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Ethnomethodological and conversation analytic approaches to identity

Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe

Introduction

This chapter presents an approach to identity grounded in ethnomethodology (EM) and conversation analysis (CA). In contrast to approaches that start with a heavily theorised concept of identity, or with a predetermined set of identity categories, our chapter describes how people themselves, in everyday social life, orient to and describe, classify or assess each other as particular kinds of people, as members (or not) of identity-relevant categories. A key point is that ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts rarely start out with identity as an analytic concept for exploration. Rather, their focus is on the organisation of social life in and through talk and social interaction, in which matters of who we are to one another are members’ concerns. While EM and CA are often regarded as ‘atheoretical’, they simply propose an alternative theory, of social life as grounded in interaction and of language as constitutive of that social life.

We will start by describing EM and CA and the implications of these approaches for understanding identity. We will then explore two interactional sites as a means of illustrating how identities get worked up sequentially and made relevant by conversational participants. The first data set comprises telephone calls made by potential customers to a double-glazing company and focuses particularly on the normative assumptions about relationships and marital status encoded in the sales representative’s use of, and negotiation around, categories and titles. The second data set involves telephone calls made to and from an NHS complaints line by or on behalf of patients. What is noteworthy about these calls is the way that a ‘legitimate complaining’ identity is worked up by the caller (and to an extent collaboratively with the operator) through the use of particular categories and expectable attributes, in ways that seem designed to dispel a lack of entitlement to complain. Such observations also illuminate the meanings of cultural categories and activities and the kinds of obligations, rights and responsibilities that are revealed to be understood by participants in the exchange. We argue that this kind of empirical analysis provides a robust identification of patterns in the way identity matters are made relevant to institutional interaction.

CA has been increasingly deployed for research in applied linguistics (see Kaspar and Wagner 2014) and been used to ground observations of routine, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice and
interactional ‘trouble’ in professional and institutional settings. More precisely, and as we will demonstrate in the closing section, CA can be used to inform communication training with the practitioners in institutions that comprise the settings under study. We conclude that EM and CA have much to contribute to the ‘real world’ impact of academic work.

Overview

EM is a discipline that was developed by the sociologist Garfinkel (1967), who was influenced by the phenomenological philosophy of Schütz (e.g. 1962) and Goffman’s (e.g. 1959) work on the interaction order. Garfinkel’s idea was that the members of a society continuously engage in making sense of the world and, in so doing, methodically display their understandings of it: making their activities ‘visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes’ (1967: vii). Social interaction became central to ethnomethodology’s project of explicating members’ methods for producing orderly and accountable social activities via CA, which has since developed into an empirical science for understanding everyday life.

CA originates in the work of the American sociologist Sacks and his colleagues Schegloff and Jefferson. Sacks’s aim was to develop an alternative to mainstream sociology: an observational science of society and social action that could be grounded in the ‘details of actual events’ (Sacks 1984a: 26). CA involves the study of transcripts of recorded everyday and institutional talk, focusing on the turn-by-turn organisation of interaction. The aim of CA is, in Sacks’s (1984b: 413) words,

to see how finely the details of actual, naturally occurring conversation can be subjected to analysis that will yield the technology of conversation. The idea is to take singular sequences of conversation and tear them apart in such a way as to find rules, techniques, procedures, methods, maxims ... that can be used to generate the orderly features we find in the conversations we examine. The point is, then, to come back to the singular things we observe in a singular sequence, with some rules that handle those singular features, and also, necessarily, handle lots of other events.

For Schegloff (1996), a key figure in the subsequent development of CA, talk-in-interaction is ‘the primordial scene of social life … through which the work of the constitutive institutions of societies gets done. It is through talking that we live our lives, build and maintain relationships, and establish who we are to one another’ (Drew 2005: 74, emphasis added).

Related to EM and CA is another approach rooted in Sacks’s (1992) lectures on conversation: membership categorisation analysis (MCA). In addition to the CA focus on the sequencing and organisation of talk, MCA also pays attention to the situated and reflexive use of categories in everyday and institutional interaction, as well as in interview, media and other textual data. Sacks focused on the local management of speakers’ categorisations of themselves and others, treating talk as ‘culture-in-action’ (Hester and Eglin 1997). His ideas were based around the membership categorisation device (MCD), which explains how categories may be hearably linked by members of a culture. He provides a now-classic example from a children’s story: ‘The baby cried. The mommy picked it up’ (Sacks 1972). Sacks claimed that we hear links between ‘mommy’ and ‘baby’, specifically that the mommy is the mommy of the baby. He provided an explanatory apparatus that allows this ‘fact’ to occur: the MCD. In this case, the MCD of ‘family’ allows the categories ‘mommy’ and ‘baby’ to be collected together. Categories (including ‘members’) are therefore linked to particular actions (‘category-bound activities’) or
characteristics (‘natural predicates’) such that there are conventional expectations about what constitutes a ‘mommy’s’ or ‘baby’s’ normative behaviour, such that absences are accountable. For example, if a mother fails to look after her children, then such things may become the basis of a complaint.

One way in which the categorisation process occurs is via the rich inferential resources carried in categories available to members of a culture. For example, a woman may be categorised as a mother, wife or daughter. Each of these categories carries with it a set of category-bound activities, predicates or ‘rights and obligations’ that are expectable for a category incumbent to perform or possess (Watson and Weinberg 1982). As Widdicombe (1998: 53) writes:

> the fact that categories are conventionally associated with activities, attributes, motives and so on makes them a powerful cultural resource in warranting, explaining and justifying behaviour. That is, whatever is known about the category can be invoked as being relevant to the person to whom the label is applied and provides a set of inferential resources by which to interpret and account for past or present conduct, or to inform predictions about likely future behaviour.

The analytic interest focuses on the multitude of potential identity ascriptions available to members of a culture and:

> which of those identifications folk actually use, what features those identifications seem to carry, and to what end they are put … Membership of a category is ascribed (and rejected), avowed (and disavowed), displayed (and ignored) in local places and at certain times, and it does these things as part of the interactional work that constitutes people’s lives.

(Antaki and Widdicombe 1998: 2; see Stokoe 2012)

If EM and CA adopt a theory on identity, they adopt an indexical, context-bound theory, in which identity is understood as an oriented-to, recipient-designed accomplishment of interaction. Categorical phenomena are studied as phenomena of the sequential organisation of talk and other conduct in interaction. Unlike other approaches in applied linguistics, CA does ‘not share the premise of standard social science that interaction varies fundamentally according to sociostructural and cultural context’ (Kasper and Wagner 2014: 182). Thus research starts from the basis that an analysis of identity categories should be based on what people do and say in the categories they deploy, rather than on what analysts take to be relevant (e.g. Schegloff 1991, 1997). This is because any person may be categorised in an indefinitely extendable number of ways. To presume that gender, say, rather than any other category (e.g. class, religion and/or occupation, etc.), is the identity inscription that explains behaviour is to rush to explanation ahead of empirical evidence and to close down other potential relevancies (see Benwell and Stokoe 2010). Instead, using CA, ethnomethodologists start with what is demonstrably relevant to participants ‘at the moment that whatever we are trying to produce an account for occurs’ (Schegloff 1991: 50).

EM and CA are often aligned with constructionism and anti-essentialism, sharing a focus on the investigation of knowledge production (Lynch 1993) and understanding ‘the ways in which the world is rendered objectively available and is maintained as such’ (Heritage 1984: 220). Ethnomethodologists place reality temporarily in brackets, adopting the position of ‘ethnomethodological indifference’ (Garfinkel and Sacks 1970: 63) to study how people maintain a sense of a commonly shared, objectively existing world. For EM it is a ‘basic mistake’ to assume that we need to ‘adopt a theoretical stance on “reality” at all’ (Francis 1994: 105), partly because
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preoccupations about ontology inhibit analysis of members’ practices (Button and Sharrock 1993). In everyday life, people generally treat identity as a real thing that they know about themselves and others; when people question their own or someone else’s membership of an identity category – that is, make it accountable – this is something we can study (Speer and Stokoe 2011).

As noted earlier, this gloss of the theory of EM and CA and their relation in discursive psychology (see Potter and Hepburn 2007) are often criticised for their atheoretical and empiricist practices and lack of interest in social theory. For these reasons, the keenest – often caricatured – debate about identity theory and method has been between two sides (see Schegloff 1997; Wetherell 1998). However, it is also in the EM/CA field that we find a wealth of close analysis of naturally occurring materials that show how identity categories of all kinds figure systematically in, and are consequential for, social action: for example, in institutional care homes for the disabled (Antaki et al. 2007), doctor–patient consultations (Kitzinger 2005), neighbour complaints and police interrogation (Stokoe and Edwards 2007; Stokoe 2013a), gender identity clinics (Speer 2011) and classroom interaction (Benwell and Stokoe 2002). In the following section, we provide some empirical examples to show how EM and CA approach the analysis of identity in interaction.

Identifying ‘identity’ in interaction

In the following extracts, the interactional data are transcribed using Jefferson’s (2004) system for CA (see transcription key in Appendix). The Jefferson system does not just attend to what is said, but how it is said, by encoding detailed information about the way talk is delivered. While the data in this chapter are mostly from audio-recorded telephone calls, CA also examines video-recorded interaction and uses a variety of multimodal transcription systems (see e.g. Goodwin 2003; Laurier 2013).

We start by examining telephone calls to a sales organisation, before moving on to an analysis of patient complaints to an NHS telephone line. In everyday life, identifying and analysing identity is something that people regularly attend to, when progressing a particular course of action. In the first five data extracts that follow, which come from a collection of telephone calls from members of the public to a double-glazing sales firm, the call-taker (W) asks the caller (C) their name. Consider Extract 1, in which W is asking C for their surname. Extracts are prefaced with ‘WC’, which identifies our dataset (‘Windows Calls’) using standard conventions for doing so in CA.

Extract 1: WC-43

1 W: And u::m: can I take y’surname please ↑sir.
2  (0.4)
3 C: Ye:h mister Chu:rchwater.
4  (0.5)
5 W: .hh that’s (0.2) cee aitch you are <cee:> double you ay tee ee ↓are.
6  (0.3)
7 C: That’s it love,=
8 W: =#Lovely.# (0.2) Okκy,=is- is it just your↑se:lf? or is it mister’n
9 ↑missu:s? ↓or. .hh
10 C: Mister an’ missus yeh.
11 W: #Lovely.#
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Within a series of questions about the caller, W first establishes C’s surname. W solicits (line 1), then confirms the spelling (line 5) of the caller. At line 8, W then proceeds to ask a more complex question about C’s marital status. W first asks if it is ‘just your↑self?’ in a yes–no interrogative formatted question. Note the difference between W’s first question, which seeks information (W cannot guess at C’s name!), and the second substantive question ‘is it just your↑self?’ The second question contains a candidate answer; she does not ask ‘can I take your marital status?’

Before C responds, W reformulates the question as an alternate interrogative with options (‘or is it mister’n ↑missu:s?’), and a further trail-off ‘or.’ that C could complete if neither possibility has yet been named by W. W therefore offers, in pursuit of C’s ‘marital status’ category membership, different possibilities to select, confirm or reject. These redesigned questions handle the epistemic asymmetry between C and W; that is, while W displays her normative knowledge about how the world is organised in terms of heterosexual couples living together and buying windows, only C knows about his actual living arrangements and, furthermore, is entitled to do so; W is not entitled to make a best guess. W’s subsequent questions both prefer a ‘yes’ confirmation but the ‘or’ handles the possibility that C occupies an alternative category. But the questions, and their order of presentation, reveal what W takes to be the most likely category that C is a member of – single or married. In line 10, C confirms that he is ‘Mister an’ missus yeh’.

In Extract 2, a similar series of questions produces a different response from another male caller.

Extract 2: WC-17

1 W: That’s lovely, is it- ↑is it jus’ your↑↑self or is it mister an’ ↑missu:s?
2 that we’re ↑see[jing or...
3 C: [It’s mister] (it’s/just) misterh
4 W: Just mister Higgins,=↑that’s great stuff u:m, .hh
5 C [Yep.

At line 3, C’s overlap addresses W’s yes–no interrogative question, but rather than providing the preferred response ‘yes’, he states in full that ‘It’s mister’. Like many cases of overlapping talk, C then redoes his answer ‘in the clear’, outside the overlap. Here, he repairs his response by inserting the word ‘just’. W’s intonation in delivering the first question, ‘is it jus’ your↑↑self’, is hearably ‘bright’, perhaps conveying that being ‘just yourself’ is ‘no problem’ and neither marked nor requiring sympathy. This analysis is supported by W’s confirmation of C’s answer at line 4: ‘Just mister Higgins’, which is swiftly followed by an assessment ‘↑=that’s great stuff’. So the fact that C is ‘single’ (or widowed, or divorced) is not a problem for W; W has no stake in his answer. Such questions, particularly with the trail-off ‘or’, are similar to those found in speed-dates in which one dater may ask another, ‘have you been married, or …’ (Stokoe 2010b). In this context, it becomes clear that the party asking the question prefers a ‘yes (I have been married)’ response, but the trail-off handles the preference and positions the questioner as ‘happy with either response’.

In Extract 3, the issue of the caller’s marital status arises as W makes arrangements to visit the caller.
Extract 3: WC-33

1 W: :m: so I just need t’have a look on the diary now an’ see when I can:
2 arrange for: somebody t- to pop an’ see y’both.=obviously measure up
3 an’ .hh an’ get it quoted.=:m .hh oh ↑sorry I said both.=is it d- y’said
4 we:. Is it u- am I right in assuming it’s £mister an’ missus.£
5 (0.8)
6 C: Yes.
7 W: O::h right.=okay.
8 (0.2)
9 W: °Mister an’ missus.°

Here, W formulates her presupposition that the caller is married, by proposing to see them ‘both’ (line 2) and then in her subsequent question to W (‘Is it- u- am I right in assuming it’s £mister an’ missus.£’). Note the detail in her question, which is prefaced with an apology for making an assumption and ‘is it’, which presumably is headed towards the question ‘is it mister and missus’. However, she repairs this to ask whether or not her assumption is correct. Here is one crux of the matter. Titles – ‘mister’ and ‘missus’ – carry with them particular sorts of information in English. More specifically, the title ‘missus’ specifies a woman’s marital status in a way that ‘mister’ does not, making such terms highly gendered and the subject of much attention in feminist linguistics. But C is more entitled to know about his marital status than W, and so her presupposition that the company will visit ‘both’ is problematic. Her subsequent repairs reveal that and how ‘speakers are exquisitely sensitive to their epistemic positions relative to addressees, as a condition of developing a turn at talk’ (Heritage 2012: 31). The turbulence created by making, then correcting, presuppositions is revealed in the gap that develops at line 5, before C confirms that it is indeed ‘mister and missus’ at line 6, with a minimal ‘yes’ response (see Extracts 1 and 2).

In Extracts 1–3, W has addressed these questions to male callers. In Extract 4, W asks a female caller a similar series of questions. The problem here, though, is that ‘missus’ more directly implies another party in a way that ‘mister’ does not.

Extract 4: WC-23

1 W: an’ is it uh- is it just ↑missus or is it mister an’ ↓missus.=o:r [um-
2 C: [(Only me.
3 (0.2)
4 W: #U-# ok- ↑30 y- is it- i- it’s just yourself is it.=#sorry.#]
5 C: [ (Yeh-) ] ↑live with
6 my mum.
7 (0.2)
8 W: ↑↑Oh ↑right okay.,hh

W’s questions, again built from an assumption about the most likely domestic arrangements of the caller, generates the response ‘Only me’. Like Extracts 1 and 2, W starts with the single category, producing a version of ‘is it just yourself’, but then goes on to propose that it might be ‘mister and missus’. Only then do callers begin to answer. Unlike Extract 2, however, in which W repeats ‘Just mister’ without a glitch, her response to C is delayed (line 4, full of perturbation,
hesitations and cut-off sounds) and a formulation of what she takes to be the upshot of C’s response ‘so y- is it- i- it’s just yourself is it.’ Here, then, W struggles with a ‘single’ response to a ‘missus’ caller, which results in C providing an account for her situation: ‘Yeh- I live with my mum’ (lines 5–6). After another delay, W’s response displays a ‘change of state’ (Heritage 1984), ‘right okay,’ indicating that, until now, she has been unable to comprehend C’s domestic situation as a ‘missus’ who is ‘just herself’ – despite actually living with her mother. In Extract 5, W produces a third option for C to respond to.

**Extract 5: WC-2**

1. W: ↑Is it- is jus’ ↑mi:ster? or is it mister an’ mis↑sus? ↑or mister an’ a

2. £partner£ [that (we’re/we’ll) see-]

3. C: [ No i- ju- ] no it’s just mister. =

4. W: =Oh it’s just- yeah.

Note the smile voice as W produces the word ‘£partner£’. This suggests that, while offering it as an option for C, she does not expect him to be gay and living with a male partner, which is confirmed by C in overlap. Presumably if this was a serious and unmarked option, it would be delivered in the same way as the other items; here it is marked.

Overall, we have seen, much like Kitzinger’s (2005) analysis of out-of-hours calls to doctors’ surgeries, how matters of identity, in terms of normative assumptions about people’s category memberships, may produce turbulence in what are quite banal interactional episodes. This turbulence is different to Kitzinger’s, however, who focused on callers’ responses to questions that presuppose a heterosexual relationship. In her data, callers are put in the position of having to ‘come out’ as a lesbian or gay couple and household. In our calls, callers frequently have to reveal their domestic arrangements and relationship statuses to satisfy an organisational ‘script’.

In the second data set (Extracts 6–9) representing calls to a ‘Patient Relations’ complaints line in Scotland, patients and patients’ relatives address their complaint to a central operator. While complaining, callers regularly appeal to membership of the implicit category ‘reason- able patient’, which often involves distancing from the activity of complaining. This pattern supports the observation made by other researchers that there is ‘trouble’ around the activity of complaining (e.g. Edwards 2005) and that complaining is an accountable, even stigmatised, activity which ‘holds powerful negative connotations at the social level’ (Dewar 2011: viii). As we will see, membership categorisation activities play a key role in legitimising complaints, either through the announcement of explicit membership of particular kinds of ‘reasonable’ identity categories; or through attributes or activities tied to the category ‘reasonable person’. Through the self-constructions of normative, reasonable identity and behaviour (see also Stokoe and Hepburn 2005), patients’ narratives are able ‘to express or confirm the continuing integrity and moral virtue of the individual’ (Pollock 2005: 23).

**Extract 6: CC-17**

1. C: The:r (.) there= was a message on the answerphone so we have to go s-

2. go ↑tomorrow=

3. OP: =Right=

4. C: =But again she can’t drive ah mean i- it’s fairly restrictive bu-=
Here a caller ringing on behalf of his wife is complaining about inadequate and delayed information regarding an appointment. Legitimacy is built into the complaint whereby the caller justifies the basis of their grievance: delays to his wife’s treatment are causing practical inconvenience – the situation is fairly restrictive. OP affiliates to this turn with an assertion of the caller’s probable feelings about the situation, ‘it’s kinda impacting on both of yer’, what Labov and Fanshel (1977) have described as a B-event (an event about which the recipient knows more than the speaker). Between lines 7 and 10, the caller develops his complaint, but prefers it with further evidence of the couple’s reasonable disposition; ‘it’s one of those things’ is an idiomatic expression of philosophical resignation, one that reveals a rational appreciation that some inconveniences are neither intended, personal or rare. Drew and Holt (1988) have discussed how the figurative character of idiomatic forms acts in a similar way to extreme case formulations in the contexts of complaints: it avoids empirical detail and has moral force, acting to secure affiliation. Again an appeal to non-membership of the category ‘complainer’ is invoked to enhance and legitimise the grievance: ‘we’re not really complaining people’. Finally the caller verbalises his emotional state ‘I’m really annoyed’ (see Edwards 1999) to furnish his account with further moral authority.

Extract 7: CC-19

1 C: Ah’ve been ah’ve >listen< ah’ve been bashed an’=
2 OP: =Mhmmm
3 C: =bumped all ma days [ah’ve ] worked hard >all my days<
4 OP: [Mhmm]
5 OP: Yep
6 C: An’ that wuz- (.) but that’s nothin’ compared tae
7 [0.2]
8 OP: What you went through.

The caller in Extract 7 provides a narrative of his tough working life (‘bashed and bumped all ma days’) in order to relativise the more extreme hardship presented by the ordeal he recently experienced at the hospital. The caller asserts that he does not habitually complain; indeed he is usually stoical. Like other callers he uses extreme case formulations to enhance the contrast and emphasise the grievance ‘that’s nothin’ compared tae’, a turn completed by the operator reflecting her affiliation to his message. By relativising his suffering in contrast to more normative hardship, the caller provides more objective yardsticks by which others can assess his suffering and helps to ‘manage [the] complaint’s subjectivity’ and avoid ‘evaluative inferences’ about his own disposition as a complainer (Edwards 2005).
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**Extract 8: CC-18**

1. **OP:** So you had one vodka that [night]
2. **C:** [So I felt (.) uh-] hoh I’d only (.) one- had
3. ↑ one vodka=I mean that’s (0.2) but I’d have ta say (0.1) I think my
daughter had said on the phone he had had a drink >or summat like
that.<=
4. **OP:** =Right=
5. **C:** =Th- there <wuznae drink involved.>
6. (0.2)
7. **OP:** Mhuh

The operator’s first turn in Extract 8 clarifies a point of information discussed earlier in the patient’s narrative, which is that the caller’s daughter mentioned that her father had an alcoholic drink prior to his heart attack. The caller’s point in topicalising this issue is to stress its irrelevance to his condition, but the operator’s turn reveals an ambiguity, whereby her request for confirmation of the drinking of ‘one vodka’ topicalises it and enhances its relevance. The interactional trouble that this question provokes is revealed in the ‘defensive detailing’ (Drew 1998) provided by the caller in his next turn, where ‘one vodka’ is repaired to ‘only one vodka’. In line 7, this assertion of the drink’s irrelevance is upgraded to ‘there <wuznae drink involved>’, and in line 10 further moral work is achieved in the claim that if the caller’s drinking had been relevant he ‘wouldn’t even be phoning yer’. This exchange reveals normative understandings about how lifestyle choices such as drinking alcohol are thought to contribute to heart disease. In his repudiation of the identity of excessive or habitual drinker, the caller makes claims to a different kind of identity, that of responsible patient with the entitlement to complain. The implication here is that if a patient were responsible for his own ill-health he would not be able to make a legitimate complaint about his treatment. Again, the appeal to a reasonable and responsible identity, in implicit contrast to other kinds of patient identity, is what underpins and legitimises the grievance.

**Extract 9: CC-20**

1. **C:** We waited over an hour to be assessed by a triage nurse which is ↑fine
2. (.) cos (.) ↑you don’t mind waiting your ↑turn (.) and (.) and there was
3. just- full of drunk people.=and (.) injured people.=and (.) we were kept
4. waiting a further two ↑hours
5. **OP:** Right
6. **C:** For her to spend almost five minutes with a doctor.

In this final extract we see another example of the self-construction of a reasonable patient identity. The caller states that ‘we waited over an hour to be assessed by a triage nurse’, an utterance that might be thought to represent a complaint; however, this is confounded by her concession that this was ‘↑fine (.) cos (.) ↑you don’t mind waiting your ↑turn’. This utterance reveals the caller to be a reasonable person, one who recognises that hospitals are busy, understaffed and full of equally entitled patients. However, the turn develops to flag up other kinds of patients, whose identities are marked, possibly in contrast to the caller’s relative, as ‘drunk’ and ‘injured’. This
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detail contributes to the impression that the accident and emergency ward was a stressful and unpleasant environment in which to wait and the reasonable hour-long wait is implicitly contrasted with a less reasonable ‘further two hours’ and the very minimal time actually spent with the doctor: ‘almost five minutes’. The category attributes of ‘reasonable person’ (‘you don’t mind waiting your turn’) are strategically established in this account to manage the impression of the actual complaint as reasoned and fair.

In these extracts, we have seen how membership category work operates in the establishment and avoidance of certain kinds of identity. Complaining is a fraught, evaluated and thus accountable activity, and callers to the complaints line must work hard to have their grievances heard as legitimate.

Issues and ongoing debates
In a recent paper, Kasper and Wagner (2014) discuss the relevance of CA in applied linguistics. They point out that application in CA does not mean the same as in applied linguistics. Applied linguistics is interdisciplinary, drawing on a range of theoretical and methodological resources from across the social sciences to investigate ‘language-related real-life problems’ (ibid.: 186). In contrast, applied CA is transdisciplinary: it does not draw from a range of epistemological or methodological perspectives but instead offers a ‘coherent, integrated theory and methodology of interaction, and a large body of research findings, that these researchers can take to investigate their discipline-specific topics and problems’ (ibid.).

As we have seen in the data extracts, CA researchers work with ordinary data (comprising talk among friends and family members) as well as applied or institutional data (e.g. talk between colleagues or professionals and laypersons and so on). While there is some debate in CA about the nature of this, there is a substantial literature on institutional interaction, from studies of medical interaction, education, helplines, police and legal settings and other workplace and organisational encounters (e.g. Llewellyn and Hindmarsh 2010). Such studies give rise to potential applications of CA research and the practical uses to which insights may be put by practitioners. This development within CA did not necessarily characterise its initial programme of work, which was more purely focused on the mechanics of sociality as realised in interaction. Recent applied CA research has been anthologised in two significant collections – Applying conversation analysis (Richards and Seedhouse 2007) and Applied conversation analysis: Intervention and change in institutional talk (Antaki 2011).

Antaki (2011) explains that there is a distinction to be made between applied CA as ‘discovery’ (a means of shedding light on the institutional character and workings of particular interactional settings) and as ‘prescription’ (deploying the insights of CA analysis to suggest improvements to the service that an organisation provides). It is this latter interventionist sense that characterises some of the most recent, cutting edge and professionally oriented research in the CA scholarly community and it is to an example of such a programme of research that we now turn.

Applied conversation analysis and identity research
This section presents a case study that showcases how a CA/EM study of identity can lead directly to application. The case study is focused on a particular institutional setting, the community mediation service. These services handle disputes between neighbours, either at the
request of one or both parties or at the instigation of organisations, such as the police. In this section, we turn to mediation service encounters between mediators and clients, focusing on cases in which clients say something potentially sexist about their neighbour. That is, clients make identity matters (both their own, as the kind of person who might make sexist remarks and the identity of their neighbour) relevant to their complaint, leaving mediators in the position of having to respond. Mediators respond to sexism (and other ‘-isms’ like racism or ageism) in particular, patterned ways (see Stokoe 2015).

One way in which analytic observations may be turned into practical outcomes for the mediators whose institutional practices are under analytic scrutiny is through CARM. Over the past two years, one of us (Stokoe) has developed a method called the Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM), and delivered over 80 communication skills workshops to mediators funded by the UK ESRC (Stokoe 2011). In contrast to traditional role-play, which is steeped in problems of inauthenticity (see Stokoe 2013b), CARM uses research about actual interaction and identifies practices in the setting under investigation as a basis for training. As the following extracts illustrate, workshops focus on, for example, how to convert callers to services to clients of services, as well as other issues such as ‘opening a mediation’, ‘solution-focused questions’ and ‘dealing with -isms’. In the context of applied CA, CARM has been described as ‘the most significant … development’ (Emmison 2013: 6), and it demonstrates how designedly large-scale qualitative work can impact on professional practice.

Extract 10 comes from an initial meeting between a mediator (M) and four clients who, together, are describing a complaint about one of their neighbours and are ‘Party 1’ to the dispute. C1, C2 and C3 allege that their neighbour, a single mother with several children, goes out at night leaving her children unattended. M has not met the woman, ‘Party 2’, and may not, if Party 2 does not agree to participate in mediation.

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**Extract 10: DM-C02**

1 C1: D’y-r I don’t think she ca:res actually she’s not spoken to any
2 of all of us has she in [all the time she[’s be]en here].
3 C2: [No;] [No,] [never
4 spoke.
5 (0.8)
6 C3: Never spoke.
7 (.)
8 C3: She jus’ dresses up, (1.4) [(What’s it,)]
9 C1: [Like a tart.]
10 (0.4)
11 C2: °Ye:[h].°
12 C3: [Heh hah heh.
13 (0.2)
14 C3: Yeh.
15 (2.4)
16 C3: .hhh ↑but it’s::

The clients took every opportunity to characterise their neighbour in negative ways, in pursuit of affiliation from mediators, and to attribute blame for the dispute to their neighbour rather than themselves. Extract 10 completes a long discussion (see Stokoe and Edwards 2015) and
introduces a category (‘tart’) to characterise how the neighbour dresses, in ways that fit with, and perhaps formulate as a conclusion, much of what C1, C2 and C3 have been saying about her. Rather than being a person like they imply themselves to be (considerate, civil, responsible, interested in their children’s welfare, neighbourly), her interests lie elsewhere, in some kind of wanton and irresponsible self-indulgence. The way she dresses and the category that it invokes are tied to the same range of behaviours in which she goes out at nights, goes on holiday leaving her children at home, and fails to discipline them properly. Her inadequacies are not only behavioural but moral, psychological and generalised: it is her nature.

In CARM workshops, the extract is played to workshop participants, who discuss what sort of response they might make at line 17. Following their discussion, the rest of the extract is played, including what the mediator actually did next.

**Extract 10 (contd)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>(0.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>M: So i- is- is that the same response that everybody- y’know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>=I’mean y-y’say that other people (0.2) [in the street, I’mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>C2: [Yeh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>C3: [( ) talk t’you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>M: Ri::ght.=an’ o(c)- do they say anything he::r.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a delay, M does not orient or respond to C3 and C1’s collaborative categorisation of their neighbour as a ‘tart’; nor does she join in with their laughter. M does not, therefore, affiliate with their stance towards the woman. Rather, she asks a question about the woman’s interactions with other neighbours. As mediation is a process that involves bringing together disputing parties to talk about possible solutions, it is of interest that M asks a mediation-relevant question about the woman’s likeliness to participate in mediation.

Consider a final example. Extract 11 comes from an intake call between a mediator and potential client. It is in such calls that problems are first formulated and offers of or requests for mediation are made. The mediator’s job is to elicit a summary of the problem from the potential client; explain what mediation is, and offer it to them. C’s problem is to do with noise from his female neighbour, which he claims is exacerbated by her visiting boyfriend. We join the call as it comes towards its closing. C has agreed to mediate.

**Extract 11: EC-13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;Yeh&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>C: [.hhh I wouldn’t mi:nd the bloke’s most probably got a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>family of his own somewhere else. .hhh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>C: You kno:w?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>C: An’ ‘e’s comin’ down ’ere for a little bit of fa:ncey bit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>(1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>C: Heh heh .hhh d’you know what I me:an.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C suggests that his neighbour’s ‘bloke’ is already married, thereby implying that she is his ‘mistress’, or ‘fa:ncy bit.’ (line 8). After a gap develops in which M says nothing (line 4), C pursues an affiliative, co-member response from M, as if they are friends talking, or as two men, perhaps, rather than as mediator–client (line 5). M responds with a continuer (‘mm’), which aligns minimally with C’s general project of characterising his neighbour but does not affiliate or take a stance on it (for example, ‘oh yes, I know!’: see Stivers 2008). At line 10, however, C pursues M’s affiliation once more, asking him to display shared knowledge of, and a shared stance towards, what adulterous people are like. Again, in the CARM workshop, participants formulate, discuss and evaluate possible responses. Here is what M actually said in response.

Extract 11 (contd)

11  (0.5)
12  M: Ye:s I [understand] what you’re saying yeah:
13  C: [Y’knów?]
14  (0.2)
15  M: “Yeh”
16  (0.6)
17  C: Because [that’s what she’s li:ke.
18  M: [(Is it cos-)
19  (2.2)
20  M: Ye:::ah. hh okay.=so .hh w’ll- w- [I’m going to contact]=
21  C: [ ((coughs)) ]
22  =um: contact her […]

Like the mediator in Extract 10, M does not display affiliation with C. At line 12, he states that he understands what C is saying, but not that he agrees with what C means. Neither does he reciprocate C’s laughter. And, following further pursuit from C (line 17), M returns to procedural issues.

Because mediators are expected to display themselves as impartial, they avoid taking a stance towards the problems described by clients. However, as we see in Extract 11, clients will often pursue affiliation, or displays of stance, and often resist offers of mediation when such affiliation is not forthcoming (see Stokoe 2013c). In CARM workshops about ‘-isms’, participants see mediators doing one of three things in response:

1 Reformulating problems by deleting the prejudicial element;
2 Moving the discussion towards mediation or procedural issues;
3 Occasionally confronting clients.

They therefore get to see mediators dealing with actual interactional problems, as well as potential solutions to the conundrum of avoiding affiliation with problematic stances while keeping the client in mediation.

CARM provides participants with a unique opportunity to scrutinise real recordings of mediation and discuss best practice from actual interactions. The implications of CARM for other workplaces might include recording day-to-day activities, such as meetings. Staff could identify, and scrutinise, practices that may be problematically gendered, or problematic in some other way, as a basis for discussion and as a source of training materials. Crucially, for applied linguistics, we can see how participants and professionals understand and handle issues of identity in real-life settings that matter and ways in which language is central.
Summary

This chapter has outlined an approach to identity grounded in EM and CA. We have explained CA/EM’s distinct approach to, and understanding of, language as a site of social action. We have seen how it is in and through social interaction that ‘who people are to one another’ is a live concern. We have also illustrated the way CA research on identity can have a practical application in the communication training of professionals and, specifically for this chapter, in how to recognise and respond to the lived identity concerns of people in conflict.

Looking ahead, applied CA has much to offer applied linguistics. The success of CARM supports Heritage’s (2009) claim that ‘the examination of real data using CA is found by many to be a potent experience capable of triggering changes in attitudes and … practices’. But, as Kasper and Wagner (2014) point out, applied linguistics also contributes to applied CA. In particular, ‘applied linguistics offers a corrective to classic CA’s entrenched monolingualism, a limitation that CA shares with most social sciences outside of linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics’ (p. 200). CA, as a designedly large-scale qualitative method, by working with increasingly large datasets and across languages (e.g. Stivers et al. 2009), is broadening the set of linguistic questions that applied CA, as part of applied linguistics, can address.

Related topics

Positioning language and identity: poststructuralist perspectives; Discursive psychology and the production of identity in language practices; Critical discourse analysis and identity; Challenges for language and identity researchers in the collection and transcription of spoken interaction; Disability identities and category work in institutional practices: the case of a ‘typical ADHD girl’; ‘Comes with the territory’: expert–novice and insider–outsider identities in police interviews; The future of identity research: impact and new developments in sociolinguistics.

Further reading


References


Appendix

The system of transcription used is that developed by Gail Jefferson (2004) for conversation analysis, taken from Speer and Stokoe (2011).

Aspects of the relative placement/timing of utterances

= Equals sign indicates immediate latching of successive talk.
(0.8) Time in parentheses shows the length of a pause in tenths of a second.
() Period in parentheses indicates a discernible pause that is less than a tenth of a second.
[overlap] Square brackets mark the onset and end of overlapping talk.
// Double obliques in older transcripts mark the onset of overlapping talk.

Aspects of speech delivery

. Period indicates closing, usually falling intonation.
, Comma indicates continuing, slightly upward intonation.
? Question mark marks rising intonation.
¿ Inverted question mark marks rising intonation weaker than that indicated by a question mark.
Underlining Underlining indicates talk emphasised by the speaker.
Real:ly, Colon(s) shows elongation of the prior sound. The more colons, the longer the stretch.
: Underlining preceding colon indicates that the pitch rises on the underlined letters preceding the colon; the overall contour is ‘up-to-down’.
: Underlined colon shows rising pitch on the colon in an overall ‘down-to-up’ contour.
! Exclamation mark indicates animated tone.
- Hyphen/dash indicates a sharp cut-off just prior to the word or sound.
↑ Upward arrow precedes a marked rise in pitch.
↓ Downward arrow precedes a marked fall in pitch.
< ‘Greater than’ sign indicates talk that is ‘jump-started’.
> ‘Lesser than’ and ‘greater than’ signs enclose speeded-up or compressed talk.
<slower> ‘Greater than’ and ‘lesser than’ signs enclose slower or elongated talk.
LOUD Upper case marks talk that is noticeably louder than that surrounding it.
“quiet” Degree signs enclose talk that is noticeably quieter than that surrounding it.
huh/hah/heh/hih/hoh indicate various types of laughter taken.
(h) ‘h’ in parentheses marks audible aspirations within speech (e.g. laughter particles).
.hhh A dot before an h or series of hs marks an in breath (number of hs indicates length).
hhh An h or series of hs marks an out breath/breathiness (number of hs indicates length).
# Hash shows creaky voice.
$ or £ Dollar or pound sign indicates ‘smile’ voice.
* Asterisk indicates squeaky vocal delivery.
( ) Empty single parentheses marks non-transcribable segment of talk.
(talk) Word(s) in single parentheses indicates transcriber’s possible hearing.
(it)/(at) A slash separating word(s) indicates two alternative transcriber hearings in single parentheses.
((laughs)) Word(s) in double parentheses mark transcriber comments or description of a sound.

Other symbols

→ Arrow placed in the margin of a transcript to point to parts of data the author wishes to draw to the attention of the reader.