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A *CA* VERSUS A *CDA* APPROACH TO CROSS-GENDER TALK-IN-INTERACTION

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Abstract: *This article attempts at demonstrating that language of talk-in-interaction is a resource that can provide direct access to the world and people's perceptions of it. Representatives of Conversation Analysis consider that the researcher should not impose variables such as age, class, race or gender on the analysis as critical discourse analysts do, and that these variables will only be considered relevant if the participants orient to them. Nevertheless, a correct understanding of the context in which the linguistic interaction takes place has been proved to be of paramount importance.*

Key words: *Conversation Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, talk-in-interaction, cross-gender.*

This paper aims at presenting a brief overview of Conversation Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, two approaches to the study of talk-in-interaction. Whereas the former looks for answers strictly within the boundaries of a given dialogue, the latter crosses the limits of the text at hand, bringing context into the analysis.

The following discussion is centered around a comparison between the two approaches, stressing on the importance of the context to the analysis of dialogue.

As early as 1993, Jacob Mey called Conversation Analysis a "minimalist approach" (185) which strictly operates within the boundaries of co-text and can only explain phenomena at hand. Mey stresses on the fact that understanding talk-in-interaction means "a correct understanding of the whole context in which the linguistic interaction takes place" (186). The following example demonstrates that a CA approach cannot explain certain categories of conversations where the understanding is based on meaning outside the excerpt.

A: I have a fourteen year old son
B: Well that's all right
A: I also have a dog
B: Oh I'm sorry
(Levinson cited in Mey, 186)

This conversation is taking place within the context of A trying to lease a flat. A mentions he has a son, information to which the landlord does not object. However, on hearing he also has a dog, B utters "I'm sorry", meaning that the leasing prospects have become rather dim. Mey thus proves that the social context is of paramount importance when analysing language in use.

Most mainstream sociology and psychology treat language as a resource that can provide direct access to the world and people's perceptions of it. In *Gender*

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Talk, Susan Speer treats talk that invokes descriptions of the world and the mind as a topic that is researchable in its own right (97). Speer's precept reiterates Harvey Sacks' hypothesis and reformulates statements by Hutchby and Wooffitt: "talk-in-interaction can be treated as an object of analysis in its own right, rather than simply a window through which we can view other social processes or broader sociological variables" (21).

Conversation analysts are not concerned with the underlying social, cultural and psychological messages that are rendered through talk, but with describing the ways in which speakers coordinate their talk to produce meaningful conversational actions. Each successive turn is a resource which helps participants establish how others understand their actions.

Drew and Heritage state that the interactional context is not determined by outside factors, but it is "continually being developed with each successive action" (18), and contexts are "inherently locally produced and transformable at any moment" (19). Thus, the analyst does not need to start the study having in mind the socio-cultural variables or any other information about the conversational context beyond the talk. Speer states that "the idea that social contexts do not 'contain' or 'determine' our actions represents a significant departure from most mainstream sociology which conceives of the social world in terms of two contexts or realms – the 'macro' context of social structures and institutions, and the 'micro' realm of local social processes and actions" (2005:98).

Identity and context can be formulated in many ways: speakers possess multiple descriptions of identity which are potentially available, but it is not in all interactions that they make use of all of them together (Speer, 2005, 115). Speer states that "this means that a whole range of purportedly 'extra-discursive' features of context, such as participants' age, class, gender, sexual orientation, participants' goals and so on, should not be assumed to be relevant to the interaction, or be imposed on the analysis by the researcher" (2005, 115). Contrary to Deborah Tannen's theory of genderlects, CA maintains that the analyst should not conceive of gender as a "pre-given variable or trait that determines the linguistic resources men and women use to speak, but instead treats it as something that is constructed and oriented to in talk" (Speer, 2005, 115). According to Schegloff, a CA approach "offers to the study of cross-gender communication a perspective that is different from the one given by critical, politically oriented and feminist researchers" (cited in Billig 573). Schegloff suggests that CA approaches social reality directly, examining it in the participants' own terms. He contrasts this with Critical Discourse Analysis, which, he claims, imposes its own categories on participants. Schegloff suggests that CDA, because it is driven by prior theorizing, finds itself in the impossibility of unveiling new things. Schegloff argues that CDA is often short on detailed, systematic analysis of text or talk, for instance as carried out in CA (1997). His opponents (Billig, Weatherall, 2000) agree that traditional CA minutely and correctly analyses talk in interaction, but also find that this work unnecessarily avoids further social analysis and critique, while being naive in such epistemological claims as limiting one's analysis to participant categories only.

Schegloff is critical of the approach in which "the participants' identities as men and women drive the analysis" (Speer, 2005, 93). Following Schegloff, the use of gender as an analytic category would only be appropriate when it is an observably salient feature of the participants' talk and conduct. Schegloff defends this judgement

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as it would, on the one hand, provide a solution to the problem of when to privilege gender over other possible dimensions of social identity that may also be relevant to the interactional context, such as age or ethnic background. On the other hand, it would prevent feminist researchers from imposing their theoretical preoccupations with gender on the text to be examined.

Ann Weatherall (2000) maintains "contra Schegloff that gender is omni-relevant in interaction" and Margaret Wetherell (1998) "aims to balance these two views of what counts as appropriate context" (Bucholtz, 53). Lakoff highlights the same opinion saying that "a complete analysis requires both [close micro-analysis and broad political analysis], and each level will inform and deepen the other" (166).

In Schegloff's example of a male-female telephone conversation, apparent interruptions, that critically oriented researchers might interpret as an example of male power and dominance, are explained from the point of view of conversational features that participants use regardless of their sex. Schegloff maintains that, since there is no explicit evidence that gender is directly relevant to the participants during the conversation, interpretation of the patterns of interruption and overlap along gender lines would be incorrect. The excerpt discussed belongs to a longer conversation between Martha and Tony who talk about their son's car being burgled:

1 Tony: W't's 'e g'nna do go down en pick it up later? Er
2 somethin like ( ) [well that's aw]:ful
3 Marsha: [His friend]
4 Marsha: Yeh h[is friend Stee-]
5 Tony:]That really makes] me ma:d
6 Marsha: Oh it's disgusti[ng ez a matter a'f]a:ct.

(Schegloff, 1997:173)

This example, instead of being interpreted as male dominance through interruption, on the Zimmerman and West model, is an illustration of how participants, irrespective of their sex, deal with weak agreements to assessments. In turn 1, "well that's awful" is an emotional response, namely an assessment of what happened to their son (the burglary). In Tony's turn, the pause signifies to Martha that he finished what he had to say. What follows in the overlap is an attempt to answer Tony's question. Once Tony has completed his assessment in the second part of his turn, Marsha says "Yeh" (4) to show agreement, and then she proceeds to have another go at answering Tony's question: "his friend Stee-". In 5, Tony performs an upgrade of his initial assessment, and in 6, Marsha utters a full agreement with Tony's assessment: "Oh it's disgusting".

Schegloff claims that it is solely by examining actual instances of negotiated interaction that we can explain context in such a way as to avoid using and perpetuating essentialist generalizations about gender roles. The analyst is not supposed to privilege his/her own interpretation, but "the orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings, etc. of the participants" (Schegloff, 1997, in Speer, 2002, 785). This entails that the researcher should not impose variables such as age, class, race, gender on the analysis. These variables will only be considered relevant if the participants orient to them.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin mentions a series of other researchers who criticize, like Schegloff, the association between particular patterns and gender: Hopper and LeBaron (1998), McHoul (1998), Stokoe (2000), Kitzinger (2000) (715-730). Hopper and LeBaron openly contrast the conversation analytic approach with feminist research: "we should not … say

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'oh, look, here's a man and a woman talking: let's look at how they talk; oh, we can make these conclusions about gendered communication'. But rather we should say, 'gender only becomes an issue when the participants themselves make it one and we can point to different things about that'" (cited in Stokoe and Weatherall, 707). So the researcher is not supposed to apply blindly traditional feminist theoretical work to any instance of cross-sex conversational interaction, but he/she should demonstrate "that and how gender is procedurally relevant for speakers" (Stokoe and Weatherall, 708).

Nevertheless, Stokoe and Weatherall are striving to demonstrate that gender is always relevant to interactions. They cite Ehrlich who concludes that the Schegloffian notion of participants' orientations is "too narrow and restrictive to adequately capture the significance of gender as an organizing principle of institutions" (in Stokoe and Weatherall, 709). One of the consequences of the Schegloffian perspective is that "it does not allow researchers to characterize interactions as, say, 'sexist' – no matter how tempting and obvious such a reading might be – unless such concerns are attended to by participants" (Beach, 2000, cited in Stokoe and Weatherall, 708).

In 1999, Michael Billig, in a response to Schegloff, suggests that CA is by no means "so methodologically or epistemologically naive as Schegloff suggests" (573). He claims that CA researchers bring presuppositions to the analysis too. Billig does not plead for the elimination of all presuppositions, on the contrary, he thinks that the epistemological and methodological naivety that Schegloff recommends is neither desirable nor achievable. Billig gives an example in order to demonstrate that prior judgements cannot be avoided. Before conducting the analysis, the researcher must make some judgements about the type of talk being studied (i.e. institutional, doctor/patient, domestic, etc.), and thus begin their research from an implicit sociological understanding. Categorizing the speakers as 'participants' or 'co-participants' reflects the analysts' understanding about the nature of the interaction being studied. Stokoe and Smithson suggest that CA provides "a new way of studying the links between language and gender and […] a useful tool for making claims about the relevance of gender in talk-in-interaction because such claims are grounded in speakers' orientations" (219). At the same time, the researchers assert that it is not only speakers' orientations to gender that represent a valuable tool, but also participants' and analysts' culture and common-sense knowledge.

Billig closes his article while defining the differences between CA and CDA: "a firm distinction would be misleading because CDA, like CA, encourages the close examination of spoken interaction; indeed, CDA often uses the methods and findings of CA. However, there are differences between CDA and 'traditional' CA. The specific tasks of CDA are frequently part of a wider analysis of social inequality. Moreover, CDA wishes to theorize the presuppositions that must be brought to the micro-analysis of interaction. CDA does not claim epistemological naivety in the fulfilment of its methodological tasks, but explicitly wishes to incorporate insights from social theory and other social sciences, including macro social science, into the analysis of particulars" (Billig, 576).

Ann Weatherall, the same as Billig, discusses Schegloff's assumptions. She highlights the fact that feminists philosophers of science have stated that in any analytic approach, impartiality is impossible. Schegloff himself, Weatherall argues, while claiming to limit the scope of

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the analysis to what the actors observably orient to, "seems to commit the very kind of act that he describes as self-indulgent" (2000, 287). He thus provides important background information about the parties involved: Marsha and Tony are Joey's parents, Joey is a teenager, Marsha and Tony live apart, Joey lives with Tony. This background information is by no means explicit from the excerpt presented, but gives the analysis coherence. Weatherall concludes that "even if gender is not explicitly privileged by participants as relevant to the conversation, it is an omnipresent feature of all interactions" (2000, 287-288). To make this conclusion even clearer, the linguist provides an example by Cameron in an article published in *Discourse and Society* in 1998. The utterance "Is there any ketchup, Vera?" produced by a husband to his wife, Vera, is used to demonstrate that gender subtly influences communication and social interaction. The wife does not understand the utterance to be a question with a yes/no answer, but a request for her to fetch the ketchup. Although there is no explicit reference to gender in this line, the pragmatic implication is clear an the analysis must obviously take the gender variable into consideration.

Schegloff and his followers caused a wave of indignation among CDA researchers. Speer, following Schegloff, arguments that an adequate discursive psychology does not need to venture beyond the limits of the text to explain why participants say what they do. She recommends, the same as Schegloff does, that analysts restrict themselves to "the orientations, meanings, interpretations, understandings etc. of the participants".

Arguing against the theories and methods of CDA, an explicitly political approach, Schegloff twice analyzes the same data transcript, first according to a feminist model, and second according to a strict version of CA. By looking closely at the sequential organization of the conversation, Schegloff builds his argument that what some feminist analysts might interpret as male power enacted through interruptions of the female speaker is instead an outcome of interactional issues, such as the negotiation of turn-taking, responses, agreements, and assessments. The researcher does not reject the possibility of a gender-based analysis of the interactional data, but he insists that feminist analyses of conversation be based on the clearly evident interactional salience of gender rather than on analyst's own theoretical and political concerns.

The application of CA to the study of gender has generated a heated debate, as articles by Billig, Stokoe and Smithson, Kitzinger, Edley and Weatherall demonstrate. Nevertheless, this debate by numerous scholars working in the fields of CDA and traditional CA does not imply "that these fields themselves are in conflict, or even that they are incompatible research areas. There is good CA-oriented work on talk that also addresses societal, political and critical issues. And vice versa, many scholars doing more critical work, for instance on gender, use conversations as data and analyse these at least partly from a CA perspective. Thus, this debate should not be framed as a false dichotomy between CDA and CA" (Van Dijk, 459).

In this paper I have offered a brief contrastive overview of CA and CDA, two approaches that deal with the use of language. My point has been that the researcher may broaden the scope of the study and reach a more refined set of conclusions while extending the analysis of a piece of talk-in-interaction beyond the limits of the participants' words, to a context that goes from physical surroundings and relationship between speakers, to broader cultural values and expectations.

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