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SOME REMARKS ON CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Conversation analysis, which has grown out of ethnomethodology as its distinct stream, turns out to be one of its most productive and influential modalities. What the two lines have in common is undoubtedly the view that (1) the basic frame of reference for studies of talk processes is the interactional organization of social activities and that (2) social events must be examined in their situational context, i.e., as ongoing accomplishments by interactants from within the local contexts of talk production, in which the indexicality of the practices of talk is arranged into co-ordinated chains of action by means of the interactants procedural skills which enable them to project and understand the internal order of the streams of action and to display understanding in consequent acts of talking.

However, following Sacks' belief that "sociology couldn't be an actual science unless it was able to handle the details of actual events" (cf. Jefferson, 1981, p. 6), conversation analysis has tended to establish its position as a "natural observational science" (Jefferson, 1981, p. 1) by adopting a radically descriptive and inductive stance which requires that analysts derive the rules of conversation from actual and rigorously transcribed talk samples in order to avoid the imposition of some ungrounded deductive schemata on data. An elaboration of a formal apparatus seems to be necessary, as Wootton has suggested (1975, p. 70), if ethnomethodology is to produce generalized knowledge.

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Such idea of a formal apparatus which consists of recurrent rules and optional, yet external, constraints embedded in the very structure of talking, underlies the basic model of conversation analysis formulated by Harvey Sacks and his followers in their famous paper on the turn taking system (S a c k s, S c h e g l o f f, J e f f e r s o n, 1974, hereafter SSJ-model). It can be read as a continuation of the essential ethnomethodological theme concerning invariant methodical devices people use in ordering their interactions, and as re-formulation of the concept of the mastery of natural language as a "member" of talk practices (see G a r f i n k e l, S a c k s, 1970).

From the very beginning ethnomethodology has not been a uniform movement, the Garfinkelian and the Cicourelian versions being its different streams. Conversation analysis must be located within the former tradition, which is grounded on the equivalence between making the sense and telling that sense (respectively, between "doing" interaction and "telling" it, or, eventually, "telling" about it; see A t t e w e l l, 1974, p. 183). And if the classical Garfinkelian tradition is often said to be, for that reason, a form of sociolinguistic structuralism (P h i l l i p s, 1978), conversation analysis might, all the more, be labelled similarly. Indeed, its primary intention seems to be an integration of ethnomethodological assumptions concerning the reflexivity embodied in the interactants' accounts (i.e., the self-explicating situated talk as a source of interactional order) and the formal structural approach to conversation. It is, however, a question, whether this attempt is eventually successful. The way in which the SSJ-model tries to resolve the problem of the relationship between interpretive, negotiative properties of meaning operations and formal rules of conversation, seems to lead to some ambivalence which produces conceptual tensions within the model. This problem will be referred to as a conjectural trouble with a precise location of the context-free vs context-sensitive properties of the turn taking system within the model. Some further remarks will be addressed to the problem of the status of the analytical language of conversation analysis in relation to the classical ethnomethodological stance concerning descriptive practices as situated phenomena.

The problem of autonomy of the turn taking system

The core of the SSJ-model is the idea that conversation (as well as other interactional activities) is organized in a non-random way by some structuring devices which are used by interactants to order their talk in actual time. The most important among them is a system of sequencing rules which provides for a turn-by-turn co-ordination of talk.

The model consists of two components. One of them contains constructional units for turns. At this level it is defined that "a first possible completion of first unit constitutes initial transition-relevance place", and that "transfer of speakership is co-ordinated by reference to such transition-relevance places". The second component (turn-allocation component) contains two basic rules of sequencing: (1) in an initial transition-relevance place, when the turn-allocation technique »current speaker selects next« is involved, the selected person, and only he/she, is entitled and obliged to take the turn. Or, if this technique has not been used, (1.1) the self-selection may occur. Or, if the self-selection has not succeeded, (1.2) the current speaker may continue his/her turn. The second rule stipulates (2) the recurrence of the whole previous set until a turn transfer takes place (SSJ, p. 703-704).

The system is assumed to be context-free, because its rules are said to operate in no connection with the content of any turn or a larger unit of conversation; the content constraints are claimed to be "organized by systems external to the turn taking system" (SSJ, p. 710). Yet, the order of sequential constraints and that of content constraints are not completely disconnected: "turn taking organization controls, at least partially, the understanding utterances get" (SSJ, p. 728) by means of a mechanism of adjacency pair. The adjacency pair, which is the basic structural unit of conversation, consists of two utterances, which are two distinct turns produced by different speakers (S a o k s, S c h e g l o f f, 1973). These utterances are related to each other in an implicational way: the first part of the pair requires in answer (which is to be formulated in the second part of the pair) an utterance of specific kind (e.g., an invitation may be accepted or rejected).

but it is precisely the acceptance or rejection which we are expected to formulate after having been invited). Thus, the adjacency pair is a turn-by-turn structure in which categorizations and instructions are displayed and reciprocally addressed, and which operates by means of the "current speaker selects next" technique of turn-allocation. "Whatever does occur [...] will be hearable or recognizable as such by virtue of the sequential properties of that pair" (E g l i n, 1980, p. 24). In natural conversation, the adjacency pair may be seen as a structure which, by virtue of the conventional-implicational character of the preferential order, constitutes "a constraint on the potential flexibility of the turn-taking system as a locally managed organization" (H e r i t a g e, W a t s o n, 1979, p. 127). If we take into account that from the ethnomethodological point of view there are no conversational actions which could be known to co-participants in advance (all such actions being local products of their sense-making efforts), we can see, that all glossing practices which formulate the cumulative sense of a conversation, may be said to be governed by the sequential system, the adjacency pair mechanism being one of its essential components that plays a decisive role in the linking of structural conversational units.

The system of rules of sequencing and the adjacency pair are also meant to be a context-bound device which is sensitive to all contingencies of talk situations. Therefore, the whole system is assumed to work in a situationally negotiable way. The question arises, in what sense and to what extent this negotiability of the uses of the formal context-free system occurs.

Turn order, turn size, length of conversation, what parties say, and relative distribution of turns are not fixed or specified in advance. (SSJ, p. 701, 708-712). The very delineation of the turn is a phenomenon under investigation, since "in actual conversation the boundaries of the turns are mutable" (G o o d w i n, 1981, p. 19-20). Similarly, the initial transition-relevance places must be conceived as essentially negotiable, because co-participants decide whether and when an utterance is completed or not. Thus, the context-bound character of the SSJ-model excludes any possibility of finding a conversational object insensitive to the negotiable options of conversing people. The actual comprehensive use of the whole system is based on the co-participants' interpre-

tive work, and we may assume the system not as primarily controlling, but rather as controlled by understanding utterances get. In what sense can we say then that the turn taking system is autonomous in relation to conversants' interpretive work in particular actual contexts?

The context-free structure is said to be defining how and where context-sensitivity can be displayed. "The particularities of context are exhibited in systematically organized ways and places, and those are shaped by the context-free organization" (SSJ, p. 699).

Conversation analysis tends to construct a universally valid model of constraints which are imposed on the linear (occurring in actual time) stream of talk by means of the very nature of talking. If we assumed the components and rules of the SSJ-model to be pragmatically universal in the sense of their structural necessity for any conversational production, it would mean that they constitute invariant conditions for talking. However, they are not obligatory generative rules regulating talk production in the way that grammar does in relation to well-formed sentences analysed in linguistic models. Nor are they strictly optional, particularly in this sense that they can be created, invented or defined in the speakers' going along a conversation, as Wittgenstein would say (see 1951, p. 1, 83).

It is crucial that the SSJ-model seems to assume that the context-bound properties of the system of conversation consist primarily in the conversants' ability to use in a situationally selective way some pre-given modes of regulations, which are normative devices or patterning resources operating "from the outside" of the situations of talking. While the Garfinkelian version of ethnomethodology is preoccupied with interpretive procedures which are the intrinsic features of talk itself, but which are referred to members' practical reasoning, conversation analysis tends to subordinate these procedures, at least partially, to external (in relation to members' interpretive work) rules coming from the outside as a set of conventionalized structural devices which can be analytically and empirically disconnected from the participants' reflexivity in their use of talk. It suggests that the SSJ-model deals with a set of surface rules, and implicitly postulates a deeper level of interpretive procedures that would enable speakers

to identify talk indexicalities in terms of conversational action-types, and thereby to manage the system of structural organization of talk. If this suggestion is right, the SSJ-model might be said to contain, implicitly, the Cicourelian distinction between surface normative rules and interpretive procedures (Cicourel, 1973). When Cicourel states that the hearer's acknowledgement of a short gap in the current speaker's speech in the form of a pause or a transition-relevance place presumes an understanding of content, he points to the interpretive competence of speakers, which is not specified by the turn taking system (Cicourel, 1976, p. 124). Thus, while conversation analysis is right and original in developing the descriptive and accounting schemes for the turn taking basis of talk as a generally relevant problem, it seems to overemphasize the regulative influence of sequencing rules on meaning processes, and underestimate the role of complex and multi-source meaning operations in putting these rules into actual use (see Cicourel, 1976, 1978, 1980).

In a recent review of developments in conversation analysis J. Heritage argues that it has been its fundamental assumption that "all aspects of social action and interaction can be examined in terms of the conventionalized or institutionalized structural organizations which analyzably inform their production". This assumption links conversation analysis to the linguistics of Harris, and, via Goffman, to the tradition of Durkheim (Heritage, no date, p. 2).

The above affiliation seems to confirm that the context-free aspects of the system for sequencing are to be located in the sphere of normative rules. If so, another question will occur: are these rules universal, cross-culturally common prerequisites of conversational regulations? Moerman's analysis of conversations in Lue (1972) suggests that the procedural identity of conversational cultures among societies of different cultural background does exist. However, rules of turn-allocation are shown to be cross-culturally differentiated (Phillips, 1977; cf. Corsero, 1981, p. 14-15; Yaeger, cf. Labov, Fanshel, 1977, p. 110). Another dimension of their intracultural differentiation may be the diversity of settings, which has hardly been explored in an explicit and purposeful way. This lack of ethnographically grounded reference for the SSJ-model has often been

stressed by C i o u r e l (1978, 1980). S c h e g l o f f (1979, p. 27) declares that a sociolinguistically styled parametrization of the studies on conversation is irrelevant to the matters which conversation analysis is concerned with. On the one hand he is right, as such a parametrization (if it is the eventual target of analysis) does not yield knowledge about the dynamic properties of talk as a process. On the other hand, it is the normative differences between sexes, status and age groups, which people actually take into account in their interaction. Turn distribution in natural conversation may be (flexibly) seen as somehow prelocated. Essentially free allocation may occur only among socially equal partners. A definite mode of social inequality may provide for a possibility of legitimate interruption of the other's turn, giving dispreferred second parts in answer, etc. This may serve as a means of exerting power or maintaining social distance.

It is unquestionable that the phenomenon of sequential organization is greatly common, perhaps universal not only as a principle of the economy of exchange, but in the first place as a natural necessity implied by the fact that the sense of hearing and the speech articulatory apparatus are specialized to each other. Speaking and listening to another persons' speech simultaneously would produce nothing but noise preventing both speaker-hearers from effective exchange of information. It is also certain that people use devices for conversing which may be, and in fact are, transcontextually stable as typificative patterns implemented and modified in the actual acts of use. But the very scope of commonality and stability which people tacitly presuppose requires deeper analytical sensitivity to the multiform systematic differentiation of contexts, which can perhaps effect the model of context-free constraints proposed in SSJ as valid for natural conversation. Except for a few examples like W o o t t o n's (1981) studies of the child-parent discourse or Atkinson's and Drew's analyses of talk in court (the latter not concerned with spontaneous, unfocused, natural conversation (see A t k i n s o n, 1979; A t k i n s o n, D r e w, 1979)), conversation analysis seems to ignore, in a purposeful and theoretically deliberate way, the possible importance of contextually specified explorations, and tends to seek confirmation for the present model and for further possibilities of developing it, always within the frame of the generalized con-

cepts of context (referring to the boundaries of a single conversation) and universally applicable rules.

The problem of reliability of analytical procedure

Discovering rules in data, or confirming that a known rule was actually used, can not be done without a careful reconstruction of the co-participants' interpretive work displayed in consequently occurring turns. Thus, analysts have to follow the work of identifying speakers' meanings, already performed by the latter. In other words, they have to reconstruct all the sources of meaning which were employed by conversing people when the conversants were defining the situation, negotiating their identities and recognizing utterances as instances of particular conversational action types. However, if the very procedure of analysis consists in carrying out the elicitation of members procedural devices by means of "overhearing" their understanding, the analyst who is primarily interested in the "how-type" questions (namely, how the studied piece of conversation was actually constructed), has to reconstruct the speakers' substantive options of the "what-type". Only in this way is he able to inspect the rules which he is searching for. These options become his descriptive resource, particularly when he is determining the types of conversational actions which were chosen by the co-participants to remedy the indexicalities of their talk.

What is the methodological rationale for this procedure? As Schegloff (1978, p. 89) has argued, "utterances are built to display speakers' understanding, they are thereby available for co-participants' inspection to see if they display an adequate understanding of that which they claim to understand [...] they also make available to the analyst a basis in the data for claiming what the co-participants' understanding is of prior utterances, for as they display it to one another, we can see it too". This argument is commonly shared by the analysts who follow the SSJ-model.

Nevertheless, one can find it not quite convincing and unproblematic. The assumption may be adequate when the analyst deals with talk between strangers, in which the level of explicit meaning elaboration is relatively high. A case of more intimate talk

based on the conversants tacitly shared knowledge and the implicit agreement on meanings, seems to be a much more difficult target, indeed a challenge for the SSJ-modelled analysis. The intimate talk requires from the analyst to know well the deep cultural, or even biographical background underlying the context with which the participants are familiar. As L a b o v and F a n s h e l (1977, p. 29-30) have argued, "most utterances can be seen as performing several speech acts simultaneously". Therefore, conversation is not a chain of utterances, "but rather a matrix of utterances and actions bound together by a web of understanding and reactions". And "there are no necessary connections between utterances on the surface level" (L a b o v, F a n s h e l, 1977, p. 350).

Eliciting the rules of conversing, the analyst as an "over-hearer", or a "third party from outside", may rely only on his own native cultural and interactional competence. What he applies is rather an art than a preclosed standardized method of interpretation. In the case of more intimate talk, his competence may be insufficient for the adequate analysis of data, even if he has, as L a b o v and F a n s h e l (1977, p. 351) suggest, the video-taped recordings of the studied behaviour at his disposal. The more the context is specific (i.e., deconventionalized), the deeper is the level of connectivity between utterances, and between utterances and actions, and the further the analyst must go into details revealing the speakers common ground for their invisibly processed understanding of each other. It is certain, that even if we take into account the more recent attempts to integrate the analysis of verbal data transcriptions with those which contain also non-verbal aspects of actions the analyst still can be said to work on essentially decontextualized texts. Such attempts have recently been a major development and contribution to conversation analysis (see G o o d w i n, 1980, 1981). But the possible grasping of the actual meaning of paralinguistic cues, and especially binding them together with linguistic data, is not more free from the danger of arbitrariness than an analysis of purely verbal material (see L a b o v, F a n s h e l, 1977, p. 356; H i n d e, 1979, p. 58-59, 67-67; C i c o u r e l, 1980, p. 101, 117).

All this implies that the analyst can, in his overhearing of what the co-participants were talking about in what they actually said, make some mistakes, e.g., by imputing a definite meaning

qualification to utterances which might actually go through the interaction unresolved by the participants themselves (see Coulter, no date). Or, it may happen that he will ascribe some implicational relevance to a chain of separate speech-entries which could be, from the point of view of the speakers, not adjacently paired turns, but disconnected, mutually interruptes lines of their narratives.

These remarks are not made to complain that conversation analysis can not achieve a perfect reconstruction of its object; such an idea is surely an intellectual utopia. Analysis of this kind may be found deficient in many respects. Meanwhile, as Levinson (1983, p. 367) justly states, "no other kind of investigation of conversational organization has yielded such a rich harvest of insights". Nevertheless, it seems that the method discussed here is much more plausible in relation to one kind of data, and much less reliable and plausible in relation to the data of other kinds. Namely, it may be suggested that its adequacy is inversely proportional to the specificity, in the sense of intimacy, of the analysed talk.

The status of the analytical language of conversation analysis in relation to ethnomethodology

The crucial point in the argument against the so called "normal" social sciences, which has been developed in the radically critical orientation of ethnomethodology, is the question of difference between the rationality of mundane practical reasoning and the rationality of scientific description and explanation of social facts. The "normal" social sciences take this difference for granted, but, guided by the same practical interests as members of everyday actions, they confuse the "topic" and the "resource" of their investigations. They allow thereby that the assumptions and rules of the everyday practical reasoning permeate their production of data, reports and generalizations (see Zimmerman, Pollner, 1971, p. 81-93). Thus, social science of that kind, and sociology in particular, can be nothing more than a "professional folklore" (Zimmerman, Pollner, 1971, p. 93). The only alternative could be that one take these obstacles as a

problematic phenomenon for investigation; it is a proper object for the ethnomethodological analysis. Zimmerman and Pollner (1971, p. 99) do not see any possibility of remedying the "normal" sociology as such. Yet, they believe ethnomethodology is capable of generalizing about the procedures people apply methodically in the production of their social world.

In the paper "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions", Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) have argued that indexicality of expressions in natural language is an unavoidable and irremediable phenomenon. It entails that any attempt at substituting indexical expressions with objective ones is no more than a glossing practice which gains its validity within its own meaning-context and which has its own socially organized mode of relatedness to the investigated phenomena. The authors stress constantly that the essential difference between the "normal" or "constructive" sociology and ethnomethodology is well-grounded in the methodical eliciting of the members' (both laymen's and professionals') procedural basis for glossing practices, which is the task of the latter approach, and in the searching for objectivizing remedies for the lay knowledge about substantive questions concerning the social world, which is an infinite task of the former. However, regardless of the interest in the formal "how-type" problems, the thesis of unavoidable contextuality of any form of discourse is a fortiori applicable to ethnomethodology as well. It must be, at best, a gloss on glossing, and its results can be valid only within its own theoretical sphere.

Conversation analysis shares with the classical version of its mother-branch the problem of formal organization of social activities. Moreover, it maintains a Garfinkelian equivalence between "doing" and "telling" (about) interaction. However, while in the paper on formal structures of practical actions, as well as in the earlier works by Sacks, the problems of meaning interpretation and a pragmatic conversational "grammar" or "syntax" were balanced, conversation analysis concentrates on the sequential organization of talk. Sacks (1957, p. 57) was aware of the fact that out of the two con-current strants in his research, identification selection and sequential organization, the latter has become prevalent. It is still true today. As a result, however, conversation analysis seems to programmatically avoid the problem of meanin

processing which underlies members' management of the sequential organization. It is the apparent cost of the one-way orientation which limits the analysis in its scope, and perhaps in depth. Heritage (no date, p. 10) admits, for instance, that topic organization and shift have made it difficult to evidence their sequential relatedness, and that it can be that such relatedness is beyond a possibility of methodical description due to the very complexity of the phenomenon, even though in his previous work on formulations (Heritage, Watson, 1979) he was much more prone to see the cumulative order of talk as considerably dependent on the machineries of sequencing.

Finally, one should ask how conversation analysis might be located in relation to the ethnomethodological thesis of the irremediable indexicality of natural talk. In this perspective it could be questioned as violating the internal unique order meanings in their relatedness and integrity within the frame of contexts of their production. An affiliation to the Durkheimian tradition, formulated by Heritage in his recent comment on conversation analysis (Heritage, no date) would speak for the conjecture that the thesis cited above has been suspended or abrogated.

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KILKA UWAG O ANALIZIE KONWERSACJI

Autor przedstawia krytyczny komentarz do analizy konwersacyjnej, odnoszący się zarówno do jej teoretycznych ustaleń, jak i do kwestii prawomocności praktyki badawczej w analizie konwersacyjnej. W obydwu kwestiach wątpliwości sformułowane przez autora odnoszą się do niewystarczającego - jego zdaniem - rozwiązania zagadnienia interpretacji znaczeń.

In "Mass Entertainment" David Gaebelmann writes extensively on pleasure of parasocial interaction. Gaebelmann referred to the work of H. Harkov and H. Strauss who had investigated this phenomenon and unique aspect of mass entertainment. According to Gaebelmann, parasocial interaction and social contact through mass media are distinct conversational with their unique characteristics. A TV-show which is built up as an illusion of intimacy between himself and his audience. He writes himself the host of a talk and holds up a picture of common experiences with his viewers. Gaebelmann says the viewer and host are very close and share their feelings of the personality, so that the host is prepared to play his reactions part conversationally. The illusion of intimacy is created by the use of personal pronouns, including as well as gestures, expressions, language, and tone. The host makes efforts to maintain a conversational atmosphere through the use of the everyday words to produce that he "knows" the other better than anyone else.

The parasocial interaction is distinguished from the real personal one in that, in the first instance, the viewer is free to watch the TV without any real relationship. In parasocial interaction a one-way contact interaction from viewer to viewer and the absence of other social contact.

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