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Ethnography and the Vicissitudes of Talk in Psychotherapy

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INTRODUCTION

Husband: I'm tired.
Wife: How are you tired? Physically, mentally, or just bored?
Husband: I don't know. I guess physically, mainly.
Wife: You mean that your muscles ache, or your bones?
Husband: I guess so. Don't be so technical.
(after some delay)
Husband: All these old movies have the same kind of old iron bedstead in them.
Wife: What do you mean? Do you mean all old movies, or some of them, or just the ones you have seen?
Husband: What's the matter with you? You know what I mean.
Wife: I wish you would be more specific.
Husband: You know what I mean! Drop Dead![1] (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 7)

As observers of married life in American culture, we can specify what the wife has done to exasperate the husband. We might satisfy ourselves

The order of authors has been arbitrarily determined because the chapter is an outcome of collaborative effort.

[1]This stretch of talk was a result in an experiment in which Garfinkel instructed his class to ask for clarifications of the meaning of everyday statements, thus calling into question common sense taken-for-granted structures shared by co-conversationalists. Had the husband, and not the wife, been in the class, a similar breakdown in communication could be expected.

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with the "explanation" that for whatever characterization the husband produced in his speech, the wife, in a distinctly formal manner, proffers alternative characterizations, each of which is both more technical and precise than those whose place they are meant to usurp. The alternative characterizations do not appear to be fulfilling a clarifying, motive-neutral function (i.e., to circumscribe the referred-to state of affairs with less ambiguity); after all, the wife's procedures are occurring in a situation of the type which normally bars such specificity. But, what type of situation had been cognitively expected and had subsequently emerged for this couple? Presumably, the husband's background expectancies as to what should count as an adequate characterization in such a situation were erroneous. More importantly, since such expectancies were taken for granted to be shared with his wife, it appears that he could not legitimate her "attack" by connecting it, through a routine motive ascription, to his wife's biographical or current interactional relevancies. Thus, his telling exclamation: "Drop Dead," the meaning of which can at least be partially glossed as: "I cannot reconstruct, for ongoing practical purposes, the 'personage' of my wife, for I cannot, here, now, through my available set of motive ascriptions, render her behavioral displays as instances of bona fide social action." (Blum & McHugh, 1971; Mills, 1940.)

Besides considering characterizations, situationally constrained expectancies, biographies, and motives in our attempt to illuminate what transpired between wife and husband, sooner or later we would need to address the *processive* nature of their interaction—that, for example, only after repeated substitute characterizations did they become topics for the husband's critical comments. Our attempt to link the segments of the husband–wife interaction might well result in a construal of what had transpired in terms of rules, or situation-specific violations thereof. For instance, when addressed with a question, the husband initially acts "in accordance with"[2] the well-known discourse rule: "Unless such and so normative conditions are not met, a recipient of a question is obliged to formulate some response to it." Next, we might note that the relation of speaking turns to accomplished consequences (such as exasperating the husband) is not simply one to one: at the level of social action, one speaking turn can accomplish several acts at a time. Just as it seemed reasonable to suppose that speaking turns are explicable in terms of a set of sequencing rules, so too, the succession of accomplished social actions could be accounted for by reference to sets of action rules.

[2]The use of rules in understanding behavior has taken two radically different forms: (1) behavior can be said to result from its conformity to underlying rule structures, or (2) rules can be said to be actively indexed in participants' attempts to construct a sense of orderly conduct (see O'Keefe, 1979 for discussion).

Following all of the above lines of inquiry, in more or less detail (e.g., note the absence of any mention thus far of statuses, roles, power, solidarity, social structure, or even sex differences), would permit us to characterize what happened between this couple, and about why it happened as it did. Our characterizations would be, for the most part, easily comprehended. This ease in comprehensibility occurs just because the goings on between the husband and wife in this setting are already assimilable for us to a particular type of happening, formulable with a set of categories dependent upon, and growing out of, our everyday knowledge. Although the means introduced above to explicate the husband–wife interaction do not all address this fact (i.e., that our membership in American culture predisposes us *not* to question the facticity of an "interaction" occurring between a "wife" and a "husband"), an ethnography of this same event would have to specify what had taken place in terms of what had been created and understood by the participants, *and* to specify this in a manner which would make explicit the cultural context making the existence of this specific happening possible. That is, an ethnography of this event would seek to specify both the cultural conditions sustaining the possibility for, and the interactional procedures actually utilized in, the participants' work in creating this situation.

The readers familiar with developments in the ethnography of communication could discern several fields of inquiry ingredient in the above introduction. Work in such fields as linguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, speech-act theory, and cognitive anthopology are here interrelated to such an extent that there is reason to speak of a "new" ethnography of communication.[3] Even so, with many of the above fields developing only after the Second World War, the new ethnography has not congealed sufficiently to permit a programmatic presentation of its theoretical premises and empirically confirmed axioms. Thus, our presentation of an ethnographically inspired investigation of language use in psychotherapy is a research-inspired amalgamation. What follows, then, is not a consummate ethnography of talk in psychotherapy. Rather, through our brief (1) presentation of the various fields of inquiry figuring in the new ethnography, (2) overview of previous ethnographically inspired investigations of language use in psychotherapy, (3) summary of Labov and Fanshel's (1977) Comprehensive Discourse Analysis, and (4) suggestion of topics in need

[3]A "new ethnography" has been developed as ethnoscience (Sturtevant, 1974). Its emphasis on the "cognitive models with which a society operates" (p. 154) is meant to augment, not replace, the central tenets of ethnographic methodology. Our use of the epithet "a new ethnography" is similarly intended to underscore the influx of related methodologies into the arsenals of ethnography.

of further research, we will attempt to define some broad boundaries within which the theoretical work of creating an internally consistent ethnography can progress and be utilized in psychotherapy research.

Academic Fields and Styles of Analysis Contributing to the New Ethnography

At one extreme, the new ethnography of communication can be seen to incorporate so many ideas from so many distinct disciples that its likelihood of achieving an autonomous character would appear quite small. For our limited purposes, it will suffice to present two overarching approaches to the study of the social organization of communicative interaction [1] the normative approach, and [2] the interpretive approach),[4] along with the speech-act analysis developed by the ordinary-language philosophers J. L. Austin and John R. Searle. In considering the normative approach, special emphasis will be given to sociolinguistic research. In considering the interpretive approach, special emphasis will be given to ethnographic research carried out by researchers native to the cultural milieu that they are studying. This overview of the normative and interpretive approach, along with our treatment of speech-act analysis, is meant to provide a framework with which to approach the following presentation of an ethnographically inspired analysis of psychotherapeutic talk.

The Normative Approach and Sociolinguistics

Sociology and linguistics, as disciplines, did not form an alliance likely to span several generations of scholars until relatively recently. Several reasons for this state of affairs have been suggested. For example, with sociology seeking to discover a set of criteria capable of differentiating forms of social organization, language, possessed by all known societies, and thought to function similarly within them, seemed particularly unlikely as a robust criterion of sociological interest. Similarly, with the Saussurean distinction between language and speech, language became the ideal object of science independent of the social contexts in which everyday speech behavior occurred (Giglioli, 1972). Language was conceived as an abstract and ideal set of rules internalized by native speakers. What native speakers did when they conversed was not

[4]In using this dichotomy, we have drawn on the work of Wilson (1970) and Leiter (1980). Readers are referred to Leiter for an especially informative and readable introduction to the interpretive approach.

considered to consist of "instances" of language, and was relegated to a distinct sphere of scientific discourse concerned with speech.

As some sociologists explored such topics as social stratification, mobility, and the interaction between status-reciprocal and non-reciprocal members of society, the role of speech became of thematic interest. Conversely, to some linguists, the idea that a societal member who had a complete mastery of his/her native language could nevertheless be completely ignorant of the appropriate ways in which to deploy it in everyday situations appeared untenable. Consideration of this problem led to the development of the concept of communicative competence—what a speaker-hearer must know in order to deploy speech appropriately within the varying situations in his/her society (Hymes, 1968, 1972a,b, 1974). Thus, grounds for the convergence of work in sociology and linguistics were set.

The work in sociolinguistics is nevertheless tremendously varied. The overarching aim has been to describe systematic relationships between forms of language use and forms of societal structure. Typically, variations in forms of language use are conceived to be a function of variations in selected aspects of social structure. Such a conceptualization presupposes means to articulate varied forms of social structure and language use. Sociolinguistics has thus sought to identify relevant sets of sociological and linguistic variables and has exploited standard distinctions developed in sociology and linguistics proper. For example, such classic sociological variables as social class, status, role, power, solidarity, age, ethnic group, familial relations, sex, occupation, and formality have all been utilized. The main focus of investigation is, then, on the ways in which language behavior varies with respect to situations uniquely described by some small subset of the possible values of these variables. Such investigations have been considered the mainstay of descriptive sociolinguistics, and basic to the achievement of a more theoretically oriented science (Fishman, 1972).

A sociolinguistic variable is defined as "one which is correlated with some non-linguistic variable of the social context" (Labov, 1972, p. 283). An example of work in descriptive sociolinguistics is Labov's investigation of the sociolinguistic variable (th) (i.e., the phonetic form of the voiceless interdental fricative in *th*ought, *th*ink, etc.) as it varied with class and situational variables.[5] Review of the following figure will reveal that "(1) In every context members of the speech community are differentiated by their use of (th), [and] (2) . . . every group is behaving

[5]Labov's efforts have not been confined to this correlational approach, and he has been a leading figure in espousing the possibility of rule accounts of linguistic behavior (e.g., Labov, 1972, p. 71).

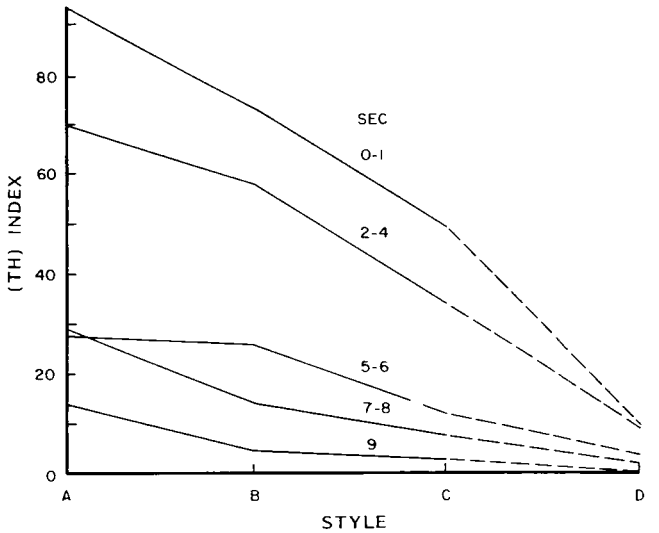

FIGURE 1. Stylistic and social stratification of (th) in *thing, three,* etc. in New York City. (Source: Labov, 1972, p. 284.)

in the same way, as indicated by the parallel slope of style shifting for (th)" (Labov, 1972, p. 285). On the basis of this study and others like it, sociolinguists have been able to describe the systematic effect variations in nonlinguistic situational factors have on speech productions.

Studies such as the above are distinguished, for example, by their choice of variables and their thoroughness, but not for their methodological innovation. Although sociolinguistic studies are routinely carried out using standard experimental methodologies, sociolinguistics as a whole certainly is not restricted to this method. Sociolinguistic methodology and forms of explanation also seek to explain language use in terms of invariant rules, rather than in terms of probabilistic laws. For example, in investigating the variations in the production of terms of address, Ervin-Tripp (1972, pp. 219–228; see also Grimshaw, 1980) has provided an analysis of the rules of address in America, nineteenth century Russia, and Yiddish. As one can see from the figure below, the rules are presented in the form of a flow chart:

Entering on the left, it is possible to pass from left to right, through a series of binary selectors, to a possible outcome in the form of one of the seven indicated forms of address. The determination of the form of address can be said to be a function of particular nonlinguistic aspects of the "situation" (e.g., whether the potential addressee is deemed to have the attribute "adult" or not). But, unlike the previous example, this

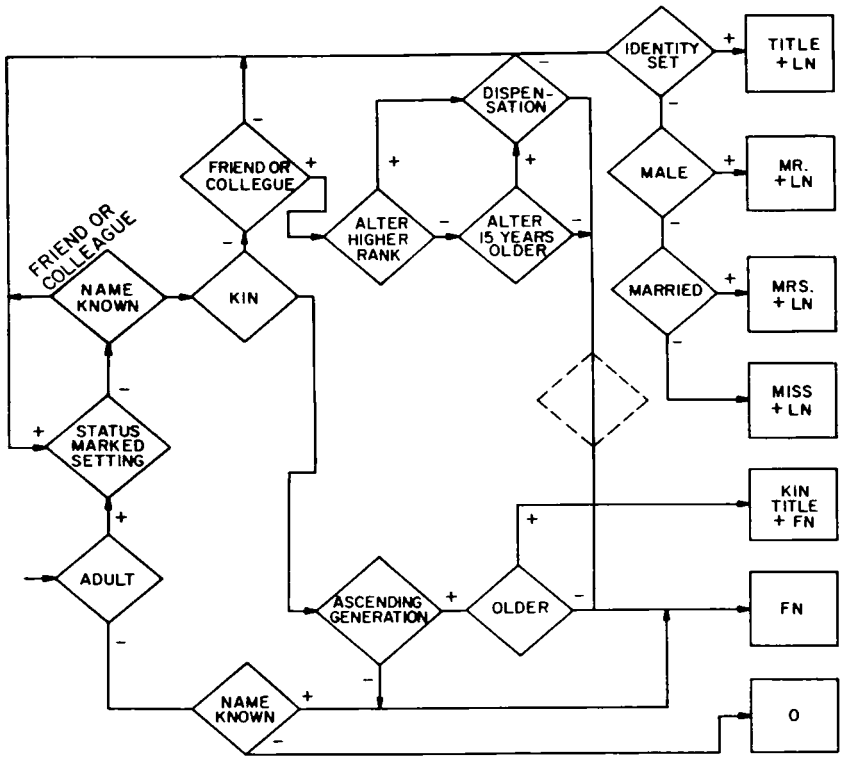

FIGURE 2. American address. (Source: Ervin-Tripp, 1972, p. 219.)

function cannot be described as a probabilistic one. The series of binary selectors in the flow chart express invariant constraints on the selection of an address term, given (1) an adult native speaker of English at the entry point, (2) the necessary applicability of one and only one selector at each choice point, and (3) a nonmetaphorical frame in which the address form outcomes might be appropriately situated (e.g., "look, _____, it's time to leave."). As a *logical* model of an American Address system, universal and necessary aspects are meant to be represented, not probabilistic outcomes based on empirical correlations. While the computer flow chart only implicitly embodies a series of formally stated rules, it should be clear that a shift in explicatory models has occurred in moving from Labov's study to Ervin-Tripp's rule-based grammar of American address terms.

Another shift is evident as well:

> The diagram is not intended as a model of a process, of the actual decision sequence by which a speaker chooses a form of address or a listener in-

> terprets one. The two structures may or may not correspond. In any case, the task of determining the structure implicit in people's knowledge of what forms of address are possible and appropriate is clearly distinct from the task of studying how people, in real situations and in real time, make choices. The criteria and methods of the two kinds of study are quite different. (Ervin-Tripp, pp. 219–220.)

In Ervin-Tripp's analysis, unlike that of Labov's, explicit use is made of the competence–performance distinction (for discussion see Miller, 1975; Pylyshyn, 1973; Stone & Day, 1980), which allows for the disassociation of conditions of language use from the sets of constraints applicable in the construction of a logical model. If this distinction is expeditious in terms of facilitating the construction of abstract logical models of language, it at the same time reduces the power and scope of such models to explain or describe what humans do most characteristically: communicate through their speech. Thus, it has been thought possible to account for the selection of our address terms utilizing such variables as the role and affectional relationship between interlocutors and the setting (Grimshaw, 1980, p. 800). However, it is important to keep in mind that such variables, or values thereof, are at least as abstract, as competence-bound, as the model in which they are specified. At the extreme, the term "interlocutor" in such a model is related to a speaker of English with little more verisimilitude than a prime number. Such hypostatization effectively restricts the role of such concepts in the formulation of theory whose value rests in the degree to which it illuminates human processes (such as those involved in formulating an address to one another) presumably extant in time, if not in space.

However, rule accounts need not be concerned only with abstract structures, or competence. In fact, rule accounts of aspects of production and comprehension of discourse, constrained by processes unfolding in space and time, have been undertaken with some initial success.

Rule accounts of the processive nature of conversational phenomena are themselves "processive": rule applicability and the set of outcomes defined by successive rule orderings are limited by constraints formulated to capture the temporal course of conversations. For example, in accounting for the turn-taking organization of conversation, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) develop a model composed of a set of rules, but which, unlike the model of the American address system, is processive in the above sense. Their model is composed of two components (a turn-constructional and a turn-allocational component) and a small set of rules. The turn-constructional component consists of the speaker's selection of a unit-type (e.g., a clause, a phrase, a sentence, etc.) with which to construct a turn. The first possible completion of the

first unit type in the speaker's turn constitutes a point relevant for the selection of the next speaker. The turn-allocational component is composed of two groups of techniques: (a) those in which a next turn is allocated by the current speaker; and (b) those in which a next turn is taken by self-selection. The rules are as follows:

> For any turn:
> 1. At initial turn-constructional unit's initial transition-relevance place:
> (a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, then the party so selected has rights, and is obliged, to take next turn to speak, and no others have such rights or obligations, transfer occurring at that place.
> (b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, be instituted, with first starter acquiring rights to a turn, transfer occurring at that place.
> (c) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, then current speaker may, but need not, continue, unless another self-selects.
> 2. If, at initial turn-constructional unit's initial transition-relevance place, neither 1(a) nor 1(b) has operated, and, following the provision of 1(c), current speaker has continued, then the Rule-set (a)–(c) reapplies at next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected. (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, in Schenkein, 1978, p. 13)

At this point, there seems little that would distinguish this systematic rule-account of turn-taking organization from the account of the American address system: one could graphically represent the system of turn-taking rules in a form comparable to that of the computer flow chart. However:

> the ordering of the rules serves to constrain each of the options the rules provide. The fact that 1(a) is the first applying rule does not entail that its option is free of constraints imposed on it by the presence, in the set, of rules which would apply if 1(a) did not. Thus, for example, given the applicability of Rule 1(b)'s option if Rule 1(a)'s option has not been employed, for Rule 1(a)'s option to be methodically assured of use it needs to be employed before initial transition-relevance place. Thereby, the operation of Rule 1(a)'s option is constrained by Rule 1(b)'s presence in the set, independently of Rule 1(b)'s option actually being employed. Similarly, for Rule 1(b)'s option to be methodically assured of application given the presence in the set of Rule 1(c), it will need to be employed at initial unit's initial transition-relevance place, and before current speaker's option to continue—Rule 1(c)—is invoked. For if 1(c) is thus invoked, Rule 2 will apply, and the Rule-set (a)–(c) will reapply, and Rule 1(a)'s option will take priority over Rule 1(b)'s again. Thereby, Rule 1(b)'s operation is constrained by Rule 1(c)'s presence in the set, independently of Rule 1(c)'s actually being employed. Having noted that lower priority rules thus constrain the use of higher priority options, it should be recalled that the constraints imposed on lower priority rules by higher pri-

> ority rules are incorporated in the rule-set itself. (Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson, in Schenkein, 1978, p. 13)

Thus, the reciprocally constraining functions of higher and lower priority rules in effect incorporate the temporal dimension into the structure of the rule set, enabling it to "comprehend" the dynamic processive nature of the phenomena of turn-taking organization. Admittedly, the rule set is abstract, but it is meant to render the processive character of turn-taking, and not the logical antecedents of hypostatized turn-taking outcomes, comprehensible. Its aim is to provide a structural account of actual constraints operative in everyday turn-taking behavior. In other words, it is deeply concerned with "the task of studying how people, in real situations and in real time, make choices" (Ervin-Tripp, 1972, p. 270). It is this latter task which Comprehensive Discourse Analysis undertakes (Labov & Fanshel, 1977).

The Interpretive Approach

While ethnographers of communication seek to identify stable patterns in the social fabric of the community under study, and while their conceptualizations have not been free from sociologistic formulations, a discernable trend in the ethnographic approach has taken shape. The most fundamental departure of the interpretive approach is its insistence that the "facts" of social life have situation-specific interactional histories. In other words, the "facts," which we accept naively as facts, ought to be seen as accomplishments achieved through the deployment of "fact-production methods" by society's members, who are all continually engaged in the work of establishing and sustaining a sense of social order for themselves and for others. The identification and description of such "fact-production methods" poses a problem for any ethnographer, but especially for those who attempt ethnographic descriptions of the life of their own culture or speech community. This is so precisely because of the culture's familiarity and the habit of cultural members to suspend any doubt as to the factual character of its structure and content. Nevertheless, the methodological prescription that undergirds the interpretive approach recommends that the researcher attain a position of neutrality with respect to whether or not everyday reasoning, and the facts which it engenders, are ontologically and epistemologically equivalent to the kind associated with "truly" scientific knowledge. Of uppermost sociological import is the discovery of the routine ways in which facts are co-constituted in everyday situations. The aim, then, of this approach is to discover the sets of methods employed in producing the situation-specific shared recognition of, for ex-

ample, status differences and situational formality (for contrast, refer to Labov's study above). Rates and correlations, from this perspective, appear to simply pass over the category of phenomena most worthy of study. Variations in the form of speech productions do not result from the systematic interplay of abstract sociological rule sets, but rather are the achieved characteristics of situations that they have been instrumental in defining.

Thus, the interpretive approach does not establish the significance of language on an autonomous level independent of the contexts in which it is used. Rather than seek univocal structures and referential determinativeness as the conditions impelling consensus in language practices, the interpretive approach stresses the essential ambiguity of language and the essential interdependence of context and meaning. Thus, "definitions of situations and actions are not explicitly or implicitly assumed to be settled once and for all by literal application of a pre-existing culturally established system of symbols. Rather, meanings of situations and actions are interpretations formulated on particular occasions by the participants in the interaction and are subject to reformulation on subsequent occasions" (Wilson, 1970, p. 721). Language rules are not generating mechanisms of action; instead, societal members are seen to actively reference rules in the course of their attempts to construct a sense of orderly communication. Referencing rules is a method employed in constructing a sense of social order. Such indicating and referencing is as much an ongoing activity of the situation as any other aspect (O'Keefe, 1979).

Thus, the interpretive approach construes the actor and interaction so that emphasis is placed on the individual's capacity to act in a purposeful manner, one that takes into account the relevance of the individual's aims as well as his/her capacity to alter such aims after having considered the perspective of the other. The individual is considered to be sense-making, and to act on the basis of his/her understanding of the situation. Rather than be seen as an object of such social forces as status, power, and institutions, the actor is seen to actively confer motivational relevance on such forces. They (i.e., "status," "power," etc.) become speech categories referenced in an attempt to construct orderly situations. Interaction, then, is taken to be what transpires between individuals on the basis of their activities aimed at providing each other with a sense of social order. Thus, interaction and the social order it projects are not given "facts," but are *accomplishments* attained in the process of securing a shared belief in the objective character of individuals and society at large.

The above brief presentation of two approaches to the problem of language use and sociality is meant to serve as a roadmap for what

follows. We hope that the reader is now in possession of enough of the landmarks to follow our presentation critically. Before presenting Labov and Fanshel's model, however, a brief sketch of Speech Act Theory will be attempted.

Speech Act Theory

The relation of *form* and *function* is a primary one in the analysis of discourse, in psychotherapy as elsewhere. A particular grammatical form may be used to express a variety of discourse functions, and as listeners we can recognize which function the speaker projects. How is this possible?

In one influential approach to the form/function relationship, the linguistic philosopher Austin (1962) presents an analysis of *How to Do Things with Words.* His account of speech acts introduced the concept of "performatives," sentences in which saying words count as the performance of an action of a particular type. For example, I may "promise," "warn," "estimate," "challenge," "argue," and so on by uttering certain words. To account for the ways in which "to say something may be to do something," he devised a tripartite distinction of the acts one simultaneously performs in producing an utterance:

> *Locutionary*—the act *of* saying something.
> "He said to me 'shoot her' meaning by 'shoot' shoot and referring by "her" to her."
> *Illocutionary*—The act performed *in* saying something.
> "He urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her."
> *Perlocutionary*—the act performed *by* or as a result of saying something.
> "He persuaded me to shoot her." (Austin, 1962, pp. 101–102).

In the analysis of conversational interaction, something akin to these distinctions will be employed. Austin viewed the locutionary act as tied to *utterance meaning* and the illocutionary act as tied to *utterance force,* and each act as expressive of the speaker's intentions in producing the speech act. The perlocutionary act is, however, an *utterance consequence* and may totally surprise the speaker, being a function as it is of the history of the listener. "Your suit is appealing" may be intended with the illocutionary effect of a compliment, but have the perlocutionary consequence of making me sad, since that is exactly what my deceased friend used to tell me. Austin (1962), Searle (1965, 1969), McCawley (1977), and others (e.g., Cole & Morgan, 1975; Rogers, Wall, & Murphy, 1977) have devoted their analytic skills to specifying the conditions or rules which mark utterance tokens as successful performances of speech acts of a particular type.

As an example of analytic research in this tradition, Searle's (1969) formulation of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful execution of the act of promising are presented in abbreviated form below:

> Given that a speaker S utters a sentence T in the presence of a hearer H, then, in the literal utterance of T, S sincerely and non-defectively promises that p to H if and only if the following conditions 1–9 obtain:
> 1. Normal input and output conditions obtain. . . .
> 2. S expresses the proposition that p in the utterance of T. . . .
> 3. In expressing that p, S predicts a future act A of S. . . .
> 4. H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer his doing A to his not doing A. . . .
> 5. It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events. . . .
> 6. S intends to do A. . . .
> 7. S intends that the utterance of T will place him under an obligation to do A. . . .
> 8. S intends (i-I) to produce in H the knowledge (K) that the utterance of T is to count as placing S under an obligation to do A. S intends to produce K by means of the recognition of i-I, and he intends i-I to be recognized in virture of (by means of) H's knowledge of the meaning of T. . . .
> 9. The semantical rules of the dialect spoken by S and H are such that T is correctly and sincerely uttered if and only if conditions 1-8 obtain. . . . (Searle, 1969, pp. 57–61)

The surface forms of promises can differ and still fulfill the conditions of promising. With such formulations, it is clear that the lack of a one-to-one form–function relationship need not hamper the systematic study of speech acts.

Austin (1962) suggests that the number of illocutionary act-types is equal to the number of performative verbs (such as "state," "request," etc.) in the language, with his estimate between 1,000 and 10,000. If we include not only performative verbs listed in the contemporary lexicon, but the products of our creative propensities to make verbs from nouns (e.g., Clark & Clark, 1979), such as "He Reaganed her right to work" or "He was really Don Rickled after his performance," the list of performative verbs would be longer. Searle (1969) argues that some conditions are common to many performative verbs, so it is possible that there exist some basic illocutionary acts to which all or most others are reducible. This issue is a pivotal concern of many recent attempts at developing speech act taxonomies (e.g., Fraser, 1971, 1974; Hancher, 1979; Searle, 1976).

Austin's (1962) analysis of speech acts assumes that each speech act has a *unique* illocutionary force, but locutions can be multiply ambiguous. This problem of the polyillocutionary nature of speech acts is con-

fronted in detail in Labov and Fanshel's (1977) Comprehensive Discourse Analysis. However, it is to earlier microanalytic studies of language in psychotherapy that we now turn.

Microanalytic Studies of Language in Psychotherapy

The importance of detailed studies of individual cases in elaborating psychological theories is well attested to (e.g., Davidson & Costello, 1969; Luria, 1968), and microanalytic studies of behavior have provided insights into *processes* of mental functioning not only in psychotherapeutic settings, but in studies of cognitive development (e.g., Langer, 1980). Linked to either frame-by-frame film analysis or video records, such microanalyses are a recent development that have yielded an understanding of the intricate structural and interactional complexities of conversational phenomena, whether in everyday settings such as classroom reading lessons (McDermott, Gospodinoff, & Aron, 1978; Mehan, 1979) or in psychotherapy.

The efforts of Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehey (1960) in their fine-grained behavioral analyses of 5 minutes of an audio-taped and filmed interview were revolutionary, both in the attention given to the context-determined meaningfulness of prosodic cues, voice quality and well-specified body motions, and in the nine general principles of interpersonal communication they derived from their study. They have provided a frame of reference for virtually all the subsequent studies in this tradition (e.g., McQuown, Bateson, Birdwhistell, Brosen, & Hockett, 1971; Labov & Fanshel, 1977). We present Labov and Fanshel's abbreviated version of the "Nine Principles of Conversational Analysis."

1. *Immanent Reference.* . . . No matter what else human beings may be communicating about, or may think they are communicating about, *they are always communicating about themselves, about one another, and about the immediate context of the communication.* (italics added)
2. *Determinism.* The only useful working assumption . . . is that any communicative act is, indeed, culturally determined: the indeterminate or "accidental" residue is nonexistent.
3. *Recurrence.* . . . Anyone will tell us, over and over again, in our dealings with him, what sort of person he is, and what his affiliations with cultural subgroups are, what his likes and dislikes are, and so on. . . . The diagnostically crucial patterns of communication will not be manifested just once.
4. *Contrast and the Working Principle of Reasonable Alternatives.* There is no way to understand a signal that does not involve recognizing what the signal is *not* as well as what it is.
5. *Relativity of Signal and Noise.* We communicate simultaneously in many channels, via many systems. Sometimes we may choose to focus attention on one channel, and as long as this focus is main-

tained, certain simultaneous events in other channels can validly be regarded *relatively* as noise.

6. *Reinforcement: Packaging.* Most of the signals that people transmit to other people are packaged: but in the normal course of events we are apt to respond only to some of the included ingredients, allowing others to pass unnoticed or to register on us only out of awareness. The phenomenon . . . is clearly related to what psychiatrists have traditionally called *over-determination.* . . . One observer may hear anger in a patient's delivery of a passage, while others detect remorse or depression or self-pity. They may all be right, in that the actual signals may reflect all these contributing factors in a particular varying balance. . . . The wise working assumption then is that always no matter how many possible contributing factors we have itemized, there may still be others that we have overlooked.
7. *Adjustment.* . . . Continuous recalibration of communicative conventions is always to be expected in transactions between human beings— . . . communicating and learning to communicate always go hand in hand.
8. *The Priority of Interaction.* A man knows what he is doing, what emotions he is feeling, what "choices" of response he is making, only by observing his own behavior via feedback. This input via feedback is subject to the same kinds of interpretation as is the input from the communicative behavior of other people.
9. *Forests and Trees: The Dangers of Microscopy.* There are important properties of things and events that are not invariant under change of scale. . . . Lengthy concentration of attention on the one event can easily blow up in significance far out of proportion to its original duration and its actual setting. One must not mistake the five-inch scale model for the fly itself. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, pp. 21–22)

In this same tradition, McQuown *et al.* (1971), present an analyzed and interpreted corpus of linguistic, paralinguistic, and body-motion data from the microanalyses of a family psychiatric interview. Much of this effort was directed toward developing theoretical frames suitable for the interpretation of such rich interactional material. The general limitation the authors note was that the *generality* of use for the analytic and interpretational frames that they developed in the context of a single-family interview remained to be determined. Reservations cut across dialectical variations in English, the transcription and interpretation of paralanguage, and the transcription and interpretation of varieties of body-motion behavior, both across cultures and in other regional and social groups of the same culture. As Labov and Fanshel (1977) and others have noted, the sheer magnitude of McQuown *et al.*'s effort, and the lack of reduction of their procedures to a parsimonious presentation, barred other investigators from attempting the necessary replicatory work. While we cannot recount their findings here, they laid the foundation for current efforts by revealing that insights could be garnered concerning human interaction from microanalysis that would be glossed

over by standard macroscopic, or content-analytic approaches. Labov and Fanshel's Comprehensive Discourse Analysis derives in part from these pioneering efforts.

COMPREHENSIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The problem addressed by Labov and Fanshel's (1977) procedure of speech act and conversational sequencing analysis concerns the relation between "what is said" and "what is done" in psychotherapy. Their Comprehensive Discourse Analysis is an integrative approach that both draws from and informs the work of psychiatrists, cognitive and social psychologists, philosophers of language, linguists, and sociologists. A central focus of the analysis is an account demonstrating the hierarchical nature of speech act sequencing in client–therapist speech:

> A conversation between therapist and patient or a reported conversation between a mother and daughter is an intricately woven fabric, and only part of it is visible at any one time. It cannot be treated like a string of beads, with linear connections that can be added and subtracted. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 272)

The sequence of steps in Comprehensive Discourse Analysis is presented in schematic form below.

Data Collection

Labov and Fanshel (1977) confined their analysis of language use in psychotherapy to an audio record. There are no inherent barriers to using video tape or film analyses with the methods of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis, but the observer effects of microanalysis may then be heightened (Labov & Fanshel, 1977), and choosing the units of behavioral analysis for nonspoken aspects of the interaction is complex. Studies by McQuown *et al.* (1971) and Scheflen (1973) of psychotherapy interviews have used film or videotape recordings, but to date studies utilizing only *audio* records have not been compared to studies using the same audio record supplemented by a visual record. It is not clear precisely what information is gained from the visual record, particularly with regard to the *interpretive* statements which answer "what happened"?. We would expect individual differences with respect to how much a visual record *changes* the analyst's account of "what happened." It is also not clear whether the *reliability* of the interpretative statements across discourse analysts would vary for audio and audiovisual records. These questions are all critical ones for those choosing a method of

analysis, but it should be noted that kinesic and proxemic analysis, at the current time, are not readily assimilable to Comprehensive Discourse Analysis as practiced by Labov and Fanshel (see Birdwhistell, 1970 and Scheflen, 1973 for analyses of body motions).

Transcription

Few people who first attempt to accurately transcribe a conversation realize how much unconscious editing one carries out in writing down what is "heard" (Ochs, 1979). Words are interspersed with forms of hesitation, false starts, various pauses, and self-interruptions, all of which may bear significance. Getting the "right" text is an open-ended process. In the two-person psychotherapy conversation Labov and Fanshel (1977) analyze, "the text after four or five editings presents a reasonably objective input to the analysis" (p. 355). Tempo and pauses are captured in their transcriptions by the use of a set of well-defined transcription devices. For example, one dot is used for each ½ second of pause, and punctuation marks such as commas, dashes, hyphens, periods, question marks, and underscoring (contrastive stress) are all used, or specified utterance characteristics. Undecipherable words are represented by "xxx."

Defining the Situation

This step of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis makes clear the contribution of sociology to the understanding and production of talk. Labov and Fanshel's (1977) view that "conversation is not a chain of utterances, but rather a matrix of utterances and actions bound together by a web of understandings and reactions" (p. 30) was derived in part from a consideration of social and psychological propositions implicit in communications in the psychotherapeutic setting. In defining the situation, Labov and Fanshel employ some parameters of the roles of client and patient that "condition" interactions. As one example, the paradox of social stigma in psychotherapy is a consequence of the client *seeking out help* from the therapist, whereas the goal of the therapy is to foster *independence from help*. Labov and Fanshel (also see Turner, 1972) show how the client's early assertions of self-understanding through narrative anecdotes are reactions to this fundamental contradiction, and they document other forms of resistance (problem mitigation; total silence) which stem from the constraints imposed by roles in the psychotherapeutic situation. Labov and Fanshel do not claim the client knows that their speech actions are influenced by the roles defined in their situation, but they do find distinct *styles* of discourse during the client–

therapist interactions that are occasioned by the psychotherapeutic interview setting. Such styles are designated as "fields of discourse.".

Identifying Fields of Discourse

In the 15 minute conversation Labov and Fanshel (1977) analyze, they find four distinct fields of discourse. These fields are distinguished by stylistic features such as lexical choices and predominant paralinguistic cues. Fields of discourse are a critical component of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis, since Labov and Fanshel claim that they determine many of the linguistic forms that occur in them. Their main role is to act as *interpretive* devices that help *the analyst* focus on stretches of talk—the family style in this case—pervaded by paralinguistic cues that are of great emotional significance.

Other conversations in psychotherapeutic settings may draw on a different set of fields of discourse, possibly overlapping with these (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 129). Dependent on the analyst's purposes, the fields might also be further refined, so that different family members might cue a different set of distinctive lexical items, emotions, and other discourse features. (Goffman [1974] has developed an account of frame

TABLE 1
Fields of Discourse

	Style	Abbreviation	Characteristics
1.	Everyday	EV	Continuous speech without pause, rapid level intonation. No emotionally colored or therapy-oriented language used. Few affective or evaluative expressions used.
2.	Narrative	N	Subvariety of EV. Account of events occurring in past. Typically begins without orientation to time, place, persons, and behavior characteristics of situation of narrative focus.
3.	Interview	IV	Many hesitations, long silences, false starts, creaky voice, falsetto, and volume. Vague pronominal references, and euphemisms regarding emotions. Topic of emotions/behavior as *objects* of talk.
4.	Family	F	Concentrated on bursts of expressing strong emotions. Special intonation contours carrying strong implication and affective meaning (some Yiddish in origin). Many idiomatic expressions of family use.

Compiled from: Labov & Fanshel, 1977, pp. 35–37, 128–130.

[field] shifts in conversation, and the notion of frames is discussed by Frake [1977]).

Identifying Episodes

In Comprehensive Discourse Analysis, an important structural unit of interactional analysis identified by Labov and Fanshel (1977, pp. 38–39, 328–331) is the *episode*. A general framework is provided for understanding "what goes on" within the session by the episode-parsing of the text. In Labov and Fanshel's work, the episode also provides a convenient unit for the structural analysis of interaction focused on a single topic.

For the reader, we present the authors' characterization of the five episodes comprising a single therapeutic session:

> Episode 1: Rhoda gives an account of how she "did the right thing" in calling up her mother and asking her to come home.
>
> Episode 2: In response to a question from the therapist about whether her Aunt Editha might help with the housework, Rhoda gives a narrative to show how her aunt would not help clean the house when she asked her and was altogether unreasonable.
>
> Episode 3: In response to a further question about whether Rhoda could arrive at a working relationship with her aunt, Rhoda gives another account of how her aunt would not prepare dinner even when she didn't work, and how Rhoda had to go out with her to eat.
>
> Episode 4: Rhoda returns to the problem of her mother's being away from home and gives an account as to how it came about.
>
> Episode 5: The therapist offers an interpretation to explain why Rhoda and her family are behaving in this way towards each other, drawing a parallel between Rhoda's mother staying away too long, and Rhoda's refusing to eat. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, pp. 38–39)

The most compelling features distinguishing these episodes are the shift of topic for the conversation at the episode boundaries and the *therapist's initiatives* for conversation. Although shift of topic may be a general feature for demarcating episodes, Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 331) indicate how the therapist's interventions are a consequence of the client's maintenance of the same topic *unless* interrupted, which may render this feature of episode boundaries of limited generality.

Transcription and Interpretation of Paralinguistic Cues

One of the most critical components of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis is assigning semantic value to paralinguistic cues. As any

speaker knows, the prosody carried by a crisp "thank you" can override the complimentary meaning of the phrase to yield an insult. The deniability of these cues in conversational interaction is to the speaker's advantage, but the analyst's dismay. Nonetheless, the general *types* of cues which influence utterance meaning are not a focus of controversy; it is generalizable principles of interpretation that have eluded discourse analysts to date. The principal contributions of the method of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis in this domain are: (1) the insight that the co-occurence of shifts of cues in *patterns* may result in emergent semantic properties, and (2) the concurrent use of graphic displays with text for the reader's aid in interpreting subjective cues such as the *pitch* and *length* of specific utterances.

Types of Cues and Format of Transcription

The types of paralinguistic cues that play a role in Comprehensive Discourse Analysis are volume, pitch, length, breathing qualities, and voice qualifiers. It may surprise the nonlinguist that reliable methods of transcription for these cues—which are *perceptual constructs*—have not been developed. The physically measurable parameters of such gradient signals as amplitude, frequency, and duration do not directly map onto their subjective analogs—varying across different individuals—for volume, pitch, and length. Labov and Fanshel provide the heuristics of graphic displays of the acoustic signal of key utterances in order to represent hesitations and pauses, for the physical dimensions of *amplitude* and *duration* (shown in prints from a variable-persistence oscilloscope), and to represent pitch contours, for the physical dimension of *frequency* (shown in prints from a real-time spectrum analyzer). Voice qualifiers such as "breathiness," "glottalization" (creaky voice), and "whine" are also used by Labov and Fanshel as cues playing a supportive role in the interpretation of cue patterns. Laughter and suppressed laughter also seem to carry semantic value for this client–therapist pair.

Terms for the Meaning of Cues

Deriving meanings from configurations of paralinguistic cues is an art rather than a science even in Labov and Fanshel's approach. Their set of terms for the meanings of paralinguistic cues divide into five sets: (1) *Negative emotional states*—tension, tension releases, exasperation; (2) *Affective evaluations of speaker's interactional moves*—mitigation, aggravation; (3) *Affective evaluations of listener's interactional moves*—sympathy, derogation, neutrality; (4) *Style*—formal, informal; and (5) *Reinforcement*—nonspecific, noninterruptive listener contributions such as "mhm." But no

unique set of cues yields any particular meaning in their system; instead, Labov and Fanshel's cue interpretations are based on recurrent *patterns of cues* that recur with certain textual themes. In the case of the patient whose talk they studied, the recurrent overlapping of hesitations, whines, and glottalizations with the theme of an inability to cope with the hurt from others' behaviors yields signals of *tension* indicating helpless anger (p. 191). Their research reveals the need for an account of the *general heuristics* for recognizing converging paralinguistic cues and textual themes for a given individual.

Expansion ("What Is Said")

This step of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis is intended to disambiguate "what is said" in the conversation by (1) a specification of unexplicit referring expressions; (2) the incorporation of *propositions* (or recurring themes) derived from the larger context of previous conversations and recounted events; and (3) the synthesis of text and a text-rendering of the meaning of paralinguistic cues. The goal of the expansion is to derive an ethnographically adequate understanding of utterances from the interactional context and history of the participants. Some parts of the expansion are at once difficult and controversial, particularly, as we shall see, the discovery of propositions. Expansion is also an open-ended process, without clearly defined limits, as Garfinkel (1967, p. 38ff), Clark (1977), and Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 50ff) have observed.

The expansion of cues into text depends on the analyst's rendering of those paralinguistic cues that *alter* the meaning of the sentence into explicit text. Labov and Fanshel use, as we have noted, *patterns* of cues that converge on a semantic interpretation, and in the example below, cues said to register "tension" and "uncertainty" are supported by a theme of uncertainty in the text itself:

TEXT	CUES
1.1 R: I don't . . know, whether . . . I—*think* I did—the right thing, justa-little . . situation came up . . . an' I tried to uhm. . . . . well, try to . . . . . use what I—what I've learned here, see if it worked.	Tension: hesitation, self-interruption; uneven tempo: condensation and long silences, 3 and 4 sec.

EXPANSION

I am not sure I did the right thing, but I claim that I did what you say is right, or what may actually be right, when I asked my mother to help me by coming home after she had been away from home longer than she usually is, creating some small problems for me, and I tried to use the principle that I've learned

> from you here that I should express my needs and emotions to relevant others and see if this principle worked. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 119)

A major task in the expansion consists of making explicit the knowledge shared by conversational participants that is packed into vague proforms and pronouns, such as "the right *thing*" in example 1.1 above. In this case, the discourse analysts had to hear the patient's entire narrative to find out that "thing" referred to "asking my mother when she planned to come home." Other anaphoric references are filled in by similar means.

A central tenet of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis, derived from the foundational work of Bateson and the Recurrence Principle of Pittenger *et al.* (1960; see above), is that speakers repeatedly allude to general propositions which concern them, but which they rarely state explicitly. Although it is possible that some propositions pervade virtually *all* conversational exchanges (e.g., X wants others' respect), Labov and Fanshel find in their case study that the key propositions arise in the patients' family interaction, (e.g., "[AD-X]" is the abbreviation for the proposition that "X is an adult member of the household") and in the therapeutic setting itself (e.g., [S]: One should express ones' needs and emotions to relevant others). The importance of such propositions in expansions of "what is said" cannot be underestimated, for many utterances only have *relevance* to the conversational context on the condition that propositions are anchor points of talk.

Labov and Fanshel generally discover propositions in their corpus of data by seeking out *explicit* formulations of the propositions at some point in the conversational text, and by seeking out what issues underly family disputes. In an important sense, it is the participants' *negations* of propositions that make the conversational analysts aware of the propositions. There are, of course, many general propositions that are not a focus of dispute and never arise in analyses but which, if they were to be challenged, would emerge as themes of concern (see Footnote 1, p. 303).

The taxonomy of propositions Labov and Fanshel found necessary for constructing coherent links between conversational transactions is too complex for review here, but the procedures of discovery they outline (1977, p. 57ff., and numerous examples) make clear the need for an approach based on the participants' points of view (also see McDermott & Roth, 1978), which are fundamental to any ethnography of conversation. Such an ethnography will inevitably depend on future attempts at working out the influence of *higher-order* propositions invoking such social units as institutions, organizations, and government on conversational transactions (Cicourel, 1979, p. 170). In Labov and Fanshel's set of propositions, such notions as "roles" and "obligations" are mentioned,

but the considerable philosophical (e.g., Rawls, 1972) and sociological (e.g., Gross, 1959; Turner, 1974) work on these concepts is not integrated with their approach.

Discourse Rules for Speech Acts, Interactional Analysis, and the Synthesis of the Sequence of Acts in the Flow of Conversation

"Doing things with words" is a fundamental concept of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis, derived from speech act theory (e.g., Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1976). But the philosophical analysis of utterances as speech acts has, in its concentration on linguistic structure only, not yielded great insights into the sequential coherence of speech acts. Labov and Fanshel (1977, pp. 58–59) argue that this limitation is understandable because

> the crucial actions in establishing coherence of sequencing in conversation are not such speech acts as requests and assertions, but rather challenges, defenses, and retreats, which have to do with the status of the participants, their rights and obligations, and their changing relationships in terms of social organization.

As we noted, speech act analysis has been constrained in this respect because of its assumption that each utterance represents only *one* illocutionary act, whereas Labov and Fanshel show how the patterns of conversational interaction are only rendered as coherent sequences if one assumes that each utterance may simultaneously express a number of different actions at various levels of depth in a hierarchy of speech actions.

Four hierarchical levels of speech acts are proposed, and an utterance may simultaneously carry out actions on each of the levels. The speech acts that they found in this therapy session are presented below:

The first level of *meta-actions* has to do with the regulation of speech, with the turn-taking and alternations between speakers that characterize conversation (Sacks *et al.*, 1974). The second level of *representations* are acts that have often been thought by analytic philosophers (e.g., Russell, 1940) to be *the* function of utterances. They index information or emotions as states of affairs, either biographical (A-events) or disputable (D-events) in nature. The third level of *requests* are acts integrally tied to the speech situation and further acts of the two speakers, A and B. At the deepest level, acts are *challenges* that are "any reference (by direct assertion or more indirect reference) to a situation that, if true, would lower the status of the other person" (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 64). At the same level, although not listed, would be *supports*, just the opposite of *challenges*. (It should be noted that the set of speech acts listed are only

SPEECH ACTIONS
(Verbal Interactions)

1. Metalinguistic

initiate interrupt redirect	continue respond repeat reinforce	end signal completion withdraw

2. Representations

A-events (in A's biography)

A	B	
give information express F demonstrate refer	reinforce acknowledge	

D-events (disputable)

A	B	A
assert give evaluation give interpretation give orientation	deny agree support give reinterpretation	contradict support

3. Requests

A	B	A
request X	give X [carry out] X put off	acknowledge reinstate redirect retreat mitigate
	refuse with account refuse without account	renew accept reject withdraw in a huff

4. Challenges

A	B	A
challenge question	defend admit huff	retreat mitigate

X = action
information
confirmation
agreement
evaluation
interpretation
sympathy

F = belief
uncertainty
exasperation
deference

FIGURE 3. Speech actions referred to in the interactional statements. (Source: Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 61.)

those *happening to occur* in the therapy session Labov and Fanshel analyze, yet many other speech acts such as flattery, promises, threats, boasts, excuses, and so on are possible. The voluminous and growing literature on speech acts could provide the interested reader with analyses of other acts used in psychotherapy.)

So far, only individual utterances have been considered. Yet the construction of utterances that are *somehow* cohesive in sequence is a remarkable feat of which mature speakers are obviously capable. Discovering these connections is at the heart of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis. The connections linking speakers' speech actions into a coherent web are said to be mediated by *rules*, often quite abstract in nature.

Two planes of conversational behavior are distinguished in Labov and Fanshel's (1977) analysis. In one plane is "what is said" (the text as expanded by cues, referent specification, and implicit propositions); in the other is "what is done," a hierarchy of speech acts that comprise their interactional analysis. They represent their analysis by means of a three-dimensional rectangle. The two-way arrow on the bottom right side represents *rules of discourse* that connect the two planes of conversational behavior, and these rules are said to mediate the *interpretation* and *production* of speech actions that are ingredient to the conversational interaction. The coherency of the speech actions in the conversational interaction is explained via the workings of *sequencing rules*, relating the cross sections of a discourse to one another. Sequencing rules explain the horizontal, sequential coherency of the abstract actions performed via talk, while rules of interpretation and production explain the vertical relations between the surface words spoken and the underlying actions carried out for cross-sections of the stream of conversation.

Rules of Production and Interpretation

The rules of production and interpretation which Labov and Fanshel have developed are said to enable a speaker to create, and a listener

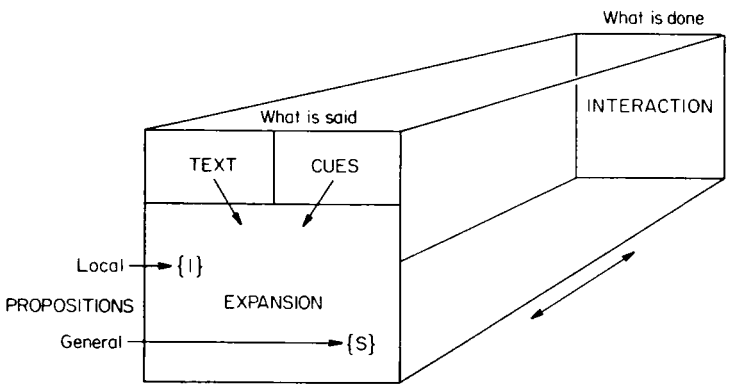

FIGURE 4. Discourse analysis: Cross section. (Source: Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 68.)

to understand, the actions that the surface linguistic forms convey—in other terms, the rules determine "what is heard," as well as "what is said." The discourse rules presented focus on *requestive, challenging,* and *narrative* conversational structures.

How do Labov and Fanshel "discover" such rules? As linguists, they could initially rely on their intuitions for constructing and evaluating conversations and attempt to formalize them as a rule, or like some ethnomethodologists (e.g., Schegloff, 1979) they could infer rules by relying on carefully transcribed texts of *naturally* occurring conversations. Labov and Fanshel utilize both tacts, also employing all the *contextual* information they have available. The rules formulated, they stipulate, must not be specific to the client-therapist under study but be as generally applicable as possible.

The Rule of Requests is one example that may briefly convey the format of a discourse rule. Taking the imperative grammatical form as the clearest formulation of the directive function of language, which requests also express, they formulate the Rule for Requests in this way:

> If *A* addresses to *B* an imperative specifying an action *X* at a time T_1, and *B* believes that *A* believes that
>
> 1a. *X* should be done (for a purpose *Y*) [*need for the action*]
>
> b. *B* would not do *X* in the absence of the request [*need for the request*]
>
> 2. B has the *ability* to do *X* (with an instrument *Z*)
>
> 3. *B* has the *obligation to do X* or is willing to do it.
>
> 4. *A* has the *right* to tell *B* to do *X*,
>
> then *A* is heard as making a valid request for action. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 78)

This rule screens out insults such as *up yours,* and other nonvalid requests, but as Labov and Fanshel note, many requests are made very indirectly, requiring other discourse rules. In particular, their Rule for Indirect Requests captures many requests made in the therapy sessions, and they generally work by altering the imperative form of a request through a mention of the preconditions of a valid request, cited in the Rule of Requests.

> If *A* makes to *B* a Request for Information or an assertion to *B* about
>
> a. The existential status of an action *X* to be performed by *B*
>
> b. The consequences of performing an action *X*
>
> c. The time T_1 that an action *X* might be performed by *B*
>
> d. Any of the preconditions for a valid request for *X* as given in the Rule of Requests
>
> and all other preconditions are in effect, then *A* is heard as making a valid request of *B* for the action *X*. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 82)

As examples of variants of the following indirect request actually made in the therapeutic session: "Wellyouknow, w'dy'mind takin' thedustrag

an' just dustaround?" Labov and Fanshel give the following alternatives:

a. Existential Status:	Have you dusted yet?
b. Consequences:	How would it look if you were to dust this room?
c. Time Referents:	When do you plan to dust?
d. Other Preconditions:	
Need for Action:	Don't you think the dust is pretty thick?
Need for the Request:	Are you planning to dust this room?
Ability:	Can you grab a dust rag and just dust around?
Willingness:	Would you mind picking up a dust rag?
Obligation:	Isn't it your turn to dust?
Rights:	Didn't you ask me to remind you to dust this place?

Labov and Fanshel formulate similar rules for putting off requests, relayed requests, requests for information, embedded requests, delayed requests, repeated requests, reinstating requests, and more interactively critical speech actions, such as challenges. They find that many requests, such as those of the wife in our introduction, are used for ulterior purposes, very often confronting social and emotional relations of the conversational parties (p. 93).

It is through the investigation of such rich discourse phenomena as these conflict eliciting speech actions that the hierarchical nature of speech actions becomes clear. As illustrative of the depth of the actions executed by a single utterance, Labov and Fanshel cite the following example. Here we first present the text, cues, and expansion, and finally the interactional statement to convey the set of actions accomplished in a single utterance:

TEXT	CUES
1.3 R.: $_{N}$An-nd so—when—I called her t'day, I said, $_{;}$"Well, when do plan t'come *home*? $_{F\ N}$	Exasperation: *plan to*, 'implication of deliberation'; contrastive stress on *home*.

EXPANSION

R.: $_{N}$When I called my mother today (Thursday), I actually said, $_{F}$"Well, in regard to the subject which we both know is important and is worrying me, when are you leaving my sister's house where (2): any obligations you have already have been fulfilled and returning home where (3): your primary obligations are being neglected as (4) you should do as (HEAD-Mo) head of our household?
$>_F >_N$

INTERACTION

R.: R. continues the narrative, and gives information to support her assertion (1) that she carried out the suggestion [S]. R. requests information on

> the time that her mother intends to come home and thereby requests indirectly ⟨4⟩ that her mother come home, thereby carrying out the suggestion [S], and thereby challenging her mother indirectly ⟨?HEAD-Mo⟩ for not performing her role as head of the household properly, simultaneously admitting ⟨STRN her own limitations and simultaneously asserting again ⟨1⟩ that she carried out the suggestion [S]. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 160)

Recall that the brackets and capital letter subscripts denote fields of discourse. The bracketed numbers and abbreviations refer to local and general "propositions," respectively:

LOCAL:
- [1] "I think I did the right thing"—Rhoda carried out the basic suggestion [S] correctly.
- [2] Mother has fulfilled her secondary obligations to Household 2.
- [3] Mother has neglected her primary obligations to Household 1.
- [4] Rhoda requests her mother to come home immediately.

General:
- [HEAD-X] *X* is a competent head of the household. [In this case "*X*" is "Mo(ther)".]
- [STRN] *X*'s obligations are greater than his capacities.
- [S] One should express one's needs and emotions to relevant others.

Finally, a "?" prior to a proposition, such as ?HEAD-Mo ,is a symbol meaning that the proposition is being questioned and challenged in the act. Similarly, propositions may be asserted, referred to, denied, or refused ( ). The directionalities of the arrows in the interactional statement

> indicate the relations to the actions performed . . . to the sequencing rules that may be operating, connecting one cross section with another. Thus *reference* is characteristically a leftward- or backward-operating action, which does not contain in itself immediate consequences for the next action to be performed. Assertions . . . are forward-looking in just the opposite sense. Questions characteristically include both the act of reference to some previous event or statement and a demand for a reply. Challenges are double-faced in the same way. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 127)

The arrows in their analysis very clearly indicate how the interdependence of different speech actions ensures that what had been called an individual speech act in fact points forward or backward in time, and constrains the set of appropriate or likely future speech actions. Labov and Fanshel represent the hierarchical structure of speech actions carried out in R's utterance as represented in Figure 5.

Thus far, we have presented only a *cross-section* of the therapeutic interview. These cross-sections must be synthesized into a sequence.

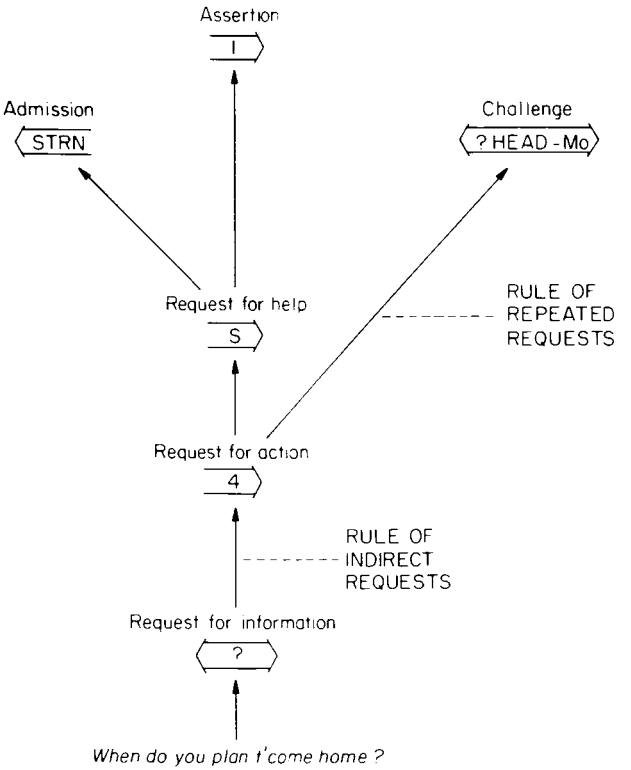

FIGURE 5. Interactional structure of 1.8. (Note: Propositions: {1} = R. carried out {S} correctly. {STRN} = R.'s obligations are greater than her capacity. {4} = R. requests her mother to come home. {?Head-Mo} = Mother is a competent head of the household [questioned]). (Source: Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 66.)

Labov and Fanshel refer to this analytic procedure as "assembly," and a look at how Rhoda's mother responded to 1.8 will serve as an example of such assembly. In essence, by "simply" saying "Oh, why"? in response, Rhoda's mother answers Rhoda's 1.8 at a number of different levels of abstractions. First, we present the text, cues, expansion, and interactional statement for the mother's response.

1.9

TEXT	CUES
R.: $<_N$So she said, $<_I$ "Oh, why?" $>_I >_N$	Surprise: *Oh*, 'contrary to expectation', Heavy implication: 2 1 2 information, There's more to this than meets the eye.

EXPANSION

R.: $<_N$So my mother said to me, $<_F$"Oh, I'm surprised; why are you asking me when I plan to come home, and do you have a right to ask that? There's more to this than meets the eye: Isn't it that [~AD-R] you can't take care of the household by yourself and I shouldn't have gone away in the first place, as I've told you before"? $>_F >_N$

INTERACTION

Mother asks R. for ⟨? further information which she already has, thereby putting off R.'s requests for action and for help ⟨~4, ~S⟩ and asserts indirectly that she knows that the answer to her own question is that R. is asking for help because she cannot perform the obligations of household, thereby ⟨?AD-R⟩ challenging R.'s status as an adult member of the household. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 166)

We have encountered the general proposition [AD-*X*] before; it represents the proposition that *X*, here Rhoda, is an adult member of the household. This proposition is at issue following Rhoda's complex speech actions of 1.8. Labov and Fanshel argue convincingly that "why"? as a response to "when do you plan to come home"? is not a coherent response at the surface syntactic level, because it doesn't follow from any regular ellipsis rule. By utilizing the unusual paralinguistic cues, their discourse rules of production and interpretation, and R's restating of this verbal encounter at a different point in the interview as "So she said, '*See* I *told* you *so*' " (i.e., that you couldn't hold status as an adult member of the household, and in fact need my help), Labov and Fanshel shows the coherency of the mother's response as one which hooks up to deeper levels of speech action that were expressed by Rhoda in 1.8, as depicted in Figure 6.

Rhoda's mother *puts off* Rhoda's request for action and request for help by a request for information herself. Rhoda's admission that ⟨STRN —her obligations are greater than her capacities—and her challenge to her mothers competence⟨?HEAD-Mo⟩are each answered by her mother's challenge in return, to Rhoda's status as an adult member of the household⟨?AD-R.⟩The subsequent response by Rhoda, not discussed here, is to *apologize* to her mother, rather than taking, for example, the options of insisting that her mother respond to Rhoda's request for action, or of challenging her mother's challenge.

In summary, Comprehensive Discourse Analysis requires the use of two types of rules. *Rules of Production and Interpretation* are said to enable a speaker to create, and a listener to understand, the actions which the surface linguistic forms convey. These rules map surface forms onto actions of particular types, such as challenges, requests, refusals, and so on. *Sequencing rules*, on the other hand, generate all possible conversational sequences of speech act types (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 110;

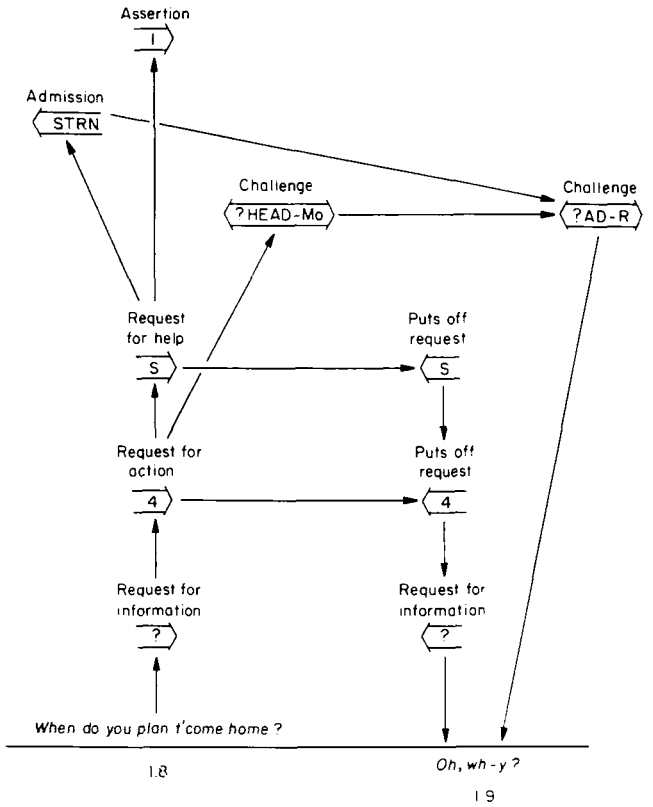

FIGURE 6. Sequencing of 1.8 and 1.9. (Source: Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 167.)

Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Sinclair, Forsyth, Coulthard, & Ashby, 1972), so that at any given point in a conversational interaction, one's choice of a speech-act type in production is constrained by sequencing rules setting out act types that are optional responses to the prior speech act type. Figure 3 provides an illustration of how the speech actions discussed by Labov & Fanshel are linked to one another. For example, a response to a *challenge* may be a *defense*, an *admitting* (Rhoda's choice in the previous example), or a *huff*. The rules of production and interpretation enable the analyst to derive "what is done" from the surface features of the utterances in conjunction with expansions, thereby yielding a cross-sectional analysis of the interaction that took place in the therapy session. These cross-sections are then assembled, by linking up the cross-sections into a sequence by means of sequencing rules.

POINTS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Implicit throughout our discussion of the new ethnography of talk have been calls for a more systematic analysis of the *meaning* of paralinguistic cues, which, although making key contributions to the interpretation of both "what is said" and "what is done" in the talk of psychotherapy, are subjected to analyses much more intuitive than systematic in their approach. We must also critically note, as have others in their reviews of Labov and Fanshel (Cicourel, 1979, 1980; Grimshaw, 1979; Russell, 1979; Streeck, 1980) that the speech acts of "challenging," "defending," and "retreating," appeal to role obligations, rights, and status of the participants, but are not guided by a theory of status, roles, or obligations. Discourse analyses which require the invocation of such terms will ultimately need to make explicit the theories in which they are embedded. For example Labov and Fanshel (p. 59) want to characterize the tenor of interactional relations in terms of power and solidarity, but what these terms refer to in the maintenance of face-to-face encounters is not explicated sufficiently to be of much theoretical use.

In addition, we have seen that the overriding goal of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis is to "discover the connections between utterances" (p. 69), and that such discovery depends on adducing both general and specific "propositions" whose status is at issue in talk, and whose negotiation depends on high-level organizational phenomena such as status, rights and obligations. In what way is this "discovery" procedure related to the scientific understanding of conversation?

Labov and Fanshel talk very little about the place of their study in the context of the philosophy of science or of social science. They note their desire to "understand" conversation, argue that it is a "highly determined" phenomenon, and repeatedly imply that *parsimony* is required in their formulation of a theory which is accountable to all the data. This dictum—that parsimony and prediction are equally critical for a scientific explanation—is worth examining:

> It is not enough to understand the conversation; it must in some way be reduced to general principles that will make other conversations easier and quicker to analyze and report. (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 27)

Two questions arise: (1) Is such a theory *predictive*, so that its explanation of the coherence of past conversational structures may be generalized in a specific manner to future ones? Or is this possible? (2) Can we have scientific understanding of conversation which is not *predictive* in this way?

With respect to the first question, Labov and Fanshel acknowledge that Comprehensive Discourse Analysis lacks *predictive* validity. For,

although a given speech act constrains the set of permissible speech-act types that may follow it coherently, neither the precise act chosen by the conversationalist, nor the lexical items used, are dictated in their rules of sequencing. Instead, we note that the rules of discourse utilized in Comprehensive Discourse Analysis have the status of evolutionary laws in biology:

> The modern theory of evolution, like all historical theories, is explanatory rather than predictive. To miss this point is a mistake that theoreticians of history have often made. Prediction would require not only a knowledge of the main force—natural selection—but also a prescience of all future environmental conditions, as well as of future balances between the quasi-deterministic effects of the law of great numbers and the purely probabilistic role of genetic drift. (Luria, 1973, p. 23)

In this respect, Comprehensive Discourse Analysis falls short of predictive success, but fares relatively well on postdictive explanation, like the modern theory of evolution. Have they achieved parsimony in their postdictive account of discourse? Although an improvement over the mammoth text of McQuown *et al.* (1971), Labov and Fanshel still required several hundred pages to explain the connectedness of 15 minutes of talk. This is the cost of microanalyses today, and many social scientists argue that this inverse relation between explanation and parsimony is inherent to the study of human conduct in general (Campbell, 1972; Cronbach, 1975; Geertz, 1973; Jones & Konner, 1976; Kaplan, 1981), and by extension, to the study of discourse.

Obviously, much work is needed before Comprehensive Discourse Analyses such as Labov and Fanshel's contribute to an understanding of our therapeutic arsenal—comprised mostly of "mere" words. However, the employment of rule accounts and the explication of interaction from the point of view of commonly shared knowledge is bound to broaden researchers' perspectives on the complexity of language use in psychotherapy, especially its coherent sequential structure. It is hoped that this presentation of Comprehensive Discourse Analysis will spawn further interest in such microanalysis.

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