

Chapter IV

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

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EMPIRICAL APPROACHES TO AN ADULT UNDERSTANDING
OF CHILDREN'S USE OF LANGUAGE**

The child as language user: deficient or different?

Since the seventies, in the literature concerned with children's language and social cognition, we are witness to a growing concern over the prevailing tendency to underestimate the skills and abilities of the preschool child mirrored in the traditional formulations. Such concern is expressed by psychologists (Donaldson, 1978; Flavell, 1977; Gelman, 1978; Markova, 1978) and sociologists (Cook-Gumperz, Corsaro, 1977; Mackay, 1973; Speier, 1970). One of the strongest arguments for questioning the classical Piagetian characterization of young children's speech as primarily to and for self, and undergoing socialization, has been provided by systematic observations of very young children's social skills in language use in natural situations which, as said by Flavell (1977, p. 172-183), yield an estimate of children's communicative abilities hitherto undreamt of. The old paradigm that treats the child as a deficient communicator unable to adapt his speech to an interlocutor, is apparently being replaced by a newer paradigm that views the child as a communicator who is different from the

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**This work is partially supported by Grant S-206 from the Committee of Psychological Sciences, Polish Academy of Sciences over the period 1982-1983.

adult in respect of what is communicated, how, under what circumstances, to what purpose, in the interests of what and whom. However, the essentials of what makes the difference have yet to be clarified. It would seem that a corresponding change in researcher's orientation to the object of inquiry is called for.

Two approaches to the study of child language:
adult-normative and child-specific

From any survey of the various approaches taken in the past to the study of language acquisition (cf. for example Shugar, Smoleczyńska, 1980) two viewpoints can be extracted. One is based on the adult norm, and evaluates, or measures, how far the child falls short of what the adult can normally do; the other considers child language on its own terms. The first, the traditional research paradigm, has deep historical and philosophical roots: the child is conceived as the "makings" of the future adult, a tenet entailing the task of the adult to "make" the child. Locke's theoretically empty child requires the work of rational teachers to bring it through childhood to rational adulthood. The historically newer view of the child as a concept of intrinsic worth, dating from Rousseau and Comenius, one that allows for the child to be differently conceived from the adult, can be summed up in the words of Kessen: "Whenever one looks at a child, one sees a whole human being, properly put together for his particular time. The behavior of the child is appropriate to the demands of his needs and of his world" (Kessen, 1965). Yet the fact remains that we study children's thinking in terms of deviance from adult thought. But is it right, asks Markova (1978), to characterize the child's way of thinking as a-logical because he seems to be unable to solve the problems which we have created for him? The child may see the world in his own way and not just in a defective version of the adult's way (cf. also Hamlyn, 1971). Sociologists present a similar view from the angle of socialization. Mackay (1973) points out that the "incomplete being" view of the child, as essentially deficient vis-a-vis adults "has, in practice, led to no research into children qua children", and further that it

has distracted investigators from the study of adult-child interaction and the theoretically important problem of underlying interpretive competence on which all interaction is based.

It is of interest to note in this connection that the wave of adult-child interactional studies in the last decade has apparently laid the empirical groundwork for the "difference" view of the child in terms of interpretive procedures. Generalizing from numerous studies (e.g., R y a n, 1974; S n o w, 1977) one might characterize the beginnings of the child's experience as a different communicator as follows: In early social interactions, the child's behaviors are taken as contributions, as being "interpretable" or carrying communicative meaning. Within the framework set up by the adult, the child gains expectancies about how the other will interpret his behaviors, and in turn gains experience in acting upon his own interpretations of other's behaviors to him. Basic interpretive competences are acquired in the earliest exchanges with adults.

The above studies have given substance to the child-specific view that sees the child, broadly speaking, as an active subject who both acts upon the world and goes about acquiring knowledge about the world. Theorizing from observational data of the child's communicative activity in the first two years of life, Halliday suggests that the child makes his own first models of language use which, over time, in the course of adult-child dialogue, evolve into the language of adults (H a l l i d a y, 1973). The cognitive capacities implied in this view are related to social interaction. Children's capacities to interpret the world and the actions of others are both a condition for and outcome of social interaction (C i c o u r e l, 1970; M a c k a y, 1973). It is argued that the abilities to "define a situation" permit for acquiring interpretive procedures in that situation; it is by relying upon what everyone knows in a situation that meaning can be attributed to what is said. These are early practical reasoning abilities that lay the groundwork for interpretive competence (D o n a l d s o n, 1978; M a c k a y, 1973).

The argument so far is that the child builds up communicative practices and procedures in the framework of adult-child interaction. We shall now argue that this framework does not allow for revealing all that is specific and typical of the child's needs for

language. This is attributed to the nature of the asymmetric pairing in adult-child interaction, governed by the adult partner, and formed by adult-provided opportunities. We shall argue that a symmetric pairing of child with child may provide a more adequate observational terrain for studying the operations of interpretive competence. We now look more closely at the notion of "pairing" in social interaction in the light of Sacks' concepts.

Sacks' notion of category membership

Using the term "member" to relate the individual to his social world, Harvey Sacks, sociologist, has been interested in how the perception of events is governed by the communicative code, how people's actions are made intelligible and interpretable to others (S a c k s, 1972). If the observer wishes to understand what a speaker seeks to achieve with a particular utterance, he must be familiar with the social categories the speaker is using and the cultural associations these categories have for him. The speaker assigns others to certain categories and ascribes to them certain category-related activities. On the example of the two-year-old's story which ran: "The baby cried. The mummy picked it up", Sacks illustrates a set of notions of category membership, category-bound activities as well as ways (devices) of relating categories. There is a category difference between child and adult, each with categorial criteria for membership (e.g., category-bound activities). Across categories there are linkage principles, or pairings, as, for example, in the case of mutually complementary activities like crying by the baby, picking up by the mummy, rendering such activities mutually interpretable at the age of two. Generalizing more broadly, participants in interactional encounters may be said to act toward each other under the guidance of some categorical class of membership they assign to each other within the given setting and on the given occasion (S p e i e r, 1972; cf. also C i c o u r e l, 1970).

Considering now how participants are guided when they perceive each other in the same category, as might, for example, child peers one could assume a principal link to be derived from similarity as opposed to complementarity as in the case of adult-child linka-

ge. Within the framework of Sacks' notions, it may be assumed that the child, in confronting his peer, has already a basic categorizing competence which guides his differentiated actions toward adult and child. In interaction with a peer, the child is facilitated in his interpretations of the others behaviors on the grounds of similarity to his own. As a "member" of the same social world, the child is no longer within the dependency relation implied in the asymmetrical, cross-category links between adult and child; he no longer is dealing with a partner actively reaching out and assigning meanings to his utterances and actions; he is instead dealing with a like autonomous partner. In arriving at interpretations of the other's actions, both must work out appropriate and effective procedures; situations must be interpreted in the same way as they arise and shape up, out of the very process of social interaction.

In line with the above view, the question arises about the interpretation of children's interpretations.

Implications for observers interpretations

Granting recognition of category membership difference, the observer who wishes to attempt the task of describing interpretive practices and procedures of the child-child world of social interaction starts from the premise that he must lay aside, or rather place in abeyance, those interpretive procedures he applies as adult participant in interactions with the child. For there are no a priori grounds to assume that the principles underlying cross-category interactions will match those underlying within-category interactions. What is created and expressed in social interactions will reflect category relations in the social order that comes into being. Adults could assume that they are not authorized to measure and estimate children's ways of creating their own social order against membership criteria (norms) proper to the adult category. This should not be taken to mean that adult observers will not recognize adult-like ways and patternings in the child-child situation, but such discoveries would be the outcomes of descriptive analytic procedures and ought not to be pre-assumed. This methodological principle seems to be a fundamental implication of Sacks' conceptualization.

Another related methodological implication is the preclusion of the postulate of participant analysis, in the direct sense. The interpretative approach in ethnomethodological sociology (Garfinkel, Sacks, and others) requires that the analyzer take the perspective of a participant in the processes under description (cf. Mishler, 1979). Yet this condition can only be satisfied provided the observer has mastered the perspective of the participant. The participant perspective postulate cannot be met in any direct fashion if only for the fact that the moment the adult enters the exclusive child-child situation, there is bound to be a qualitative change in the interaction process. Adult co-presence changes the latent possibilities of social process specific to children. In the terms adopted for the present discussion, the situation is altered from intra-categorical to cross-categorical (cf. also Mackay, 1973).

In search of solutions, the best that can be suggested is via approximation. Recognition of "outsider" status involves not only physical absence but also the recognition that the adults description is a gloss within a specific frame of reference which needs to be specified according to methodological guidelines.

The empirical question is posed of finding the types of analyses that will bring out the patterns evolved by children in social interaction.

The child-child situation: The observational data

The data and analyses upon which the present discussion is based will be briefly outlined.

Twenty-four dyadic sessions were observed in which 24 children from different neighbourhood nursery schools participated. Unacquainted children, aged three to five, were paired in half-year age brackets, each child participating in two dyadic sessions, once in a same-sex pair, once in a mixed-sex pair. Three sessions took place on a single day, involving three children, each session lasting about fifteen minutes (the third session with an adult). The laboratory playroom measured 2.8 by 5.6 square meters and contained a variety of nursery school type toys. Subjects met for the

first time outside the playroom and were invited to come in and play for a while. No adults were present. The play session was monitored through television circuits. Videotaped recordings of the sessions were transcribed in detail by two analyzers. Each analyzer followed one child's continuous behavior and speech. Speech, visual behaviors and body movements were noted separately. Synchronized transcriptions were then made, upon which further analyses were performed. Details are reported elsewhere (Shugar, 1982 a). A more detailed coding and recording procedure has been elaborated by Bokus (1982).

Since then the observational base has been expanded by an additional 48 dyadic sessions following the same design, with children aged three to seven years.

Of particular interest here is our perception of the child-child dyadic sessions as observers, recorders and analyzers. Our approach was neither selective nor theory-guided; it was intended to be open and comprehensive. Our aim was to look for the natural patterning of children's activities and speech in the dyadic situation. This required detailed familiarity with the moment-to-moment changes occurring over the 15-minute span of time making up the session. First we were interested in the interactional patterning, how much and in what way the children into and sustained interactions as well as how interactions ended. Next, we looked at the interlinking of the children's activities, how such coordinations of actions were brought about and how they were structured. Then we focussed on the stream of discourse, how it was functionally related to interactivity and action coordinations: to what extent it was part of the activity and to what extent it was separable and organized around topics. Findings of these and other analyses have been reported elsewhere (Bokus, 1982; Bokus, Shugar, forthcoming; Pożarowska, forthcoming; Schier, 1983; Shugar 1978 a, 1981, 1982 a; Shugar, Bokus, forthcoming).

One of the outcomes of our analytic work on child-child observational data is the line of argument presented in the present paper.

Analytic approaches to the study
of the child-child situation

Two avenues of approach to the study of the child-child situation will be contrasted from the angle of adequacy to bring into evidence the patterns of talk take shape and at the same time to clarify children's procedures of mutual interpretation. These will be referred to respectively as conversational analysis and event analysis. A central issue in this discussion will be that of "context", understood roughly as "what is going on". Each approach will be considered in terms of how this issue is handled. In this discussion I shall draw on the assumptions and proposals in the relevant literature available to me.

Conversational analysis

Students of child language development have currently accepted the view that talk is organized from the start within a conversational format. The first developmental study to apply conversational analysis (on the model of S a c k s et al., 1974) was that of S n o w (1977), who extracted the beginnings of conversational structure from observations of natural interactions of mothers and their babies. Succeeding studies (e.g., S n o w, F e r g u s o n, 1977, and others) have gone further in showing how the social frame provided by the adult facilitates the child's acquisition of language. Infants learn early to function within the system, that is, to solicit turns from the mother and to initiate topical sequences. The child can steer the semantic content of maternal speech, thus providing for himself the basis to discover predictable relationship between utterances and events (S n o w, 1979). At the same time as the child learns the language, the child is brought to share the norms of adult discourse (W e l l s, M o n t g o m e r y, M a e L u r e, 1978). By such common procedures, child and adult can construct texts together, achieving properties of coherency, cohesiveness, and appropriateness to the situations which give rise to the texts (S a c k s, 1979; S h u g a r, 1978b, 1982 b). Apparently there is a natural history of the evolution of the social frame of conversational turn-taking.

The conversational format has also been used to analyze child-child verbal interactions. With the aid of this analytic approach, discoveries have been made about children's early acquired conversational skills in spoken interaction with both adults and peers; together young children can elaborate "a shared code of conduct" through turn-taking (K e e n a n, 1974), they can organize request sequences with each other (G a r v e y, 1975) as with as with parent (W o o t t o n, 1981), they participate in "orderly discourse" (W e l l s et al., 1978), and they also design their speech to differentiated recipients (S a o h s, D e v i n, 1976; Shatz, G e l m a n, 1973). From these and numerous other studies (of E r v i n - T r i p p, M i t c h e l l - K e r n a n, 1977), firm ground has been laid for the thesis that preschool children make use of the vehicle of spoken interaction defined as conversation, and that not only do they display the ability to participate in this "social frame" but also they can construct the frame themselves within which to conduct sequentially organized, recipient-designed talk.

From these studies there emerges the view that children's social interactions are organized by conversation, as are adult interactions in line with the claim of the original authors of conversational analysis (S a c k s et al., 1974) and their successors (e.g., H e r i t a g e, forthcoming; S o h e n k e i n 1978). Conversation, treated as the general vehicle of interaction, was originally defined as a speech exchange system which lends itself to rigorous description as a context-free system yet at the same time context-sensitive (incorporating a recipient design - S a c k s et al., 1974). Thus, from conversational analysis developed to account for the organization of adult talk, extrapolations have been made for the description of child talk organization. Much evidence speaks for children's take-over of the same formal rules that account for adult practice (turn-taking systematics, sequencing, etc.) which in turn facilitate communication and acquisition of language knowledge. However, work on this paradigm seems to be displaying signs of over-extension. What is the evidence?

In numerous studies, in addition to describing conversational accomplishments, references are made to children's speech behavior that does not fit into the conversational patterning. Failures to recognize social obligations of cooperative speech, to respond at

the allotted moment, to focus on a given topic, nonsequiturs, non-coherency across utterances, all referred to in the literature, are dealt with variously. For example, such behaviors are treated as faulty performance, speaker shortcomings, developmental immaturities, egocentric speech (e.g., Nelson, Gruendel, 1979; McTeer, 1981; Wells et al., 1978). The last mentioned authors suggest that conversational norms may not be the only principles governing children's use of speech, and that "other principles" may intervene giving rise to the "disorderliness" of talk in which children participate. However we are left wondering what such principles might be. Nor, from these various studies, do we know how much of children's talk meet standards of conversational rules and how much must be accounted for by other principles. If the child is not talking within the conversational format, then what is he using his utterance for? Are such utterances devoid of interactional value; if not, then what relations do they have to social interaction? Some clues to the answers might be found in a somewhat different approach to the analysis of talk which children produce in the child-child situation.

Apparently some sociologists, particularly those with the ecological orientation, have been interested in interactive processes between children as a domain of study different from adult spoken interaction equated with conversation. Speier (1970), for example, considers that talk is embedded in interactional processes, rather than comprising them. While looking to conversational properties of talk as "an altogether new set of empirical dimensions", Speier hoped to see these dimensions applied to such analytic topics as "speech practices". This term is understood as referring to methods children use in building talk and practical activity around each other. This was seen as a new approach to the study of talk, one which would inform us about children's knowledge underlying their courses of action in given situations. Only from such empirical analyses could any generalizations be made about children's interactive abilities. In this view, children are not envisaged so much as "conversationalists" as practical agents at work in social situations.

It would seem from the above that organizing principles underlying children's talk are context-determined. Without understanding the natural context of situated activity, the presumed order-

liness of children's dealings with each other in which language is engaged will not be fully revealed. Particularly, the conversation-analytic approach - by foregrounding speech activity and separating it from its context - fails to illuminate under what conditions children may choose to use conversational procedures in preference to other procedures, and vice versa. It does not aim at revealing the substantive aspect to what is going on, that is, what the children are making happen by way speaking. What is required is an analytic approach which will account for context-talk interdependencies.

Event analysis

Event analysis is a research orientation based on the view that social interactions need not only be verbalized interaction and that the unfolding of events can be accounted for by other organizing principles than those revealed in talk sequencing. Central to this orientation is the view that language has an "embedded" relation to its frame of reference, or its context. Language-context relations take prominence in event analysis, since the meaning of the event is not principally located in the language used in it; rather the meaning is located in its frame of reference.

Since the event-analytic approach is not presented in any one place in the literature, I shall refer to diverse sources to clarify it.

Settings, events, and moves

Orientation to events as objects of social interactional analysis is associated with E. Goffman. Taking as point of departure his definition of the social situation, we cite: "The nature of the social situation is that it contains possibilities of mutual monitoring, each individual is accessible to the senses of all the others. These individuals [...] are potential participants in social interaction" (G o f f m a n, 1972, p. 63-64). This definition describes the social situation as a possible social event [my

italics - G.W.S.], taking place at a given time and in a given place. The boundaries of the social event are set by Goffman as follows: "A social situation arises whenever two or more individuals find themselves in one another's immediate presence, and it lasts until all but one individual remains" (Goffman, 1972). Elsewhere Goffman describes the social situation as the home of speech, yet where speech does not necessarily occur. Events that engage participants in a social situation start from joint orientation of visual and cognitive attention and mutual openness to all manner of communication. This state has been called by Goffman "focussed interaction".

Following Goffman's line of thought, Merritt (1979 a), who is interested in the linguistic aspects, starts from locating events in a social setting as their context. Taking the view of the linguist, she considers that the way toward reaching generalizations about language use is by discovering such uses through focussing observation on a single social setting. The repositories of norms of language use for a particular speech community are comprised by events occurring in a given social setting. Thus, taking as point of departure the social setting, events become the object of analysis. By this method attention is directed to the places or "slots" that call forth speaking as well as to the responses to the occurring behaviors. To illustrate her approach, Merritt (1979 b) describes a study of teacher-child "events" in the open classroom setting, in which the child approaches the teacher to obtain services from her. The observer noted the moments (slots) afforded the child by the teacher to gain access to her attention. The norms of the event, i.e., the acceptable ways by which access is granted to the child, is conveyed in the teacher's interactive behavior. Similarly, Corsaro (1979) watched the communicative behaviors of nursery school children attempting to gain entry into a delineated play area occupied by other children. He extracted the combinations of behaviors by the access-seeking child (circling the area, reaching in and taking an object, requesting to play, etc.) depending upon the responses to each move. As it turned out, verbal moves (the most adult-like type) were neither the only, nor the most salient, type successfully employed; the success of verbal moves depended upon their placement in the sequenced pattern of moves. Also, Bokus (1982) observed combin-

ations of behaviors in children who initiated social interaction with another child in which the verbal move turned out to be not the sole, but the necessary, component of approach.

In analyzing the progressive nature of events, such as customer-clerk routines, G o f f m a n (1971) points out the optional placements of talk, talk being simply a resource in such a social setting. He has proposed as the basic, minimal unit of analysis the "move". The move is seen as a crucial primitive element in two senses. In one sense, in the goal-orientation of the interaction, the significance of the move lies in its use to "move forward the interaction". In the other sense its significance lies in the equilibrium of the interaction; moves are made to maintain a certain balance of rights and obligation fulfilments, and, as such, have a ritualistic character. L a b o v and F a n s h e l l (1977) express similar ideas. In these authors' comprehensive analysis of what is going on in a whole event (the therapeutic session) within a particular social situation (therapy), it is stressed that the event must first be understood as a whole and then the particular moves, or acts, can be interpreted as they progressively occur in the making of the event. What is understood as a whole event is made up of the accumulation of progressive moves by the active participants; in turn, moves are made on the basis of interpretations of foregoing moves, and the expectancies of succeeding moves.

Applying a similar research orientation to young children's peer interactions, C o o k - G u m p e r z and C o r s a r o (1977) take a sociologist's view of the outcome of such patterning. They speak of the "social order" generated by children within their own environment. Children's social events are progressively ordered on the basis of understandings negotiated up to that moment; it is on these understandings that the interpretation of an utterance depends. Interested in the nature of children's language, these authors believe that adults (as well as participant children) can understand their language only as it is environmentally (contextually) "situated". Cook-Gumperz et al. use the term context in a very inclusive non-specific way, as embracing both "the entire social-physical setting insofar as it becomes a socially activated part of the child's life space" (C o o k - G u m p e r z, C o r s a r o, 1977, p. 412). Context is construed as the source of interpretation, both subjective and objective. More specifically, the set-

ting initially engenders expectations of what may happen, and provides the initial "frame"; then starts the interpretation-action chain making up the event. In their studies of nursery school children's social activities, Cook-Gumpers and Corsaro have sought for the patterns of what they call "communicative strategies" in the interactions of children. They stress the point that these strategies are mutual, since each encounters in the other a social actor who possesses the same or similar communicative abilities (C o o k - G u m p e r s, C o r s a r o, 1977, p. 431). These sociologists, in advocating this research orientation, predict that it can open the way for adults to obtain a better understanding of children's own social patterning, their interactive rules and social alignments (see also C o o k - G u m p e r s, G u m p e r s, 1978).

Still another "event" type approach is exemplified in our own research based on analyses of preschool children's dyadic play sessions, in which the session is taken as a whole event which is shaped freely by the children as active agents. Taking a psychologist's view of how such patterning may occur, our attention is focussed on the individual child and his ongoing activity to which his speech is linked. Viewing each child as an agent of ongoing action, interactions are seen as the results of different ways children use to coordinate their activities. The ways in which they use language can be discovered by relating utterances to the lines of activity pursued respectively by each speaker. Speech is embedded in the stream of activity of each child; its interactive value is the effect it has in opening up that activity to the monitoring of the co-present child, rendering it intelligible as well as accessible to participation. The interaction units and the time stretches of separated activity make up the smaller event units culminating in the whole session event. The moves that children make to forward the interaction, to change, or terminate it, are identified not only as utterances, but as more complex moves, comprising nonverbal components also serving as ways of rendering information accessible to the partner. The move analysis - here called "discourse analysis" (S h u g a r 1978, forthcoming) - has led to the discovery of two patterns of language use related to ongoing activity. One has been referred to as "action discourse" embracing the patterns of moves that coordinate practical activity

with objects; the other has been referred to as "topical discourse" which is separated usually from practical activity, and which is organized on principles of conversational sequencing of turns. In distinguishing between these two discourse patterns, it has been possible to study how they intermesh in the constantly moving context of activity organization (S h u g a r, 1982 a).

In this view, context is identified with children's own activity organization in which each is active agent. Speech then becomes mutually intelligible and interpretable within this context; in turn the context is constantly undergoing changes under the effects of speech. What children interpret is always first and foremost the activity, its content and form, which is also the source of their expectancies.

Some comments on the contrast of two analytic approaches

Event analysis, based on some conceptualization of context, is necessarily an open approach. It is as sensitive to context as analysts can be able to interpret that context. Participants' procedures for guiding events are also open-ended. Event analysis does not seem to have a systematic description, but rather follows guidelines which are approximations of how participants in the event might be proceeding. Event analysis lends itself to widely diverse applications, to all social context where language alone does not comprise the event, but is adjunctive to it, as the ethnographer A l b e r t (1972) describes the status of language dependent upon the exigencies of non-verbal activity.

Some event types may be equivalents to conversations and therefore may be sufficiently described by the conversation analytic approach; on the other hand, the rigor of the conversation analytic approach does not seem possible within an event approach; goals of the two approaches may basically differ since each accounts for different social phenomena.

Yet the two approaches seem to exert a mutual influence one upon the other. To researchers interested in the event-type approach, conversational analysis has provided insights into the progressiveness in the social ordering and the sequencing of exchanges (C o o k - G u m p e r z and C o r s a r o, 1977), and i

fact has been accommodated within larger-scale event-type analyses such as in the classroom language studies of G r i f f i n and S h u y (1978). More recent studies in the conversational analysis domain have increasingly placed conversations in contexts. Stress on the "indexical character of utterances and actions" which Goffman lays in numerous works has forced a shift of focus upon the prevailing context to which participants are necessarily oriented. In a review of newer trends in conversational analysis, Heritage (forthcoming) names as a fundamental assumption of later studies that contributions to interaction are both context shaped and context renewing. Yet what is taken as context, what is ground and what foreground, in the analysis of social behaviors is still an open issue. Whatever the definition of context, from whatever theoretical perspective, there seems now to be general consensus as to its pervasive influence, its centrality for understanding behaviors occurring within its field of influence.

The issue uppermost in this paper remains a view of context within the child's perspective, since this defines the goal we have set. We arrive at the conclusion that from the point of view of the child as language user, context is central, and embraces what is happening around him and what he himself has a hand in creating; contexts comprise the conditions in which the child is functioning, the settings for his activities and therefore the set of conditions he understands as a social member of his environment.

The adult's task like the ethnographer's.
An empirical attempt to formulate speech procedures
appropriate to the child-child situation

Let us suppose, like S p e i e r (1970), that what children are doing in their exclusive contacts concerns the organization of childhood activity, and in so doing they are building up their interactional competences. What participants need are methods or procedures for pursuing activities together. It goes without questioning that they must have interpretive procedures, since what is being done and what is talked about concerns what everyone knows, i.e., rests upon the common store of knowledge (know-what and know-how). The above assumes the same categorial membership of this speech

community implying their similarity relations. In agreement with Merritt (1979 a, b), we may expect that there are "norms" or habitual procedures for language use for this particular speech community which repose in the events occurring in a given social setting - here: child-child situations.

The adult's aim in approaching this world is analogous to that of the ethnographer. As pointed out by Frake (1969, after Mehanna, 1978) the description must account for the behavior of a people in ways deemed appropriate among themselves. In aiming at detecting what qualifies for appropriate procedures in the child-child situation, one is guided by the assumption of symmetry relations, the mutuality and reflexivity of moves. In construction of events through interactive procedures, there must be a working agreement about a mutual understanding of what the other has in mind, especially when imaginary events are attempted.

But, given the accepted differentness of the children's world as against the adult's world, account must also be made for the fact that the child's world is open to, and engulfed in, the adult world; what is more, the child's world is embedded in the context of the wider adult world, largely unknown and incomprehensible. And so children's interpretations edge upon areas where knowledge is incomplete and insufficient; some procedures must therefore be heuristic in nature, innovative, imaginative. There must therefore also be a certain tolerance for unintelligibility in the common interest of keeping on with the construction of events. Such are the basic assumptions that underlie the formulation of working principles to be presented below.

Before proceeding, let us consider what can be said about the validity of these formulations in terms of the psychological reality for the child, in other words, in terms of the child's perspective. We refer once more to the approach through which the generalizations formulated in the working principles were reached, namely, a detailed, sequentially ordered analysis of interactional behaviors of children in dyadic situations without adult presence, the comparisons of numerous dyadic sessions in the search of common patterns. Inspired by Goffman's definition of the move, we have followed the progression of moves that start and sustain interactions, moves that carry forward the interaction, as well as moves that affect the balance of rights, obligations and status rela-

tions between members. Yet the interpretation of moves from the perspectives of the participants remains the most difficult and sensitive point of the analysis. The interpretations we have made have no more than the value of a gloss, an approximation, whose goodness of fit can only be tested in the regularity of the patterning that is revealed in the move-by-move approach on a micro scale.

Yet we are encouraged to proceed along this track, seeing in this orientation the possibility of grasping what is even more complex than the habitual speech procedures and practices, namely, the value of these bits of spoken language for future event-making. From finding out the value of habitual procedures for event construction, we would hope to delve into the potentiality of these procedures for the new, developing goals of children who are working their way into the cultural practices of the adult world that frames their own. Current practices may provide methods for constructing fictive versions of the adult world, through doing adult things the child's way saying adult sayings the child's way. Childhood social organization may be children's ways of self-induction into the larger culture. We hope that the "ethnographer's approach" to understanding events in "cultures" other than our own, yet embedded in our own, will aid us in this task.

The following section comprises a list of formulations called "working principles", distillations of the move analysis of dyadic sessions of preschool children. They are followed by fragments selected to illustrate the uses of these principles. For a closer study of the arguments and evidence supporting the theses in the listed working principles, reference is made to the following literature: Bokus (1982); Garvey (1974, 1975); Goffman (1976); Pożarowska (forthcoming); Shugar (1978 a, c, 1981, 1982 a, b).

Working principles children follow in speech procedures
and practices in event construction - based on inferences
of the adult observer

1. Each of us can^a originate and pursue his/her own line of action, and accompany this line with loud speech.
2. If two of us alternate our speaking within the same social

space, we can follow the other's talk as well as our own and, what is more, we can check its references by looking at his action field.

3. Each of us can pick up any utterance heard and respond to it with another utterance. We can "speak-act" on it by commenting, inquiring, criticizing, and so on.

4. Each of us can also respond to the others response, and so we can build exchanges, having in mind the same topic.

We can deal with questions this way:

5. Each of us can answer any question, own or other's depending who has a ready answer to it.

a. A request for information addressed to me will be complied with, for it is an appeal to my knowledge store.

6. A query about the meaning of an action should get a sincere^b answer.

a. This includes our imaginary lines of action, which are not intelligible to the naked eye.

7. We tolerate a certain degree of unintelligibility about what each other has in mind, in order to sustain a "working agreement", since this is necessary to push ahead our event construction.

We can deal with requests for action this way:

8. We can comply with a request from the other or not. It depends mainly on whether a) it interferes with what I am doing at the moment, and whether b) the action requested makes sense to me. Therefore:

9. A request for a reason for a requested action deserves an acceptable reply.

We can recognize and deal with violations^c of the above principles this way:

10. We have interpretive procedures (hard to explain) for recognizing a challenge, that is, for taking up another child's move as being a challenge to me.

11. We can respond to a recognized challenge with a counter-challenge, which is our right.

12. We can construct a format for remedial procedure (dialogic). A violation is remedied when a state of par is restored.

a. Remedying violations requires quick inventive skill and can be fun.

^a Can is used here in the sense of "able to" and also "have a right to".

^b Sincere refers to the effort to convey understanding to the querying person; it refers also to not disturbing the state of par, i.e., not to be taken as a challenge to the state of knowledge of the querying person.

^c Violation is understood as departures from the above working principles. Violations can be understood as special moves in event construction on an interpersonal plane. They are challenges to the symmetry relations between peers. Challenges are grasped by the formula: I AM BETTER THAN YOU AND IF NOT PROVE THE CONTRARY (cf. Labov, Fanshell, 1977).

Fragments from dyadic sessions of preschool children
illustrating the working principles (WP)

Fragment 1. Boy and girl aged 3.0-3.5.

Robert (running toward toy telephone): Look it's a telephone.

Kamila (glancing in his direction, taking blocks out of a box).

I'm gonna take this block ... train wagon.

Illustrates WP 1 and 2.

Fragment 2. Boy and girl aged 3.0-3.5.

Piotruś (pushing the tank on the floor, holding the toy stethoscope).

I'll be a tank and I'll shoot and I'm going to examine with this earphone ... I'm turning here.

Kasia (watching): What for?

Piotruś: It's pretend.

Kasia picks up Piotruś' utterance and asks about the sense of his activity (WP 3 and 6). Piotruś gives a sincere answer - he says he is pursuing an imaginary line of action (WP 6). The exchange is on the topic of the sense of P's activity (WP 4).

Fragment 3. Boy and girl aged 4.0-4.5. The children have just entered the playroom and gone to the stools on which dress-up items lie. Marta picked up an embroidered jacket; Tomek picked up a feather headdress.

Marta (holding out the jacket to Tomek): C'mon put it on. Hurry up (stamping foot).

Tomek (putting on headdress): No you put it on.

Marta (lowering the jacket and eyeing it): What for?

You want me to be an Indian?

Tomek (fixing the headdress): Uhuh.

Marta: And you? You have to have a sword.

Illustrates at least WP 5, 6, 7 and 8. Marta's request for an action meets with Tomek's refusal with counter-request for action, which blocks her imaginary action line. That Marta had an intended action line in mind (that Tomek was to "be someone" other than himself, by putting on the jacket) is made clear in her question: What for? (= Why should I be the one to put it on?). She supplies the answer by inferring what Tomek's imaginary action line could be. It is a tentative answer, calling for confirmation. Tomek supplies confirmation (accepts her interpretation of what he had in mind, regardless of what he had in mind). Tomek's move sustains a working agreement, which moves ahead the interaction. Marta moves forward by dealing with a new implication: if Marta is to be an Indian, what is Tomek to be? The question remains open, but Marta has supplied some information towards a solution: he will need a sword.

Fragments 4-8 deal with violation and remedy. Boy and girl aged 3.0-3.5.

Fragment 4 - violation and reaction. Kamila is seated on the mattress holding a floppy doll with long limbs, and has toy scissors in her hand. Irek leaves his tractor and comes close to look.

Irek: What are you cutting off his arm for?

Kamila: I'm not cutting off his arm, I'm cutting away his wee tiny finger nails so he won't scratch me so (pedagogic tone of voice).

Irek: Where?

Kamila: On my leg, he's scratching me.

Irek (silence): He turns his back to her and occupies himself with train.

Illustrates the violation of WP 6 involving the status of WP 7. Irek queries about the meaning of Kamila's action expecting a common sense answer. Kamila's words do not fit her action making her action unintelligible. What is more, K's imaginary action line puts her in the position of doing an adult-like type of act (cutting the finger nails of a child) and in addition she has presen-

ted it in an elaborate verbal display of linguistic prowess. Irek may sense that Kamila has made a move to "better" him. He may find this offensive, as his turning back from her seems to indicate.

Fragment 5 - responding to violation by violation Kamila as before. Irek, back to Kamila, picks up train wagons and puts them on the tracks on the floor.

Irek (loud voice): And who went and spoiled these tracks?

Kamila (silence).

Irek (scolding tone): I'm asking.

Kamila (silence).

Irek: A train goes on tracks.

Illustrates WP 10 and 11. Irek is making a retaliatory move. He is not playful at all. He is blaming someone for some state of affairs in his action field (Kamila has not touched his tracks). Furthermore, Irek seems to be making a verbal display of blaming, borrowing adult style to the child. Kamila ignores the move, but may have recognized this as a retaliation.

Fragment 6 - violating further (adding insult to injury?).

Kamila as before. Irek is examining some objects.

Irek: And where's that squirter? And what's that?

Kamila: That's little blocks.

You're a little kid or what.

You don't know anything.

Irek (silence).

Kamila violates WP 6 in flagrant manner. She directly undermines the state of par by downgrading Irek's status on grounds of lack of adequate knowledge (appropriate to his age). Irek holds off for the moment.

Fragment 7 - challenge and counter-challenge Kamila as before.

Irek as before.

Kamila (lifts her head and catches Irek's eye line) (softly and tenderly with a sigh). Here is where we're cutting them off, he's got such long finger nails, he scratches me.

Irek (eyeing Kamila): You can't catch fish and I can.

Kamila (silence).

Kamila's elaborated verbal display is directly addressed to the other; she is reiterating her challenge in a new form. Irek

issues a counter-challenge. The form of his challenge is direct, straightforward and explicit; the content chosen is on a ground where presumably Irek's experience warrants his statement of own ability.

Irek's statement constructs a format for challenging (WP 12). The children proceed to use the format (I can do X and you can't) in reciprocal fashion. In so doing they enter a state of play as the next event indicates.

Fragment 8 - violation remedied. The children are oriented toward each other in space and they are talking.

Irek: But y'know, can you say "pociąg" (train)?

Kamila: Pociąg.

Irek: You can't. Pociąg (clearly articulated).

Kamila: Pociąg.

Irek: Me too. Pociąg.

This fragment illustrates a final return to equilibrium between peer partners. The violation of the state of par between equal parties was remedied procedurally, and creatively. A reciprocal dialogic format helped to establish equal frames of mind. The next events are amicable and cooperative.

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Grace W. Shugar

PODEJŚCIE EMPIRYCZNE W BADANIACH ROZUMIENIA
PRZEZ DOROSŁYCH MOWY DZIECI

Autorka przedstawia odmienne podejście badawcze, określone przez autorkę jako "event analysis". Podejmując dyskusję z analizą konwersacyjną autorka wskazuje, iż znaczenie wydarzeń interakcyjnych związane jest z całościowym kontekstem aktywności interakcyjnej i nie powinno być ograniczone do reguł rozmowy. Oparciem empirycznym są badania prowadzone przez nią nad komunikacją między dziećmi, natomiast teoretycznych uzasadnień dostarczają niektóre teksty E. Goffmana, a także szeregu innych autorów.