks soon started to apply his new reasoning procedure to other materials he had. His lectures from 1964 (published in 1992a) bring us back to his ideas,

such as “how to get someone’s name without asking for it” (give yours), “how to avoid giving help without refusing to give it” (treat the circumstance as a joke), “how to get help for suicidalness without requesting it” (ask “how does this organization work”), etc.

It then took about ten years for the key ideas of CA to become crystallized. This early development took place largely through collaboration between Gail Jefferson, Emanuel Schegloff, and Harvey Sacks. The early CA culminated in the publication of a paper on turn-taking in conversation by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson in 1974. The era of early CA ended tragically, when Sacks was killed in a car accident in 1975.

As a whole, the studies of social interaction have established face-to-face behavior as an emergent social fact. Harvey Sacks (1992a and b) formulated this in his famous term “order-at-all-points”, which still guides CA research. It suggests approaching social interaction as a systematically organized whole in which even the smallest details may be relevant and should not be neglected a priori. This allowed Sacks and his colleagues to formulate interaction as an emergent order and as a new autonomous field of study (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974; Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

CA approaches talk and actions in interaction as sequentially organized and ordered. The relationships between turns and actions in interaction are considered the key resource both for participants and analysts. The sense of ongoing action is created and deciphered by the positioning of turns and moves in interaction. Contributions in interaction are sequentially implicative, delimiting the possible next contributions by making some types of action conditionally relevant³. The turns and actions in interaction form their own context in an endogenous, orderly manner. The validity of CA research consists in showing how participants orient to this sequential order and how they realize the

normative orderliness of social actions through their orientation. Indeed, participants treat the orderly course of interaction as a normative standard, so that departures from regulative patterns of interaction become sanctioned. The very institution of talk-in-interaction is reflexively maintained through the accountability of deviations from the orderly courses of interaction.

In all, the organization of interaction consists of the syntactic, semantic, and prosodic qualities through which turns are designed, but also the pragmatic connections through which turns are interlocked. Further, these concerns interplay with normative and inferential properties of talk that allow participants to orient to the sense and implications of their interaction (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 39). This multilayered orderliness makes talk a "deep" object; it can look trivial and insignificant from one angle but become relevant from another. This methodological canon enables unlimited new findings, but also makes the research a never-ending process. CA can be considered as the reverse engineering⁴ of the immense complex of intersubjective architecture of the social world. To decipher this enigmatic structure requires a genuine craftsmanship from the analyst for observing, describing, detailing and systematizing this fractal-like multiplicity.⁵

In the final instance, CA investigates social actions. Schegloff (1991: 46) and Peräkylä (1995: 17) have pointed out that talk amounts to action. Through talk participants create and sustain the sense of what is going on and what they are doing. Talk is the primordial site at and through which the actors express their understanding of the ongoing event, and negotiate their division of roles for participation in it. Indeed, talk amounts to action. Talk and social actions are not two separate plenums, talk being the medium for orchestrating activities. Talk makes the sense of the social activities intersubjectively available.

Key ideas and findings

The central findings of CA concern the organization of ordinary conversation and the accomplishment of task-oriented, institutional interactions. Early CA concentrated on the study of mundane, ordinary interactions. It has shown that everyday talk is not a mess, but an orderly event that forms the basis for the organization of social action. The organization of ordinary conversation consists of orderly practices, such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference organization and repair (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998; ten Have 1999). On the other hand, the analysis of talk-in-interaction has shown that the patterns of interaction are the participants' key resource in achieving institutional activities. Institutional settings such as courtrooms, classrooms and ceremonies, are composed of characteristic forms of interaction. Studies of institutional interaction aim at specifying the actual format through which the institutional practices are accomplished (Drew and Heritage 1992; Arminen 2005a).

Turn-taking is a fundamental phenomenon in social interaction, the basic mechanism for organizing all types of talk-in-interaction (Sacks et al. 1974). Turn-taking is based on turns at talk that are composed of *turn constructional units*. These vary from single word constructions ('right', 'okay', etc.) to complex sentences, but they always constitute the first possible place for the turn completion. In everyday conversation, turn-taking takes place on a turn-by-turn basis so that after each completed turn a speaker arrives at the

point of a possible speaker change. Initially, a speaker is entitled only to one turn construction unit at a time. Complex turns demand extra effort to skip the projected completion and continue beyond the completion point.

Turn-taking alone does not form a sufficient basis for social interaction. Parties in interaction accomplish actions with the help of the organized ways in which turns at talk are linked to each other. Ultimately, the sequential linkages between turns at talk are based on adjacency and adjacency pairs, like greetings (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). The simple basic idea of adjacency pairs, as already mentioned, is that a question invites an answer; a greeting invites a greeting. The notion of the sequential organization of talk is critical for understanding the organization of social actions, because the details of talk gain meaning through their placement in sequences that are part of larger courses of action. The sequential organization of turns engages parties in social actions. The production of the first part of an adjacency pair, such as a question, ties the targeted recipient to the production of the second part of the pair, an answer, and the expectation of social action is created. A departure from the sanctioned course of action is possible, but accountable. The matrix for the analysis of social actions is here.

Preference organisation connects interaction in the emerging larger orders of social solidarity (Heritage 1984: 265-280). The design of action enables the formation of social solidarity through the preference organisation. In the organization of adjacent actions there is a bias toward *preferred* responses. Requests, offers, invitations and proposals, among others, allow acceptance or refusal. It has been shown that preferred responses, acceptances mostly, tend to be produced immediately and economically. Dispreferred responses, refusals, tend to involve delays, additional speech particles and

explanations/reasons for refusal. The organization of talk-in-interaction favours social solidarity, but also enables the emergence of conflict if parties deviate from the expectations based on the preference organization.

Finally, speech also includes an inbuilt mechanism for tackling troubles and difficulties in uttering, hearing and understanding of talk (Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977). Repairs cover a broader range of activities than mere correction of errors. A repairable⁶ item of talk does not necessarily include any kind of error; the repair itself characterizes some earlier stretch of talk as being repairable. Repairs thus embody the reflexive nature of talk-in-interaction. They are not only made in a context, but also form it. That is, they both sustain and shape the context they orient to and are part of. Hence, repairs clarify misunderstandings, build sequential connections and mend breakdowns in intersubjectivity. They form the last defense of intersubjective orderliness of social actions (Schegloff 1992). In all, they carry social significance because of their reflexive, context-renewing nature.

The deliberately narrow focus on “trivial”, ordinary interaction enabled CA to discover the elementary invariances of social interaction upon which all forms of social action are built. However, CA was interested in the organization of social actions in interaction, not conversational talk only. CA simply has a particular way of investigating social actions from the sequential point of view, disclosing the composition, meaning and tacit rationality of social actions. As a whole, it has opened a new field of social sciences that analyses the interactional patterns and their contribution to social actions in all sort of settings.

In the 1970s, CA extended to interaction in institutional contexts; in which the interacting parties orient to the goal-rational, institutionalized nature of their action. Early on CA had pointed out that interaction in institutional settings is somehow specialized and different from mundane interaction. In their paper on turn-taking, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) sketched the possibility of doing comparative studies on different systems of turn-taking. They noted that in contrast to everyday interactions, many institutional occasions, such as courtrooms, classrooms and ceremonies, had pre-designed turn order that served the institutional task in question. This idea paved the way to the emergence of the studies on institutional interaction that specify the format through which each institutional practice is realized.

The studies on institutional interaction focus on questions of what talk and interaction do in goal-oriented settings, that is, institutional environments. The analytical aim is to specify how the parties' orientation to a context becomes consequential for their conduct (Schegloff 1991). In other words, CA does not presuppose that a context such as a medical, therapeutic or legal institution is an external constraint that restricts the participants automatically. For instance, a doctor, therapist or attorney may have institutional power, but it must be exercised and made consequential in interaction with clients. The studies on institutional interaction may discern how institutional realities are sustained and managed and institutional power exercised. Interaction may be highly consequential for the parties; for example, in courtrooms where competing strategic verbal performances are used to credit and discredit a case (Drew 1992); calls for emergency services may routinely initiate a service delivery but may also fail with fateful consequences (Whalen J., Zimmerman and M.R. Whalen 1988). Talk in institutional

settings is not an innocuous side aspect but a medium of action and power. CA does not deny the existence of power but studies its exercise (Hutchby 1996). This may also offer an opportunity to reflect upon power relationships and sometimes contest them.

Studies of institutional interaction have become a strong tradition (Boden and Zimmerman 1991; Drew and Heritage 1992; Arminen 2005a), which follows Sacks's original idea of studying members' methodical ways of accomplishing social tasks in interaction. Through the examination of institutional patterns of interaction, the achievement of institutional tasks, identities, and inferences can be elaborated. Eventually, the studies on institutional interaction concern the strategic aspects of interaction, the ways in which collaboration is achieved and the procedures whereby the differing perspectives of the participants are brought into alignment at least momentarily. In particular, CA has become influential within medical interactions through its descriptions of medical practices, which have had an impact on communication training of doctors (Heritage and Maynard 2006). CA has also addressed numerous other institutional fields, such as education, law and the media.

The study of institutional interaction is based on the comparisons between institutional practices and their counterparts in everyday interactions. This comparative approach allows specifying the particularities of institutional practices amounting to a strict methodological policy. The studies determine how institutional speech events differ from generic forms of mundane interaction, and identify the resources and techniques that accomplish the departures from generic forms of interaction. As a whole, the task of studies on institutional interaction is to explore the ways in which talk and action in interaction is specialised, simplified, reduced or otherwise adapted to institutional goals.

CA can increase our understanding of institutional practices by re-specifying their interactional substratum and thus shape, broaden, detail, and even correct our understanding of institutional practices (Peräkylä and Vehviläinen 2003). The most general principles of CA apply to the scrutiny of institutional interactions and practices, but a separate set of concerns comes into a play when the focus is particularly on the *institutional* nature of interaction. The analyst has to demonstrate how the context affects a particular aspect or a segment of interaction, thus allowing an examination of the role the institution has in and for the interaction in the setting. Schegloff (1991) has called this “defining the procedural relevance of context”, which is practiced to provide criteria against arbitrary interpretations of the meaning of context. This means that the relevance-to-the-parties is taken as the guarantee of the relevance-for-the-analyst in order to specify how the orientation to a context becomes consequential for the participants’ conduct. The goal is to show and detail the procedural connection between the context and talk in action through comparison between “sequences-of-that-sort” in the institutional and mundane contexts in order to identify the characteristics of sequences of talk in each context. The analyst aims at reverse engineering the actors’ techniques, methods and procedures through which the context is reflexively constituted in the first place. In this fashion, studies of institutional interaction concentrate on *doing*, on finding out how institutional realities are obtained and continuously updated

Fusions and redevelopments

In the 1990s, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have not only matured but also diversified into many specialized subfields. New synthetic lines of thought have also emerged, one of which has become known as workplace studies. This offers a new synthesis combining the methods of ethnomethodology, CA and ethnography.

Originally, this line of research was pioneered by Lucy Suchman (1987). The topic of her investigation, the user's interaction with an “intelligent” photocopier, may sound trivial at first. However, her exposition of human-machine communication not only illuminates the properties of interaction between a human and a “smart” machine, but also compares human and computational logic. Since it succeeds in shedding light on distinctive features of human communication in contrast to computational systems, Suchman's study is fascinating not just for those interested in interactions with technologies but also for those who seek to understand human behaviour and the mind. Suchman also makes a significant methodological contribution. Her study is a misleadingly easy mix of the use of background knowledge of the intelligent properties of the machine (computerised system), an ethnomethodological account of situated human reasoning and a conversation analytical explication of the sequential flow of human-machine interaction. This synthesis of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and ethnography later became known as workplace studies.

Workplace studies are a naturalistic approach committed to the detailed study of work practices, disclosing the reasoning and procedures through which work tasks are carried out. This research considers the production and coordination of workplace activities in real-time interaction through talk and visual conduct (Heath and Luff 2000; Luff, Hindmarsh and Heath 2000), analyzing coordination of work both in face-to-face

(inter)action and between distant parties, mainly through various technological means. Typically, the analysis of work activities is based on ethnography and video recordings. The ethnographic materials provide background for a more detailed inspection of videotaped work practices. The aim of using several data sets is to achieve a productive analytical circle in which recorded details are interpreted in their ethnographic context, which itself is elaborated by reference to the inspection of actual interaction. Video recordings permit testing the validity of ethnographic insights and provide reportable evidence of instances of the practices researched.

The analysis of videotapes unites the study of spoken interaction with visually observable physical actions. Talk is studied with the help of CA transcription conventions and methods, and visual actions are inspected along with the stream of speech, which discloses the sequential flow of work activities. These studies reverse engineer the building blocks of the intersubjective understanding of work practices in action in which the parties' coordination of their activities itself displays their sense of practice. The approach shares the fundamentals of ethnomethodology, including the notion that the contributions to actions are contextually oriented and structurally organized. Each activity is positioned vis-à-vis previous activities, thereby displaying the actor's interpretation of the stage and sense of action. *Order at all point* also exists at work. Consequently, no detail of (inter)action at the work site should be neglected as irrelevant or accidental a priori. For instance, one of the earliest workplace studies, which is about medical practices, found that a certain amount of idiosyncrasy and messiness in traditional doctors' records was not an obstacle to transmitting information, but a means of conveying the doctor's own medical sense-making process (see Heath and Luff 2000).

Subsequently, the replacement of paper records with digitalized records lost these subtle, tacit means of communication irrecoverably. This study illuminated the ways in which medical records were used in practice and in encounters with patients. This understanding surpassed the practitioners' own understanding of details of their practice, because small details such as making notes or reading records while interacting with patients are largely practical matters that escape conscious attention. Yet these kinds of tacit practices form “an essential and accountable feature of everyday professional medical work” (Heath and Luff 2000: 58).

A growing number of workplace studies have dealt with coordination centers such as emergency dispatch centers, the control rooms of rapid urban transport systems, and air traffic and ground control centers. These studies have focused on collaboration in the use of various tools and technologies to respond to normal, natural troubles and difficulty in maintaining schedules and coordinating activities in complex settings. Some studies have also addressed work practices in corporations like financial institutions, newsrooms, medical settings or in call centers and at help desks. Other topics have included the work activities of train drivers or pilots in real or simulated settings. In principle, any work practice can be studied, but interactive technologies, responsibilities for a large number of people, high work intensity or the potential for fatal errors pose both practical and theoretical questions that are worth particular scrutiny. These studies have been relevant for the emergence of the new applied field called computer supported co-operative work (CSCW).

Another new emerging synthetic approach is a discursive psychology which started as a branch of discourse analysis (Edwards and Potter 1992; 2001; Hutchby and Wooffitt

1998: 202-228), but has recently become increasingly close to CA. Discursive psychology addresses traditional cognitive and epistemological concerns but focuses on their interactional constituents. Its typical questions concern issues such as how the factuality of statements is designed in interaction or what techniques speakers use to preempt a recipient's skepticism. Discursive psychology challenges traditional cognitive sciences as well as profound philosophical questions dating back to Descartes' division between body and mind (te Molder and Potter 2005). The question concerning the interactional basis of the psyche is a fine example of the further development of a scientific field. In the 70s, CA was established as an independent field of its own. Now CA methodology is applied to new areas, challenging traditional notions such as the autonomy of the mental apparatus.

Challenges

Ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA) were among pioneering approaches in the 50s and 60s that attempted systematically to open new (micro) domains for research. Heritage (1984: 291) has argued that CA represents a further extension of ethnomethodology in both scope and detail. From his point of view, CA studies the mediation of agency and structure. One of the best known developments in this area is Anthony Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration that builds on some ethnomethodological underpinnings, though it synthesized them with other approaches. CA can be seen as a general theory of social action (Schegloff 1987). However, a number of critics have not been convinced of this and have continued to call CA "micro",

“molecular”, “narrow” and “internalist” (Lynch 1993; Billig 1999; Wetherell 1998). The refusal of CA practitioners to be involved in the micro/macro split has also been largely dismissed. If CA is discussed in the context of social science and theory, it is generally seen as a narrow micro perspective. Moreover, there is antagonism between EM and CA, some ethnomethodologists claiming that CA has developed into a narrow technical field that has lost its social relevance (Lynch 1993; Pollner 1991). As a whole, all the approaches called “micro” are still largely dismissed simply as irrelevant as a result of their lack of focus on large societal structures.

Some CA and EM practitioners have recently addressed these criticisms and considered social action in a broader context than EM and CA traditionally have. The new approaches include workplace studies, as already mentioned, and studies that examine the relationship between talk and other actions (Goodwin 1994; 2000; Nevile 2004; Arminen 2005b). These approaches seem to have adopted aspects of activity theory to address social actions more distinctly, and do not prioritize the communication between agents (c.f. Engeström and Middleton 1998). In general, talk and other actions inform each other in the ongoing accomplishment of the task that they are contributing to. It is not talk as such, but the coordination of talk and action that establishes the sense of the ongoing action (Goodwin 2000).

Research into social actions shows that talk is not “just talk” for parties in action. Talk is both consequential for the further development of the ongoing action, and is also preconditioned by the nature of ongoing activity. The analysis of social action should not artificially concentrate on “talk itself” but should grasp the totality of talk-and-action-in-interaction. In fact, many individual studies have already addressed talk vis-à-vis the

ongoing embodied action (Goodwin 2000; Nevile 2004; Arminen 2005b). Goodwin (1994) presented a highly interesting analysis of the role of talk and action in the well-publicized trial of Rodney King, showing how the coordination of expert talk in relation to the videotape on the beating of King enabled the expert witness to construct a live demonstration of the innocence of police officers beating him. The prosecutors had believed that the amateur photographer's videotape as such would show the guilt of the police officers. The skillful expert witness, however, was able to make the audience believe that the three police officers were just justifiably defending themselves against the violent aggressor (whom they were beating with batons).

In more theoretical terms, we can distinguish sequential and sequence organization. The former is a broader term that concerns ordering and the relative positioning of any kind of actions, moves and utterances. Sequence organization concerns courses of action that have been realized through talk only, being a sub-set of sequential order. Thus far, there no systematic theory about their relationship has yet been formulated. A further development in this area would enable a more comprehensive understanding of talk-and-action-in-interaction both for themselves and for other social and cultural structures.

Ultimately, this line of research may revitalize Sacks's original vision (1992a and b) of the science of social life. Initially, CA started to develop from Sacks's contemplation of the broader idea of the science of social life that would reconstruct and analyze the practices that permit members of society to see and grasp things the way they do (Arminen 2005a). Following Garfinkel's idea of ethnomethodology, the aim was to move beyond relying on what-everybody-knows. Instead, the most basic elements of action in interaction that allow parties to establish the ideas they have were to be scrutinized

(Sacks 1992b: 26; Silverman 1998: 53-56). The goal was to build a science that could deal with the actual details of actions in order to reverse engineer the constitutive elements of the phenomena in society (Sacks 1992a: 27). The reproducibility of findings was considered as the basis for the scientific analysis of social world. Ideally, the reader would gain as much information as the researcher so that the analysis could be reproduced (Sacks 1992a: 27; Silverman 1998: 53-56). However, Sacks was not interested in narrowing down the scope of studies to details of interaction only, seeing his research as about conversations only incidentally. Conversation is something that one can get actual instances of on tape. The reproducibility of details of actual events was critical simply because it made the science of social life possible (Sacks 1992b: 26).

Further studies on the relationship between sequential order and sequence structure would be welcome both from sociological and ethnomethodological viewpoints. From a sociological point of view, it is essential to relate the role of talk-in-interaction to the emergence of social and cultural structures other than the talk itself (cf. ten Have 2002). From an EM/CA perspective, the separation of talk from other activities performed via various other media involves the risk of missing details of the parties' ongoing orientation to action (Arminen 2005b). For instance, it has turned out that the novelties of mobile phone talk concern its sequential properties. If somebody asks directions by mobile phone while driving a car, or answers a mobile while in the toilet of the train, the emerging contingencies and features of interaction are inseparable from the embodied action. Further, the noticeable difference in responses to mechanical landline telephone summonses and identity-information conveying mobile phone summonses shows that

people orient to media other than talk and to their communicative relevance in ways that are directly consequential for the action-in-interaction (Arminen and Leinonen 2006).

Finally, though the sequential organization of social action is a broader domain of scrutiny than the sequence organization of talk, it does not need to be less strict and rigorous. On the contrary, subtle nuances of sequences of mobile phone talk, for example, are related to its mobility as a new type of sequential context (Arminen 2005b). The prosody of answers to summonses and the reconfiguration of greeting exchanges are elements of the parties' orientation to the new kind of mobile talk-in-action. These subtle nuances might seem irrelevant if the analyst failed to address mobile social action as a new kind of sequential context. The separation of analysis of sequences of talk from the sequential organization of action may impoverish the analysis and leave salient aspects of social action intact.

Conclusion

EM and CA can be seen as part of cognitive, linguistic and praxiological revolutions of the 20th century. EM opened people's tacit resources of social action, their common sense and interactional competence up to research. As mentioned, Garfinkel (1967: 1) introduced the research policy of ethnomethodological studies: "their central recommendation is that the activities whereby members produce and manage settings of organized everyday affairs are identical with members' procedures for making those settings 'account-able'" CA enabled a further development leading to a systematic research paradigm for the study of interactional behavior as an emergent property of

social actions. Together EM and CA have addressed the purposefulness and intelligibility of social actions, and discerned the tacit understandings and assumptions that guide the accomplishment of social actions. In all, they have opened up social actions as situated activities that emerge from their practical management within their realization.

CA can be characterized as a reverse engineering program that identifies the unique "fingerprint" of each social practice both in everyday and institutional contexts. However, this fingerprint is not yet the outcome of the research, but its beginning. Studies on interaction explore the patterns of action in interaction in order to show how they contribute to the social practice in question. The distinct patterns of interaction are not only a fingerprint through which the type of interaction can be recognized but, primarily, the actors' way of organizing and arranging the accomplishment of social activities. Ultimately, the analyst investigates the organization of social action through explication of the working of interactional patterns.

As a whole, EM and CA discuss how talk and other activities as ongoing achievements contribute to the emergence of social actions, not merely try to understand talk or the organization of action. They have contributed toward our grasp of diversity in social practices. They identify, specify and compare salient forms of interactional patterns that constitute or contribute to establishing the social world as perceived. Unexplored regions in the sequential organization of social activities still appear to be rich. Further investigations enrich and invigorate our understanding of human beings in society.

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Notes

¹ For Garfinkel (1996; 2002), “formal analysis” means roughly all standard science that is based on the separate sets of methods. He does not provide any clear definition of “formal analysis”. Garfinkel has been criticized on the basis that 1) sciences differ crucially in their formality; for instance, is ethnography a formal approach? (Wilson 2003), and 2) that all sciences, including ethnomethodology, have to rely on some methods, hence, they all are formal to some degree (Clayman and Maynard 1995).

² In CA, this “all interactional social behaviour which typically includes talk” is commonly abbreviated to “talk-in-interaction”.

³ A question invites an answer; a greeting invites a greeting, etc. This is the basic idea of adjacency and adjacency pairs, which consists of the first pair part making the production of the second pair part conditionally relevant (See Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

⁴ The term “reverse engineering” originally comes from a special field of engineering that deciphers how complex structures, such as pyramids or gothic churches, were built in the first place.

⁵ CA holds the view that speech is an organized whole and not just a random source of errors (c.f. Chomsky). This view connects CA to the debates on “grammaticalization” and “emergence” of linguistic structures (see, Hopper and Traugott 2003).

⁶ “Repairable” is a technical term that refers to the source of the repair. A repairable item is not necessarily an error, but any feature that the subsequent repair marks as the trouble-source, such as “I had- wanted to”. Through a repair the speaker may achieve an alternation of a conveyed meaning even if the original item was not false in any independent sense. Sometimes a distinction is drawn between repairs and corrections that handle errors having an independent existence (see Schegloff et al. 1977).