CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

PART 1

Theoretical orientations

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

1

Analyzing talk at work: an introduction

PAUL DREW and JOHN HERITAGE

1 Overview

This book is a collection of studies of social interaction and language use in a variety of institutional contexts. The interactions that are analyzed here are basically task-related and they involve at least one participant who represents a formal organization of some kind. The tasks of these interactions – ranging from the examination of a witness in court to a health check in a new mother's home – are primarily accomplished through the exchange of talk between professionals and lay persons. So the title of this volume, *Talk at Work*, refers to this: that talk-in-interaction is the principal means through which lay persons pursue various practical goals and the central medium through which the daily working activities of many professionals and organizational representatives are conducted. We will use the term "institutional interaction" to refer to talk of this kind.[1]

Institutional interactions may take place face to face or over the telephone. They may occur within a designated physical setting, for example a hospital, courtroom, or educational establishment, but they are by no means restricted to such settings. Just as people in a workplace may talk together about matters unconnected with their work, so too places not usually considered "institutional," for example a private home, may become the settings for work-related interactions. Thus the institutionality of an interaction is not determined by its setting. Rather, interaction is institutional insofar as

We would like to thank Max Atkinson, Steven Clayman, Charles Goodwin, David Greatbatch, Per Linell, Doug Maynard, and Manny Schegloff for their comments on an earlier draft of this Introduction.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

participants' institutional or professional identities are somehow made relevant to the work activities in which they are engaged. The studies in this volume seek to describe the institutional nature of the tasks and relevances that inform conduct in a variety of work settings. They examine how these relevances are established and how specific tasks are discharged through such conduct. And they depict the consequences which both may have for the character of the interaction and its outcomes.

This collection is unusual in at least two respects. First, the contributions are not studies of the same institutional domain. Whereas it has been usual in the literature to focus on one particular type of institutional setting (e.g. doctor–patient interaction [Fisher and Todd 1983; Heath 1986; Silverman 1987] or courtroom language [Atkinson and Drew 1979; Maynard 1984; Levi and Walker 1990]), this volume contains studies of a wide variety of different institutional contexts. We believe that this diversity encourages a comparative perspective from which it is possible to develop a range of analytical and thematic connections. And this may encourage a greater degree of theoretical coherence and cumulativeness in research than has previously obtained in this field.

The other respect in which this collection is distinctive also relates to the hope of developing a coherent, cumulative research perspective. All the studies here arise from a single research tradition, that of conversation analysis (henceforth CA).[2] It may perhaps seem surprising that a perspective which, as its very name suggests, is associated with the analysis of ordinary conversation between peers in everyday contexts should be applied to interactions which are evidently not "ordinary conversation" in quite this sense. Yet the data and research enterprises of CA have never been exclusively focused on ordinary conversation. On the contrary, CA research has been developed in relation to a wide range of data corpora.[3] Indeed it is for this reason that the term "talk-in-interaction" (Schegloff 1987a) has come to be generally used, in preference to "conversation," to refer to the object of CA research. There is nothing about the perspective and techniques associated with the sequential analysis of ordinary conversation which is inimical to the analysis of institutional talk. Part of our purpose in this chapter is to outline how it is that CA has generated the kind of studies exemplified in this collection, and how the distinctiveness of CA's

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

approach may yield special insights into how persons conduct their affairs in institutional contexts. Our hope is that this collection may help to consolidate a specifically conversation-analytical approach to the analysis of institutional interaction.

The contributions to this volume focus on conduct that is in various ways shaped or constrained by the participants' orientations to social institutions either as their representatives or, in various senses, as their "clients." These orientations have traditionally been researched in a variety of ways: through questionnaires and unstructured interviews, through ethnographic observation and participants' commentary to researchers in workplace contexts, and through self-reports and diary studies. By these procedures, sociologists have attempted to get inside the "black box" of social institutions to gain access to their interior processes and practices.

In contrast to such methods, the studies collected here attempt to gain access to institutional processes and the outlooks that inform them by analyzing audio and video records of specific occupational interactions. The objective is to describe how particular institutions are enacted and lived through as accountable patterns of meaning, inference, and action. The direct focus on recorded conduct has the advantage that it cuts across basic problems associated with the gap between beliefs and action and between what people say and what they do (Deutscher 1973; Stimson and Webb 1975; Abell and Gilbert 1983; Gilbert and Mulkay 1984). At the same time, this form of research may be regarded as a complement to more traditional observational and participant ethnographic methods of dealing with the same problems.[4] Insofar as recorded data from institutional settings can be subjected to repeated inspection which can enhance analytic treatments ranging from the interpretative to basic forms of quantification, an opportunity exists to bring new insights to traditional sociological analyses of institutional settings with additional data and with new and powerful investigative techniques.

In what follows, we sketch the position of CA as an approach to institutional talk within a more general set of approaches to action and interaction, outline the methodological and analytical framework represented in this approach, and describe the major growing points of research in the field. Readers who wish to proceed directly

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

to an outline of the contents of this volume should turn to section 8 of this "Introduction" (p. 53).

2 Convergences in the development of research on institutional interaction

The analytic outlooks expressed in this volume emerge in part from distinctive, but converging, lines of investigation in sociology, anthropology, and linguistics. There are two central tendencies in this convergence: (a) the development of sociolinguistic approaches to language that address the contextual sensitivity of language use; and (b) the emergence of analytic frameworks that recognize the nature of language as action and which handle the dynamic features of social action and interaction.

2.1 Context in talk: sociolinguistic perspectives

Sociolinguistic research into discourse and social interaction emerged in a context of competition with linguistic traditions that treat the constituent units and levels of organization of speech as if they were isolated both from one another and the interactional contexts in which they might occur. Banished from the ideal order of *langue* to the disorderly domain of *parole* where, Chomskian orthodoxy had it, little that was systematic was to be found: the sociolinguistic study of interaction initially seemed to have little to recommend it.[5]

Early indications from sociolinguistics that the world of *parole* might be more orderly than expected emerged in empirical studies of linguistic phenomena below the level of a sentence, for example the phoneme (Labov 1966) or address terms (Ervin-Tripp 1969). In his study of English in New York, for example, Labov (1966) found it necessary to take account of the dialogic contexts in which his data occurred. In noting the change from the unpronounced (r)s in *fourth floor* when a salesperson was first asked directions, to the voiced (r) in response to a request to repeat the direction, Labov connected a systematic phonetic variation to a change from a "casual" to a "careful" speech context. This was an important early step in the recognition that "purely" linguistic phenomena – here, the phonetics of speech – are not autonomous from their dialogic context in interaction.[6]

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

Thus, when linguists, in part, perhaps, stimulated by the results of CA within sociology, began in the 1970s to take seriously the collection and analysis of data which were not contrived but naturally occurring, and which were not limited to single sentences but included sequences of discourse, they were not just responding to the recognition that levels of linguistic structure and organization are interrelated. They also acknowledged that fundamental linguistic phenomena are significantly influenced by the interactive or textual context in which they are produced (Brown and Yule 1983; Stubbs 1983). With the developing acknowledgment of naturally occurring talk as appropriate data for linguistic analysis (Labov 1972), it became apparent that conceptions of sociolinguistic context had also to be modified. Apart from categorizing speech situations as either formal (status-marked) or informal, sociolinguistics had initially treated context in terms of the social attributes speakers bring to talk – for example, age, class, ethnicity, gender, geographical region, kinship, and other relationships. The impact of these attributes was treated as somewhat monolithic, drawn, as Goffman memorably remarked, "directly and simply from chi squaredom" (1964: 134). However, studies of data from natural social settings soon showed that the relevance of these attributes depended upon the particular setting in which the talk occurred – that is, whether the talk was conversational, took place in school, in courts, in business negotiations, and so on – and also upon the particular speech activities or tasks speakers were engaged in within those settings. In some cases, it was found, the nature of the social setting heightened the relevance of speakers' social attributes (e.g. Cazden 1970); in others, however, the activities in which persons were engaged influenced the talk in ways that overwhelmed the relevance of their social attributes (Goffman 1964).

A second major impetus to connect linguistic structure with social context derives from anthropological linguistics which, from Malinowski (1923) onwards, has stressed the sociocultural context of utterance as central to meaning and action (Duranti 1988; Goodwin and Duranti 1992). This perspective gained prominence with the emergence of the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1964) within anthropology. Hymes's development of the concept of communicative competence (Hymes 1972b; see also Hymes 1972a, 1974) expressed the growing confidence and sophistication with

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

which the contextualization of speech and language was being treated within anthropology and his 'SPEAKING' (1972a) model systematized the major growing points in the analysis of that contextualization. At the same time, a key collection of papers, *Directions in Sociolinguistics* (Gumperz and Hymes 1972), contained a range of studies that gave empirical substance to these connections.

In this context, a particular debt is owed to the work of Gumperz and his collaborators, who stimulated a reassessment of the dynamic nature of social contexts and the importance of linguistic details in evoking them. Gumperz (1982) demonstrated that any aspect of linguistic behavior – lexical, prosodic, phonological, and syntactic choices together with the use of particular codes, dialects, or styles[7] – may function as a *contextualization cue*, indicating those aspects of the context which are relevant in interpreting what a speaker means (1982: 162). By signaling interpretively significant aspects of the social context, they enable interactants to make inferences about one another's communicative intentions and goals. Using data from a wide variety of social contexts, Gumperz (1982) indicated the complex ways in which, in interethnic interactions, inferences from linguistic behavior are miscued through ambiguities and mismatches in these cues. The notion of "contextualization cues" thus offered an important analytic opening to grasp the relationship between language use and speakers' orientations to context and inference making. It embodied a more complex and dynamic view of context than hitherto, and suggested that a wide range of linguistic detail might be implicated in the contextualization process.

There is a significant convergence between the linguistic concept of "contextualisation cues" as outlined by Gumperz, and the sociological concept of "frame" developed by Goffman (1974; see also Bateson 1972). Goffman's notion of "frame" focuses on the definition which participants give to their current social activity – to what is going on, what the situation is, and the roles which the interactants adopt within it. In this analysis, behavior, including speech, is interpreted in the context of participants' current understandings of what frame they are in. His related notion of "footing" (Goffman 1981) addresses the reflexive and fluctuating character of frames, together with the moment-by-moment reassessments and realignments which participants may make in moving from one

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

frame to another.[8] These are sociological concepts that focus on the social organisation of individuals' experience of the situation or "context" which informs their own conduct and their interpretations of the conduct of others. They are, however, linguistically relevant in so far as participants negotiate frames and communicate changes in footing through "cues and markers" in speech (Goffman 1981c: 157). Tannen and Wallat (1987), for example, have usefully analyzed how a pediatrician selects and shifts between different linguistic registers according to whether she is speaking to a child or to the mother, and according to her particular activity (i.e. whether she is examining the child, explaining to the mother, recording her diagnosis, etc.). They further show that certain detailed aspects of the pediatrician's speech can be understood as the products of her managing the demands of two competing frames, the frame of consultation and that of examination (1987: 212).[9]

Goffman's frame theory has contributed to an increasingly sophisticated and dynamic approach to the analysis of social context. Instead of treating context as unitary and invariant, he has suggested a conceptual framework which captures the changing activity frames with their associated systems of relevance that can emerge within a given setting. In studies such as that by Tannen and Wallat, Goffman's sociological insights are combined with linguistic analysis to show the ways in which the details of language use are related to specific activities within an institutional setting.

Gumperz's notion of "contextualizing" and Goffman's conception of "frame" both relate specific linguistic options to the social activity for which language is being engaged. In combination, they have done much to advance and develop a more complex and dynamic analysis of the "context" of interaction. Their analyses of the relation of linguistic choice to context are resonant with Garfinkel's (1967) discussion of the indexical and reflexive characteristics of talk and behavior, with the precepts of "context analysis" (Kendon 1990), and with the conversation-analytic notion of "recipient design" (Schegloff 1972).

Overarching these particular gains, these studies and the wider "ethnography of speaking" framework with which they articulate have consolidated a key sense both of the contribution of cultural contextualization to the understanding of language and, more generally, of the relationship between language and the socio-

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

cultural order. The record is less clear-cut, however, in the analysis of action. Hymes (1972a) invoked the conception of speech acts to handle this, observing that "the level of speech acts mediates immediately between the usual levels of grammar and the rest of a speech event or situation" (1972a; 57). But while many studies in the ethnography of speaking show how actions are shaped by the cultural contextualization of utterances, there has not been an equivalent emphasis on the organization of social action *per se*. Rather, the nature of social action and its sequential organization have been explored more extensively from other perspectives, to which we now turn.

2.2 Talk in context: speech acts and discourse analysis

Perhaps the most vivid point of convergence between language and social organization arises at the level of *speech acts*. In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) developed the view that in the production of an utterance a speaker performs an action, and aspects of his analysis were developed in a more systematic and technical way by Searle (1969).[10] Searle's speech-act theory, with its focus on the rules and conditions through which a sentence is understood as a particular kind of action, involves a more restricted focus than the "activity" or "speech-event" domain addressed by the work of Gumperz and his colleagues. However, because activities or speech events are built out of particular component actions, speech acts are arguably central to the analysis of all forms of interaction. And, since analysis of the organization of social action has always been a central focus of sociological research, the emergence of speech-act theory was a promising development for sociology. It held out the prospect of a real and empirically grounded interface between linguistics and sociology that could, in turn, contribute to the emerging body of work on discourse and social interaction.

Labov and Fanshel's (1977) study of a psychotherapeutic interview represented a major effort to apply speech-act analysis to institutional discourse. The study was motivated by two distinct objectives. The first was to demonstrate that, in the way they perform their actions, therapist and patient give expression to their proper roles in therapy. This goal involved detailed interpretative

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-37633-4 - Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings
Edited by Paul Drew and John Heritage
Excerpt
More information

analysis; for example, Labov and Fanshel demonstrated the ways in which the patient, in making an evaluation, uses language which specifically displays her adherence to the therapeutic objective that patients should "be in touch with their emotions and be aware of what they are feeling" and gain insight into these feelings, including feelings of guilt (1977: 138 and 185; also Wootton 1977).

Labov and Fanshel's second, and more fundamental, objective is a theoretical one. It arises from their observation that coherence in discourse is not primarily a product of either the surface structure or the content of utterances. Rather, it is achieved in the connections between the actions which particular linguistic expressions perform (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 69–70). As Labov and Fanshel saw it, the production of discourse involves two distinct processes: (a) the speaker's analysis of a surface form as a given speech action; and (b) an analysis of its connections to other actions. Their objective, therefore, was to account for discourse coherence (a) in terms of rules which "translate" what is actually spoken into the speech act thereby performed and (b) in terms of rules that provide for linkages between actions. Both sets of rules are necessary to show how surface form, often through very indirect means, achieves a given speech action.[11]

The conjunction of these two objectives in a context of interaction which is, by common consent, often veiled and highly indirect led to a number of interlocking difficulties in Labov and Fanshel's analysis. First, in addressing the pervasively indirect character of much of the dialog, they were obliged to get from the surface form of utterances to their character as actions by means of contextually triggered "translation rules" (Gordon and Lakoff 1975). Yet, as Levinson (1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1983) notes, an indefinitely large number of such rules are apparently required to achieve this goal, which is consequently unattainable.[12] Moreover, the utterances in Labov and Fanshel's corpus can function as actions which can be understood differently at a number of different levels. The researchers made considerable efforts to formulate rules which account for different understandings of an utterance. But, as Taylor and Cameron (1987: 49ff.) observe, it was often difficult for Labov and Fanshel to determine how a particular utterance was actually understood by the participants and how the recipient's understanding of the utterance squared with the speaker's intention in

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org