



Susan A. Speer and Elizabeth Stokoe (eds.), *Conversation and gender*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 344

Conversation and gender offers a valuable contribution to the contemporary study of the relationship between language and gender (or sexuality) informed by the methods of conversation analysis (cf. Kitinger, 2000, 2007; Schegloff, 1997; Speer, 2002; Stokoe & Weatheral, 2002). Combining theory, methodology and practice, it offers the most recent developments in the field and showcases state-of-the-art research at the intersection of gender and conversation. The chapters offer unique insights into the minute details of the interactions to uncover how gender becomes relevant in a conversation. They thus constitute a successful endeavour at countering arguments claiming the inability of conversation analysis to address issues related to structural reality.

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this volume has a two-fold goal, theoretical and methodological. While the former is expected to broaden the understanding of the relation between conversation and gender as participants' concern produced locally to accomplish social actions, the latter is largely instructive and aims to show the practical affordances of conversation analysis (henceforth, CA) and related methodologies (membership categorization analysis and discursive psychology) for gender research through detailed demonstration of these methods in use.

The book comprises fourteen chapters: an introduction and thirteen relatively self-contained and original empirical studies that allow a reader to focus on selected aspects of gender and conversation. What unites these contributions is their reliance on audio- or video-recorded naturally-occurring data (e.g. domestic telephone calls, face-to-face conversations, police-suspect interviews, calls to helplines or children's play), their treatment of gender as participants' category and the identification of regular situated practices in parallel contexts.

Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction to the field. Based on an impressive overview of the existing literature on gender and language research, Susan A. Speer and Elizabeth Stokoe contextualize the distinctive analytic position of the current book and provide a succinct but rather solid critical discussion of two other strands of research i.e., the *sex/gender difference* approach and the *gender construction* approach. These competing bodies of work are contrasted with the CA-inspired approach to the study of gender and conversation. Here, Speer and Stokoe discuss the suitability of

CA for gender and language studies. In particular, they highlight the problem of relevance and procedural consequentiality as integral to CA methodology, as well as consider key distinct research questions addressed by current CA studies of gender. The chapter ends with a brief consideration of the issues and questions raised by the authors in this volume and lays out directions for future research. Importantly, Speer and Stokoe suggest one especially current guideline to produce CA findings accessible for use outside the academia.

The remaining thirteen chapters are loosely organized into four sections unified by the research questions they pursue. However, certain dialogic or polemic relations can be identified between the studies within and even across the sections.

Part I: Gender, person reference and self-categorization

The following three chapters seek to address the question of whether linguistically gender-neutral and linguistically gendered reference tools for categorizing oneself and others can become relevantly gendered in interaction. This section is opened by Clare Jackson (Chapter 2), who engages in a feminist analysis of naturally occurring telephone calls in order to demonstrate how the self-reference 'I', typically described by CA researchers as 'reference simpliciter' (Schegloff, 1996, p. 440) that masks crucial categorial information (identity-related categorization such as age, gender or ethnicity) about the speaker, is "rendered hearably gendered in the context of its production" (p. 31). Jackson extends the status of the self-reference 'I' and empirically demonstrates "its localized context-specific capacity for conveying [gendered and age-related] categorial information without having to name the category" (p. 36). Her analysis illuminates how social actors are explicitly or obliquely oriented to themselves as relevantly gendered when producing commonsense (gendered) norms and positioning themselves as individuals in relation to these norms. Given this specific sequential placement of the investigated phenomenon, Jackson's findings constitute a promising starting point for further research on other categorial information and category-neutral personal pronouns as vital tools for negotiating the relationship between the self and society in multiple social contexts.

Similarly, in Chapter 3, Victoria Land and Celia Kitzinger address the topic of first person self-categorization. Using data from ordinary telephone conversations, they investigate rare instances when speakers explicitly deploy various category descriptors (e.g. a schizophrenic, student or queer) to categorize themselves amidst their mundane social activities. Taking on board Schegloff's (1997) claims about the multiplicity of social categories and category relevance, Land and Kitzinger straightforwardly demonstrate that "the availability of a [gender] category membership is not necessarily sufficient warrant to claim that this membership is directly relevant to the

participants at that particular interactional location” (p. 61). Rather this is determined by locally accomplished actions. The undeniable value of this finding lies in its challenge to *difference studies* in language and gender research. Land and Kitzinger convincingly argue that “gender is not omnirelevant” (p. 63), and being a man/woman does not always presuppose speaking as one. By implication, the reduction of speakers to essentialist gender categories done by other research traditions runs the risk of disregarding participants’ orientations to their most salient aspect of identity at that moment.

In contradistinction to the first two contributions, in a theoretically dense Chapter 4, Noa Logan Klein explicates the salience of gender categorization in non-recognitional references to non-present third parties. These references are of particular interest to gender and language researchers as they are not used to be recognized by the recipient and function either as ‘information-free placeholders’ (Klein p. 66) which do not carry any categorical information about the referent or as ‘simple’ references (Schegloff, 1996, p. 440). Klein, however, argues that gender categorization is the minimum amount of information in non-recognitional person reference that speakers need in the basic practices of recipient understanding and recipient production of subsequent references. This makes “gender—perhaps even the—central mechanism for classifying people in English speaking cultures” (p. 66). It is particularly fascinating to see how, in Extracts 9 and 10, the recipients resort to their commonsense knowledge of the categories ‘teacher’ and ‘boss’ in their struggle to select a gender pronoun matching the previously mentioned referent whose gender categorization is obscure. Contrary to Land and Kitzinger (Chapter 3), Klein concludes that the systematic inclusion of gender categorization in non-recognitional person reference testifies to “the robustness of gender as a social institution and its omnirelevance in social life” (p. 82).

Part II: Gender, repair and recipient design

This section comprises three chapters that look into how the category of gender may or may not be relevant to the way speakers self-repair their talk and design it for its recipients. Elizabeth Stokoe (Chapter 5) extends the discussion from the previous section and focuses on the self-initiated self-repair of consecutive references to absent third parties to provide a more nuanced understanding of situated orientation to gender. Using audio- and video-recorded data taken from a remarkable variety of research sites (e.g. ordinary conversation, university tutorials, police-suspect interviews, online blogs, a sit-com comedy or neighbour mediation sessions), she explores four puzzling patterns of repairs where one referentially adequate gender category term (‘girl’, ‘woman’, ‘lady’) is replaced or juxtaposed with a consecutive one from the same category collection used to refer to ‘women’. And,

she scrutinizes them for speakers' orientation to gender. Stokoe argues that repairs are bound to recipient design and analyses her data through the lenses of the 'speaker indexical' nature of interaction (Edwards, 2005) whereby speakers, aware of their talk being evaluated by its recipients, design it to "manage both the object side and subject side of the actions their talk is to accomplish" (p. 93). Stokoe concludes that although these repairs are always linguistically gendered, they "may or may not be 'oriented to gender in the feminist, political sense" (p. 111).

In Chapter 6, Sue Wilkinson applies the concept of recipient design to a pre-fabricated stretch of talk ('signature formulation') that a female call-taker delivers to callers on a fibromyalgia helpline in multiple similar iterations. The recipient design of the institutional talk can be analyzable as sensitive to callers as both individuals and category members. Although the author briefly discusses her study in relation to the scripts of institutional interaction in the analysed helpline setting, this could be supplemented with a reference to Anssi Peräkylä and Sanna Vehviläinen's (2003) concept of the stocks of interactional knowledge', that is, quasi-theories of client-professional interaction. Nevertheless, Wilkinson's meticulous analysis of recipient-designed practices in terms of their sequence placement and interactional unpacking allows a reader to easily trace fine-grained details unifying or differing the presented data excerpts. More globally, the analysis also shows how by using CA methods, instead of relying on prior assumptions of gender, researcher can unveil how people do gender in interaction. That is, while Wilkinson claims that the call-taker displays an implicit orientation to gender when she proffers scripted talk to designated recipients whom she takes to be hearably female (this may initially seem to reproduce comparative 'sex differences' research), her CA-informed study however starts with practice first, and then she observes how the use of signature formulation correlates with "the presumed gender of the participants. Gender is thus endogenous to the interaction rather than imposed upon by the analyst" (p. 133). The chapter ends with a suggestion for future research to "specify how an orientation to gender (or some other category set) is consequential for the content and course of the interaction" (p. 133).

This section closes with Chapter 7 in which Alexia Hepburn and Jonathan Potter engage with one of the most emblematic strands of sex/gender difference research whereby tag questions supposedly index women's talk and their inner psychological state of unassertiveness and powerlessness (Lakoff, 1975, see also O'Barr & Atkins, 1980). The context-sensitivity of CA and discursive psychology allows the authors to empirically examine the function of tag questions in recipient-design where they are contextually linked to specific conversation practices. Through a rigorous micro-level analysis of three parallel fragments of interaction taken from different (institutional and conversational) settings, Hepburn and Potter contradict previous research and demonstrate a systematic pattern of how tag ques-

tions paradoxically become powerful invasive and coercive devices for actions that have already been rejected, and participants themselves do not orient to them as gendered features of talk. It needs to be stressed that the study cautions against making any haphazard associations of linguistic features with macro-social categories and psychological states without attending to interactional detail. In consequence, Hepburn and Potter's work unequivocally exemplifies an important research trajectory that breaks with traditional sociolinguistics and, in line with the tenets of this volume, treats gender as the participant's category, not the analyst's, and psychological themes as resources for action, rather than underlying identity-related states.

Part III: Gender and action formation

The chapters in this section share a common analytic interest in how gender is relevant, irrelevant or omnirelevant to the accomplishment of social actions. The first contribution (Chapter 8) in this section is from Susan A. Speer, who examines the role of reported third party compliments in transsexual patients' passing as 'real' men or women. The author successfully engages the triangulation of data sources taking her empirical material from psychiatrist-patient consultations in a gender identity clinic, telephone-mediated interviews with transsexual users of the clinic, and audio- and video-recordings of ordinary conversations. Across her data set, Speer observes a systematic deployment of reporting third party compliments that allow speakers to objectively evidence positive and/or gender-relevant features of their appearance, attributes or character in order to get positive assessments, and avoid the negative characterological inferences associated with overt self-praise and bragging. This is possible because of the embedded character of these compliments that creates an epistemic distance between the speaker and praise. Moreover, reporting compliments performs a subsidiary role to other more focal actions, which allows the transsexual speakers to "objectively evidence that they pass [...] as 'real' men or women" (p. 157), and hence do gender while they are involved in other activities not concerned with performing gender. Speer concludes that if gender is omnirelevant (although Land and Kitzinger in this volume claim otherwise), "it makes sense that doing, indexing and orienting to gender co-exist with, and get woven relatively seamlessly into the texture of interactional slots whose primary purpose is the accomplishment of other actions" (Speer & Green, 2007, p. 362).

Jack Sidnell's study (Chapter 9) scrutinizes another type of action, that is, joke telling that takes place between three men and a woman. Here the focus falls on the question, *D'you understand that honey?*, which a male conversationalist poses to his female partner. Sidnell's exceptionally in-depth analysis of participants' verbal and embodied conduct (although I must

admit it could have been a bit more succinctly presented), in particular his attention to gaze and body position, combined with the concept of participation framework allow him to uncover the nuanced ways in which the co-present participants partake in the activity under study. This multimodal analysis enables him to demonstrate how the question works to “convey a [gendered] categorization of the participants [...] as prerequisite to understanding [the joke]” (p. 198), and constructs it as designed exclusively for a male audience. It is worth noting that through the sequential analysis of the interaction, Sidnell empirically exposes how social actors readily “co-implicate a larger framework of ‘genders as separate sub-cultures’” (p. 184) to account for cross-gender miscommunication. More broadly, this study exemplifies that CA tools make it possible to excavate potential gender differences in talk without the analyst presupposing them before the analysis proper. Although the author himself remains critical of the cultural approach to the study of gender and language, the notion of gender difference emerges from his study as a pervasive set of ideas the participants themselves, not the author, locally use to make sense of surrounding reality.

Chapter 10 continues the theme of potentially humorous interaction. Wayne A. Beach and Phillip Glenn address the question of how orientation to gender becomes participants’ concern in bids and responses to intimacy. Based largely on contiguous phone calls between family members who report an incident about an ill mom’s smoking, the authors demonstrate how male callers attempt to launch expanded affiliation sequences through the enactment of gendered roles and the production of improprieties associated with gendered topics. Atrocious as it is to comically depict a family member dying of cancer, some recipients may either accept such bids in pursuit of intimacy (this is the case of Excerpts 10, 11 which do not come from the analyzed sequence of calls) or decline to self-affiliate with such improper talk and, as a consequence, orient to the gender work as subsidiary to other more focal social activities. On such occasions, the “gendering of the scene remains implicit [...] gender roles are present but not foregrounded” (pp. 214, 221).

Part IV: Gender identities and membership categorization practices

Each of the final four contributions focuses on how identities are constructed through membership categorization practices. In Chapter 11, Carly W. Butler and Ann Weatherall, similarly to Susan A. Speer, take up the concept of ‘passing’ and look into its situated realization. They offer good empirical translation of Garfinkel’s (1967) ground-breaking study of transsexual Agnes, who tried to pass as a woman. Interestingly, the contributors present a rare case study of a 6-year-old boy (William) who temporarily assumes an identity of a girl (Charlotte) in interaction with his classmates. His cross-gender identity becomes interactionally relevant, is oriented to,

consequential and accountable many a time during the analyzed spate of interaction. The authors identify three pervasive and interwoven interactional practices that help the children to “generate, maintain and ignore William’s new identity as Charlotte” (p. 232). These include the differential distribution of epistemic rights and responsibilities associated with a person’s identity and their social relations, the organization of person reference, in particular personal names and pronominal indexical references, as well as gender categorization activities. I must however say at this point that the use of ‘passing’ in this study is slightly perplexing. Its conceptualization diverges from the one proposed by Bucholtz (1995), who views it as “the active construction of how the self is perceived” (1995, p. 352) in order to claim membership in the opposite (e.g. cross-gender) category. While I can clearly see such a construction of the self in the presented data, however, other participants’ displayed (lack of) recognition of William’s aspired-for identity suggests not only that William’s passing was unsuccessful, and thus it should be qualified as attempts at passing, but also that it was part of the ongoing interactional business. Therefore, what Butler and Weatherall demonstrate is rather collaborative work on a cross-gender identity that accompanies William’s struggle to pass as Charlotte. Nevertheless, their analysis clearly illuminates that gender category membership and/or even a “quite remarkable claim of a change in identity and gender was [collaboratively] accomplished by rather ordinary conversational procedures” (p. 249). This finding can serve as a practical guideline for gender and language researchers on how and, more importantly, where to seek evidence of how social actors do gender in their everyday encounters.

By the same token, Marjorie Harness Goodwin (Chapter 12) also takes on board the question of how children proffer gender identities amid their everyday talk. Integrating the methodological apparatus of CA and membership categorization analysis with her ethnographic observations of two children’s peer groups, she looks into how these children’s formulations of gender accomplish affiliative and adversarial alignments or stances in the context of conflictual interactions, such as disputes, complaints or assessments. She argues that “through examining stance-taking we can come to grips with the concerns that deeply animate participants” (p. 251). For instance, the analysis evidences a heteronormative social order as a commonsensical resource used and maintained by the participants. Also, gender person formulations become crucial tools for maintaining boundaries of the children’s gendered groups and spaces. Goodwin’s analysis demonstrates an intriguing property of categorical formulations—indexicality. That is, gendered terms such as ‘girl’ when mobilized as intensifiers during disputes can carry either positive or negative valance as a result of prosody and embodied conduct, “the same person formulation can have very different meanings depending on the interactive context in which it emerges, as it takes its meaning from the activity-in-progress being produced through its utterance” (p. 268).

In Chapter 13, Angela Cora Garcia and Lisa M. Fisher look into the institutional context of divorce mediation where the category of gender emerges as particularly salient. Drawing on a video-taped divorce mediation session, the authors explore how gender inequality is collaboratively constructed by male and female participants in interaction. The affordances of CA integrated with an interpretative analysis allow the authors to uncover how participants implicitly rely on their own experience of family and commonsensical assumptions regarding the gendered distribution of spousal and parental roles in the traditional family unit in order to make strategic claims for custody of their offspring. It is interesting to observe how through the details of talk “participants collaboratively construct the local micro-political gender order” (p. 291) to the wife’s disadvantage as one party to this collaboration. This is quite unsettling given the interactional work of the skillful and well-trained mediators, and their professional theories of interaction against gender bias. I must also acknowledge the relevance of the findings to the professional concerns of divorce mediators. Although other studies in the volume (cf. Hepburn & Potter) do have the potential to address acute social problems, their authors—regrettably—silence this possibility. Yet, Garcia and Fisher attend to the issue of practical relevance directly in their concluding remarks. This testifies to their sensitivity to real-life problems and, more globally, constitutes an indispensable step for creating a new tradition of applied CA research.

The volume concludes with Chapter 14 by Jakob Cromdal, who combining the methods and insights of CA and membership categorization analysis examines how children evoke, produce and exploit “some culturally distributed notions of gendered behaviour” (p. 295). Not only does Cromdal detail how the category of gender—as a practical concern—is orchestrated to deal with local matters of participation in mundane peer activities (likewise Chapter 11), but he also presents how “social and moral orders are invoked and locally produced” (p. 295) in interaction. It must also be stressed that Cromdal’s study uses bilingual English-Swedish video-recorded conversations and is the only contribution in this volume that draws on non-English-language data. This comes as a surprise as gender is ultimately bound up with culture and language, and studies considering multilingual and multicultural data could greatly enrich our understanding of gender vernacular knowledge and sensitize us to how it is oriented to in other societies.

In sum, *Conversation and gender* has all that a study on the intricate relation between gender and conversation should possess. It integrates theory, methodology and practice. A great asset of this publication is its rebuttal of charges against CA as too rigorous to address issues related to structural reality. The studies in this volume problematize long-lasting assumptions regarding gender and language use generated by other research traditions which reified gender essentialism and advocated gender constructionism. This would not be possible without the current ethnomethodological

understanding of gender as participants' category and CA attention to interactional detail. The contributions in this volume address some of the inconsistencies engendered by the previous studies and further or nuance the existing scholarly findings of other CA-inspired work. Also, to varying degrees they engage with the debate on gender omnirelevance and feminist CA as a separate field of study.

This collection of papers is rather too specialized to be treated as an introduction by newcomers to the field of gender and language within the CA perspective. Part of the problem is the technical machinery of CA as a methodology. Nevertheless, the empirical studies yield fresh insights into how gender is drawn upon in social encounters, and how it can be studied as an empirical phenomenon. They also provide inspirations for researchers, raise new questions for future research trajectories in the field and bring to the fore a plethora of new research sites from which to draw audio-recorded but more increasingly video-recorded empirical data. Finally, fine-grained analyses of talk-in-interaction make excellent demonstrations for researchers of how CA-informed studies of gender should be executed (see also Antaki, 2011).

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