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**Psychological matters in institutional interaction:
Insights and interventions from discursive psychology and
conversation analysis**

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Abstract

In this paper, I describe how psychologists who work with language – in particular, naturally-occurring social interaction – can develop evidence-based communication training for professionals. I start by situating my research in discursive psychology and conversation analysis and explain some points of (dis)connection between mainstream and qualitative/critical that nevertheless enable practical application and impact. I explain how I developed CARM, the Conversation Analytic Role Play Method, which takes interaction ‘in the wild’ in diverse institutional settings to explore what constitutes effective practice. Drawing on police crisis negotiation and community mediation intake telephone calls, I show how, psychological matters (e.g., identity, prejudice) are relevant to and impact the progress and outcome of encounters. I explain how these data and findings, rather than hypothetical cases and simulations, have been used in workshops with practitioners. Overall, the paper makes the case for using discursive psychology and conversation analysis to provide rigorous, empirically-grounded communication training with integrity.

Keywords: Conversation analysis, discursive psychology, communication training, qualitative methods, identity, police, mediation.

Introduction

For more than thirty years, discursive psychologists (DP) have studied how language, in the form of social interaction and texts, builds action and constructs the world. In a direct challenge to much of what we might regard as ‘mainstream’ psychology (MP), and across the social sciences more broadly, Edwards and Potter (1992) pushed researchers to understand how and that language *does* things, rather than treating it as providing access to the mind. With its antecedents in the discourse and rhetorical approaches of the Loughborough group, discursive psychologists promoted their blend of ordinary language philosophy, social studies of science, social constructionism, and ethnomethodology. Rather than treat language as a tool or pathway to cornerstone psychological phenomena like attitudes, attributions, identities, personalities, emotion, or memory, via questionnaires and survey instruments – and often via focus groups and interviews – instead, they examined how language builds worlds and minds alike. In DP, like its methodological partner conversation analysis (CA), the core purpose of language – in the widest sense across all its modalities – is the production and maintenance of human sociality and intersubjectivity.

While mainstream psychologists do not always treat language as an unproblematic or neutral tool – people can lie on a survey, for instance – research is often designed to handle the vagaries of being human and access what lies beneath. However, the contrast between, loosely, DP and MP, is, like all binaries, sometimes overstated, caricatured, or simplified. There have always been striking examples of the importance of language, as shaping (experimental, survey, etc.) outcomes, or producing artefacts, rather than as being a neutral medium for the construction of knowledge. For example, in the 1970s, Elizabeth Loftus and colleagues, in their studies of eyewitness reports in experimental settings, demonstrated how the wording of questions about the events being witnessed influences responses. Some of the

earliest DP research on memory is, while taking a different ontological stance, aligned to MP theories of reconstructive memory and the power of context, stereotypes, and so on, on what people think they know about any given event (see Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards & Middleton, 1990). In a classic study, Loftus and Palmer (1974) showed participants films of automobile accidents and found that their estimates of the speed of the cars varied according to whether they were asked how it ‘bumped’, ‘smashed’, ‘hit’, ‘collided’, etc., the other. In her overview of the field at the time, Loftus (1975) reported other studies that revealed how “very subtle changes in wording influences a witness’s report” (p. 652), such as the effect of swapping definite for indefinite articles in question design (e.g., “did you see *the* broken headlight” versus “did you see *a* broken headlight”).

While DP research is rarely included in MP research on memory (e.g., Addis et al, 2015), and while MP often conceptualises language as manipulating a nevertheless underlying truth, points of connection remain possible. For instance, some of my own recent research has shown how response trajectories change according to the use of particular words (e.g., “are you willing to” is more effective than “are you interested in” in requests for participation or engagement; “can we speak” is more effective than “can we talk” in crisis negotiation – see Stokoe, 2013; Sikveland & Stokoe, 2016; 2020). While DP and MP typically differ in the way change and outcome are conceived – with DP using CA to examine the ‘next turn proof procedure’ of contingent patterning and MP examining the causal contingency of one event on another, shown by a significance test – the approaches creep closer together in new experimental and quantitative traditions in DP/CA (e.g., de Ruiter & Albert, 2017; Stivers, 2015). Furthermore, DP/CA researchers are well placed both to interrogate the language in and of MP methods (e.g., Gibson, 2011; Wooffitt, 2010) and to develop coding schemes and language interventions with empirical integrity (e.g., Sikveland & Stokoe, 2020).

Despite its demonstrable influence far beyond the UK, DP remains largely unknown in north American MP. This is evidenced in US-based criticisms of MP from inside the discipline. For example, a decade or so ago, Baumeister et al (2007) wrote that “psychology pays remarkably little attention to the important things that people do” (p. 396). Ten years later, Mehl (2017) made the same point:

Laypersons often think of psychologists as professional people watchers. It is ironic, then, that naturalistic observation, as a methodology, has a remarkably thin history in our field. In contrast to ethologists (and researchers working with infants), psychologists are in the privileged position to be able to obtain valuable data by simply questioning their subjects. At the same time, there are clear limitations to what self-reports can assess. ... the psychological scientist’s tool kit also needs a method to directly observe human behavior in daily life. ... naturalistic observation can bring behavioral data collection to where moment-to-moment behavior naturally happens (Mehl, 2017, p. 184).

In other words, DP has an ambiguous relationship with MP. Much MP assumes that DP is a qualitative method in the same tradition of interview studies, thematic analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis, and related approaches. I will return to the question of whether DP is a qualitative method in the Discussion. However, some of DP’s fiercest debates have been not with MP but with critical (CP) and qualitative psychologists (QP) – particularly regarding the use of interview and focus group data in QP (e.g., Edwards & Stokoe, 2004; Griffin, 2007; Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Smith, 2005). One reason for these debates is DP’s recruitment, since the early 1990s, of conversation analysis for its empirical work. This includes an insistence on using what Mehl calls ‘naturalistic observation’, and what is more commonly referred to as ‘naturally-occurring data’ in conversation analysis; that is, data that passes what Potter (2002, p. 541) famously called the ‘dead social scientist

test’ (see also Potter & Shaw, 2018). By embracing the study of social interaction ‘in the wild’, DP rejected (as resource, though not as topic; see Rapley 2001) the use of semi-structured interviews – whether used under a ‘constructionist’ or ‘co-constructed’ frame or used as a route to producing and examining the sorts of ‘rich’ accounts of experience that questionnaires do not afford. I have written elsewhere (Stokoe et al, 2012) about the way some CP have caricatured conversation analysis, referring to ‘the Loughborough School’ as something to ‘beware’ of, for its, say, apparent apolitical empiricism. For others (e.g., Kitzinger, 2008; Speer, 1999), such characterizations are ingenuous, especially given the influence of ‘feminist’ conversation analysis.

Debates about theory and method are, of course, grist to the mill for academics, and will continue for many years to come. However, one of the consequences of DP adopting CA as its primary analytic framework has been the evolution of a large body of empirical work on naturally-occurring talk ‘in the wild’ in different institutional and domestic settings, including the identification of robust, systematic conversational practices with (normatively oriented to, not behaviourist or causal) action-outcome findings. Consequently, a core benefit and contribution of DP/CA is its engagement with and understanding of *institutionality* – in a way that other areas of psychology struggle. For example, social psychology may theorise abstract processes of persuasion, say, and may study ‘it’ in experimental settings, but it is DP/CA that has an apparatus for empirical analysis (e.g., in studies of sales, negotiation, mediation; see, for example, Humă & Stokoe, 2020; Stokoe et al, 2019). Furthermore, core research in DP/CA is influential outside their home disciplines of psychology and sociology – into linguistics, communication, cognitive science, and computer science, but also into law, medicine, healthcare and other fields. Its reach has been expanded by its openness to interdisciplinarity, by working across languages, and – not uncontroversially – by embracing experimental methods and quantification , as mentioned above (see de Ruiter & Albert, 2017;

Schegloff, 1993). Some in ethnomethodology (the branch of sociology from which CA partly emerged) and DP have also been critical of implied cognitivism in some CA (e.g., Lynch & Wong, 2016; Potter, 2006), and DP has shown how, while CA ‘respecified’ mainstream sociological topics like structure and agency, it has sometimes failed to apply the same approach to psychological topics such as attribution or emotion (e.g., Hepburn, 2004).

For the past decade or so, my own work has focused increasingly on a different set of challenges to, and implications for, the way we study language and what we choose to examine in our research. These are the challenges of thinking about language, and the practices of social interaction, as ‘effective’ or tied to outcomes, as well as the challenges involved in taking empirical findings to intervene in the language practices of organizations. In the next section, I describe how I came to think of my research in DP/CA as the scrutiny of a ‘natural laboratory’, in which every turn taken by one participant has a local impact on an unfolding conversation within the organization of contingent practices. Participants select from ordered options, which they may align with or resist in different ways. Recordings of people talking – in whatever setting I examine – provide datasets in which, very often, the outcome or impact of whatever happens in interaction is felt immediately, or endogenously – people say yes or no; agree or do not; are persuaded or are not; are convicted or are not; answer or do not. Every turn constrains and/or affords what happens next. And my research began to reveal, like Loftus’s work demonstrated years earlier, that every word matters.

The Conversation Analytic Role-play Method

The Conversation Analytic Role-play Method, or CARM is, first and foremost, a communication training approach based on CA and DP evidence about the sorts of problems and roadblocks that can occur in interaction, as well as the techniques and strategies that best

resolve and overcome them. Historically, communication training is based largely on one of two methods: post-hoc reflections on strategy or best practice that are formalized into texts and guidelines, and role-play. Writing about the first approach, Glenn and Susskind (2010, p. 118) stated that while “training materials are rich with suggestions for managing such talk ...prescriptions tend to skew either toward global strategic considerations or toward isolated individual behavior.” They further argue that “written accounts of successful or problematic practices” are subject to “temporal and perceptual limitations ... [and] the vagaries of memory.” Similarly, I have found that the sorts of effective practices revealed by analysis of transcripts are seldom the same as people’s post-hoc reporting of what they think does or does not work (Stokoe, 2013a). One reason is that people often have a normative, rather than an empirical, understanding of interaction. One job of conversation analysis is to yield “empirically grounded results at variance with our commonsense intuitions about how some action is accomplished or what action some utterance is to be understood to have accomplished” (Schegloff, 1996, p. 169).

The second type of training method is role-play or simulation. Role-play typically involves one party (a doctor, police officer, negotiator, mediator, etc.) interacting with a simulated client, using hypothetical scenarios or adaptations of actual scenarios as the basis for the encounter. As Glenn and Susskind pointed out, however, simulation leaves “open the question of how ‘real life’ might differ” (p. 118). I have addressed this question elsewhere, by comparing role-play training talk to the actual interactions that the training was designed to mimic (Stokoe, 2013a), and, more recently, comparing simulated clients’ interactions (in the form of ‘mystery shopping’) with actual users of a service (Stokoe et al, 2020). In the former, both parties know they are doing role-play; in the latter, the person whose skills are being assessed – the service provider – does not know they are interacting with a mystery shopper. In both cases, I found that people say things in training, that they do not say in actual

encounters, and that simulated clients do not give their interlocutor authentic communicative tasks to respond to.

In contrast to traditional role-play, CARM takes research findings about actual interaction as a basis for training (Stokoe, 2011; 2014). Although Susskind (2010, p. 165) suggested that CA researchers “may not be the best people to figure out how their insights (however quickly or slowly they emerge) should be used by negotiation analysts and instructors”, CARM has proven to be an effective method for disseminating such insights (e.g., Emmison, 2013; Meagher, 2013). The method works by transcribing and anonymizing extracts from recordings that demonstrate different ways that participants formulate and organize actions (e.g., offering a service) – and their consequences. The audio and/or video files and transcripts are presented synchronously, such that workshop participants experience ‘in the wild’ encounters without knowing what will happen next. They then discuss what they might do next to handle the situation. For example, if party A makes one type of comment, how might party B respond most appropriately? Finally, party B’s actual response is revealed and discussed, and the workshop moves on. Participants turn insights about best practices into strategies (Puchta & Potter, 2004) on the basis of what mediators actually do and say and on what actually works.

Since 2008, I have delivered CARM workshops to hundreds of organizations. CARM workshops were originally free to users, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, and so I wrote to organizations – mostly mediation companies – in the UK and USA, to offer a free and bespoke workshop. Early workshops focused mostly on converting callers to clients in initial inquiry intake calls but also on such varied topics as opening mediation, solution-focused mediation, and dealing with racism in conflicts – all based on CA-DP research (e.g., Stokoe, 2003; 2006; 2009; 2015; Stokoe & Edwards, 2007; Stokoe & Sikveland, 2016). Once the funding had expired, organizations began to approach me with

requests for workshops and were prepared to pay for them. Over the course of two years, between 2012-2014, I had generated enough income to employ my collaborator, Rein Sikveland, who has worked with me to develop CARM ever since. Our work grew far beyond mediation organizations to commercial, healthcare, legal and other settings. In 2013, I accepted an invitation to appear on BBC Radio 4's *The Life Scientific*, a programme which profiles scientists and their work. This paved the way not only for the extensive public engagement and science communication I have done ever since, but also created further user demand, including requests for bespoke projects (e.g., sales calls, patient-reception, vet-reception, crisis negotiation, etc.), funded by users, leading to more research that underpins more CARM.

CARM sits alongside the now-established tradition in conversation analytic research to disseminate findings to practitioners, with the aim of improving or transforming practice. From doctor-patient encounters to midwifery education, from improving response rates to telephone interviews to examining the way choice is delivered to people with intellectual disabilities (see Antaki, 2011), studying actual practice with a view to informing people about practice is proving fertile ground for understanding what institutions are to the people who encounter them, and what practitioners do, for the people who engage with them. In the context of applied CA, CARM has been described as “the most significant ... development” (Emmison, 2013). In the following sections, I will illustrate some of the research that has been used to underpin CARM training – particularly those topics and practices that are especially relevant to psychologists. To that end, I focus on the way that *who people are to one another*, through the formulation of one's own and others' identities, categories, characters, memberships, prejudices, and so on, can be tied to the outcome of institutional encounters. The aim is to show not just that psychological matters are systematically realized

in interaction, but that the design of turns, responses, and courses of action are consequential for the participants in settings that matter to them.

Data and Method

I draw on two datasets for this paper. The first dataset comprised a corpus of approximately 600 audio-recorded intake calls between members of the public and UK community mediation services in cases of neighbour disputes, as well as calls to a local council environmental services (who also deal with disputes between neighbours). These intake calls were the first point of contact between members of the public and mediation as a process. During these calls, potential clients first describe their problems and request (or receive an offer for) mediation. The mediator's job is to elicit a description of the problem from the potential client, explain what mediation is and offer mediation services to her or him, and arrange a visit between the mediator and potential client. The second dataset comprises audio recordings of interactions between people in crisis (PiCs) and negotiators (Ns), provided by a UK police Hostage and Crisis Negotiation Unit and recorded at the scene as a routine part of the process. The recordings were stored under encryption and the police supplied the data under their own research governance auspices of data processing. We were supplied with 14 negotiations, totalling 31 hours, ranging between one and four hours in duration, and the research was initiated and funded by the police, with CARM training the outcome.

For the first dataset, participants consented to have their calls recorded for research purposes; for both datasets all names and other identifying features were anonymised. The data were transcribed using Jefferson's (2004) system for conversation analysis (CA). This transcription system includes information about the delivery of talk, such as its pacing, overlapping talk, and intonation. The analytic approach combines CA's principles of turn

design, action formation, and sequence organization with discursive psychology's compatible concerns with "the ways in which talk manages subject-object relations, or mind-world relations" and other psychological considerations such as identity and motive (Edwards, 2007, p. 31). CA examines the overall structure of interaction, in terms of its constituent actions, as well as the specifics of, and patterns in, turn design (how a turn of talk is designed to do something), turn-taking (who talks when), action formation (how actions are formed within and across turns of talk), and sequence organisation (how actions are organised in a sequence) (Schegloff, 2007).

Analysis

I present three sections of analysis, each of which summarizes how conversation analytic research with a discursive psychological interest has been deployed effectively in CARM workshops: 1) how people use identity categories to resist a service offer in mediation intake calls; 2) how mediators may identify and respond to a potentially racist client, and 3) how misaligned identity expectations may impact the smooth progress of the opening moments of crisis negotiations.

1. How identity categories are used to resist a service offer

In the 1990s, neighbour disputes became a familiar social problem and a focus for the broadcast and news media. In the UK, television schedules were populated with programmes called 'Neighbours from Hell' and 'Neighbours at War'; aggrieved callers spoke to radio phone-in or television chat show hosts to air their neighbour grievances; newspapers reported neighbours doing damage to each other's properties, minds and bodies. 'Neighbours from Hell' became a video game; 'Neighbors from Hell' an American sitcom. Twenty years later,

public discourse about toxic neighbour relationships is as buoyant as ever. However, psychologists, now as then, have been slow to try to understand this relationship (see Stokoe, 2018). While social, community and environmental psychologists had examined neighbour-related topics, such as people's experiences of, and attitudes towards, various aspects of their neighbourhoods, communities, and places (for an overview, see Stokoe, 2006), there remained remarkably little explication of what it means to be a 'neighbour' (Painter, 2012), or how everyday neighbour relationships are managed.

It was in this context – of a gap between public and psychological discourse – that my interest in neighbour relationships and disputes was piqued. Because I wanted to capture these relationships 'in the wild', I realised that my best chance was to study them as they became somewhat public; somewhat accountable – which meant capturing disputes, rather than interaction over the garden fence. To this end, I began to analyse recordings of neighbour dispute documentaries, newspaper reports, and radio call-ins (Stokoe, 2003). Alongside these data, I pursued unedited, non-broadcast datasets which began with recordings of community mediation and evolved from there (Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003). I approached community mediation services to ask if they might record encounters between mediators and clients. Although some mediators agreed, many did not. Instead, services offered to record their initial inquiry calls into their offices. For mediators, these calls were not 'mediation proper', and so they were less concerned about a researcher studying them. From my perspective, the data were ideal for a study of neighbour disputes because they comprised a 'naturally occurring survey' of the causes of disputes, as well as an opportunity to examine the ways that neighbour complaints were formulated (e.g., Edwards, 2005; Stokoe, 2009).

Towards the end of the project, my focus turned away from analysing the design of neighbour complaints and their identity features and towards the organization of initial

inquiries (or ‘intake calls’), and, in particular, whether or not callers became clients of community mediation organizations by the end of their encounter with a mediator (Stokoe, 2013b). Such intake calls are treated as separate from and outside of an actual mediation and had received no attention from either researchers or mediation training. But because mediation services secure funding partly on the basis of recognized need – on the size of their client base – it is crucial that mediators successfully convert callers to the service into clients of their service; into clients of mediation ‘proper’. As Charkoudian (2010, p. 141) points out, ‘to justify continued public or philanthropic funds in a tight economic environment, it is incumbent on community mediation centers to demonstrate their value.’

Analysis of intake calls revealed clients’ doubt about the usefulness of mediation compared to other services such as going to the police, lawyer or court with their dispute; in other words, institutions that are explicitly more on one client’s side than another in a conflict. Given that the outcome of intake calls is a bottom-line issue for mediation services, it was surprising that both research and training had focused, prior to this project, on what happens once clients have been secured, rather than on what happens to secure them (or not) in the first place. The project’s findings were, therefore, to be of direct relevance to mediation organizations.

One key finding was directly relevant to psychologists was the way that parties systematically brought into play categorizations and characterological formulations of themselves and others involved in the dispute. As Drew (2005) points out, is in interaction that people live their lives, build and maintain relationships, and establish “who [they] are to one another” (p.74), and, regarding disputes, “the complainability of some form of conduct can be contingent on the identity of the agents and the recipients of the conduct” (Schegloff, 2005, p. 452). Across a series of papers, Derek Edwards and I showed how identity matters – cashed out as categorial ascriptions and characterological descriptions crop up, not randomly,

in specific sequential environments in the intake calls (e.g., Edwards & Stokoe, 2007; Stokoe & Edwards, 2007; 2009). One place, highly relevant to the likely acceptance or rejection of going further with mediation and thus to mediation training, was in response to mediators' explanations of the process. These explanations often followed callers' descriptions of their disputes. Here is an example. We join the call as the mediator (M) explains what mediation services do to the caller (C).

Extract 1: HC-2

01 M: What we do as a mediation service we: um: (1.1) we help
02 people: (.) sort out- (0.4) their own uh differences so .hhh
03 we wouldn't take si:des, we wouldn't- (0.7) try an' decide
04 who's right or wrong but would- .hh would try to help you
05 both um:: (0.8) sort out uh: the differences between: (0.2)
06 between you.
07 (2.5)
08 C: Well I-hh (1.2) to be qui:te honest I don't think she'd
09 cooperate.

M is explaining a fundamental principle of mediation: its impartiality with regards to both parties to a dispute. C's unenthusiastic response begins with a long delay at line 07, followed by the turn-initial 'Well' at the start of line 06. That C's response is a dispreferred one is suggested further by the phrase 'to be quite honest' (Edwards & Fasulo, 2006). C indicates that she will reject mediation because she thinks her neighbour would not "cooperate" (lines 06-07). The phrase 'to be quite honest' also suggests that C is reluctant to criticize a neighbour; that she is a 'blameless caller' with a 'blameworthy neighbour'.

I found that callers routinely resisted mediation on the basis that their neighbour would not participate or was not the kind of person you can 'talk to' (Stokoe, 2013b). From this, two other findings flowed. First, I examined the design of explanations themselves. Mediators typically explained mediation in one of two ways. In Extract 1, M takes what I termed ethos-

driven’ approach, in which mediators explain the philosophy of mediation, rather than what actually happens. These explanations are, like Extract 1, also typically negative and abstract: services that do not ‘take sides’ or decide who is ‘right or wrong’, and that focus on getting people to talk to each other. Extract 2 provides another example, in which the caller is asking about something she has read about mediation on the organization’s leaflet (the ‘yours’ referred to at line 01).

Extract 2: DC-11

01 C: It does say on yours like- you don’t really give advice.
02 M: .hh No:..=No:..=Um: it’s really t’help you- u- both to uh sort
03 it out between yourselves.=.hhh [uh- yeah. Through]=
04 C: [Which () (they’re not)]=
05 M: =[talking. .hh]
06 C: =[the type of people.]

At line 01, C formulates the ethos-based explanation she has read, that mediators ‘don’t really give advice’, which M confirms at line 02. M then continues to explain that mediation is a talk-based service in which people ‘sort it out between themselves’. Like Extract 1, and elsewhere in the data, ‘talking’ and ‘sorting it out between yourselves’ provided a ready basis for callers to reject mediation as a course of action. This is because a) they have already demonstrated a willingness to resolve matters by ‘trying to talk’ to their neighbour and now want outside intervention, and b) because callers generally take any opportunity to negatively characterize their neighbour. In Extract 2, the caller begins to reject mediation, in overlap, on the basis that her neighbours are ‘not the type of people’ (lines 04-06).

In sum, I found that, when mediators explain mediation as a talk-based, impartial-ethos service, they opened up a slot for callers to reject it in identity-relevant terms, categorizing their neighbour as the kind of person who is unlikely to mediate. However, I also found that when mediators explain the step-by-step process of mediation, and in terms of what it does,

rather than what it does not do, callers were more likely to agree to mediate (Stokoe, 2013b). Furthermore, process-driven explanations did not afford the same possibility for rejecting mediation in terms of the caller's neighbour's character. This was one of the first CARM 'trainables' – findings from CA-DP research that were not just of interest to academics, but useful for practitioners. Feedback from mediators was positive: "We changed our intake calls and were able to engage more people in the process and arrange for them to see our mediators" (Solution Talk, UK); "We've really used your research about mediation intake... it's helped a LOT of people make it to the table. Thanks!!" (The Mediation Center, USA).

This and other findings underpinned not only CARM training for mediators directly but spun out into collaborating with design studio *A Dozen Eggs*, with whom we worked on mediation organizations' websites – where, very often, ethos-based descriptions of their service were prevalent. Now we had some evidence for how prospective clients might respond to such information online. Unlike, say, running focus groups about how best to explain mediation (to people who have not called mediation with a particular stake in the conversation), or ask other mediators what they think should be online, recorded interaction provides us with a naturally-occurring survey, or experiment, or test-case, for identifying what works. Having expanded the empirical database to include intake calls to family mediation services, which produced similar results about engaging clients, I was subsequently invited by the UK Ministry of Justice to join Family Mediation Task Force and change the language and branding of explanatory public information through animation and leaflets. The Ministry of Justice said, "My team adapted the promotional video and related leaflets/posters as a direct consequence of Stokoe's input". The research also underpinned changing similar videos used by the USA Superior Court, in Spanish and English, for community and family mediators.

2. Responding to a potentially racist service user

My first CARM workshops focused on examples like Extracts 1-2, in which relatively easy changes (explain mediation differently) could be implemented. However, as part of my original funding, I was able to offer services a second, bespoke workshop that would deal with whatever communicative issue was pressing for them. The issue they asked about was how to deal with prejudice, and hate speech, in mediation. This was a topic well-fitted to my research more generally on gender and language, and work with Derek Edwards on how mediators and police respond to reports of racism (Stokoe & Edwards, 2007). It is also a topic for which (e.g., diversity) training is typically restricted to hypothetical scenarios and abstract cases. By contrast, in CARM workshops, participants live through real cases of what we might call '*-isms*' (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.: Whitehead & Stokoe, 2015), line-by-line.

In Extract 3, the caller (C) lives in a high-rise block of flats and his complaint is about noisy neighbours. C has agreed to mediate; the call is nearly complete. C has been talking generally about the issue of high-rise living and the potential for noise disturbances.

Extract 3: EC-34

01 C: I mean: uh- (0.4) e- ha:lf the battle of- as you u- are aware
02 of hi:gh rise living (0.4) is to get on with your
03 nei:ghbours, [an' generally we do in this] block,
04 M: [.hhh absolutely. °yeah.°]
05 (0.2)
06 M: I'm su:re.
07 C: There're a couple of families and uh I- I shou:ldn't sa:y
08 this.=but I'm go:in' to say because it's perfectly true:
09 M: £uh heh.£
10 C: They're A:sian families who seem to 'ave no control over
11 their children.
12 M: A:hh.
13 (0.7)
14 M: Y:eah.
15 (0.3)
16 M: .hh[hh

17 C: [Unfor:tunate but th- it's a ↓fact.
18 (0.5)
19 M: .hhh (0.3) ye:ah so: w- well certainly whatever hh uh:- *any-
20 any-* family if- if- if the children're .hhh out of control
21 then obviously it's going to be difficult in a: (0.2) °in a°
22 high rise flat.
23 (0.6)
24 M: .hhh Yh:eah: hh yeah.
25 (1.3)
26 M: [()
27 C: [Mean I did. (0.5) I di:d as I spoke to Helen.

Our target lines are 10-11, in which C introduces something new (“They’re A:sian families”) into his complaint about the neighbours, enhancing the complainability of the problem with the introduction of a membership category. Coming at the end of the call, after hearing an ostensible (and typical) noise complaint, it seems that M has no reason to suspect that a possible *-ism* is coming. M affiliates strongly with C’s assertion about the challenges of high-rise living (lines 01-06). Note C’s management of M’s expertise about noise disputes (“as you u- are aware”) alongside his own experiential expertise as someone who lives in a high-rise block: they are talking less as mediator and client but more as co-members who know what life is like. At lines 07-08, C produces a classic disclaimer (“I shouldn’t say this but...”), which M receipts with a laughter particle (line 09). This is rather risky, given that disclaimers routinely precede talk that is hearable as (often) prejudicial (see Potter & Wetherell, 1987); it is a way of attending to the hearability of something one is about to utter as a possible *-ism* and therefore of managing that hearability; managing what Edwards (2005) calls the “subject side” of complaining. This is classic DP, where attitudes are produced as being aligned with and warranted by reality.

At lines 10-11, then, C claims that “They’re A:sian families who seem to ’ave no control over their children.” Here, ‘seem to’ produces this claim as experiential, observation-

based, not just a prejudice about Asians. Nevertheless, one analytic question is what makes this a possible *-ism*? Unlike the racial abuse identified by Stokoe and Edwards (2007), C does not say that, for example, “f***ing Asian families”. “A:sian families” could be *description*, not racism; a direct challenge to C (e.g., “that’s racist”) might be too certain and strong an evaluation. But what makes it a possible *-ism* is the disclaimer and the making relevant something about a family as the basis for generalization; the complainability of the families who have no control is ramped up with “Asian”, attaching an attribute to a category as an explanation.

M’s initial response comes at line 12 (“Ah”), which has not only a “change of state” quality, warranting the earlier observation that M did not anticipate the narrative to follow such a trajectory, but it is delivered with a “discomforted” intonation. This nuance is itself ambiguous, but what M does not do is a strong alignment with C’s turn; he does not affiliate with C and therefore does not produce a preferred response. At line 13, there is an opportunity for C to withdraw from this utterance (see Whitehead, 2015), but C does not. M adds a further receipt “Y:eah.”, with similar intonation to line 12. In an environment where M does not progress the sequence in any other direction, C pursues affiliation by building on his prior turn, suggesting that his description is a matter of “fact” rather than his prejudice (“Unfor:tunate but th- it’s a ↓fact.”, line 17). After another gap, M reformulates C’s problem as being one for “any family”, swapping “Asian” for “any” (lines 19-22). At line 23, there is an opportunity for C to affiliate with M’s reformulation as a sequence-closing third turn, but he does not; M takes this turn and produces agreement tokens. These do close the sequence; C moves on to talk about procedural matters regarding the mediation (line 27). C remains a client of the service despite this turbulence; M’s ambiguous (with regards to the strength of his disaffiliation) dispreferred responses, and his reformulation rather than direct challenge, have kept the intake call on course.

This case illustrates the overall finding from analysing ‘-isms’ in neighbour disputes, that mediators generally responded by reformulating the complaint and deleting the ‘-ism’, as in Extract 3. Alternatively, mediators occasionally challenged callers (e.g., “what has them being Asian got to do with it?”). Extract 4 is an example, and we join the call near the start.

Extract 4: DC-65

01 C: Next door nei:ghbour.
 02 (0.7)
 03 C: Um:: (0.2) .hhhhh is:: >Indian.<
 04 (1.6)
 05 C: I’ve no: problem with Indians: bu’ unfortunately he’s>lower
 06 caste< so he doesn’t do any work.
 07 (0.2)
 08 C: An’ that’s not ra:cist.
 09 (0.4)
 10 M: pt. What so: (0.6) wha’ has him [being Indian got to- do:]=
 11 C: [W- the prob- the problem]=
 12 M: =[with it then.]
 13 C: =[is, I mean,]
 14 (.)
 15 C: Sorry?
 16 (.)
 17 M: .hhh well I’m jus- wond’ [ring why:,]
 18 C: [(Yeh.) well]
 19 (0.2)
 20 C: The pro:blem is (0.6) uh:: (some/seven) years ago:, [...]

C’s opening turn contains several interesting features: “Um:: (0.2) .hhhhh is:: >Indian.<”.

The hesitation, pause, in-breath and punched-deliver of the category “Indian” all indicate C’s orientation to this as problematic, and its hearability as a possible –ism. At line 04, M makes no response and a long gap develops. This permits C to develop his complaint, starting with a disclaimer (“I’ve no: problem with Indians:”) to ward off possible evaluations of his as racist. He also provides, as we have seen previously, empirical evidence about the relevance of his

neighbour's Indian-ness and description based in fact rather than prejudice ("he's > lower caste < so he doesn't do any work."). Note the use of "unfortunately", as in Extract 3: the callers are not predisposed to seek out negative things about "Indians" or "Asian families", but observe them as a matter of fact. The disclaimer also operates as a modifier, similar to our earlier observations about practices of withdrawal or stance alteration.

In response to a further lack of alignment from M (line 07), C denies that he is saying racist things (line 08), showing that he is treating M's silence as an unspoken accusation of precisely that. However, having secured a withdrawal from C, M does not move onto procedural matters but challenges C's use of the category "Indian" (line 10) and its relevance to the on-going action of complaining about a neighbour. Because it is in overlap, it seems that C has not heard the (full) challenge (note the repair initiator at line 15). M does not repeat her challenge directly in her follow-up (line 17) and C then begins to describe the problem (which is about maintenance of a shared driveway). This call ended without the caller becoming a client of the mediation service. The early turbulence and explicit challenge by M may partly account for this, because the parties were misaligned from the start of the call. Overall, I found that mediators' responses had an impact on the outcome of the call; reformulations were more likely to secure or keep the client, while challenges led to disengagement. Here was another 'trainable' – and one which produced some of the richest discussions in CARM workshops. Mediators often fundamentally disagreed with each other about what constituted racism, sexism, and so on, and how they should respond – often exploring the nature and purpose of mediation itself.

CARM for mediators led, by word of mouth, initially, to new research and training projects with family mediators, collaborative lawyers, conciliation services, and other related organizations. It also led to work with hostage and crisis negotiators at the UK Metropolitan Police Service and Police Scotland, as well as negotiators in Sweden and Norway. This

particular branch of research came about by chance. Following a CARM mediation workshop, I was approached by a senior police officer and negotiator, who could see the potential value of using CA to analyse the recordings made, live at the scene, by crisis negotiators talking to persons in crisis. My final illustration comes from this research.

3. Misaligned identity expectations and progress in crisis negotiations

While hostage and crisis communication has been researched extensively, across psychology, behavioural sciences, linguistics and law, the dominant negotiation models make language-relevant recommendations but rarely unpack linguistic practices in detail (Stokoe & Sikveland, 2019). In a field dedicated to the importance of communication – and language as the tool through which negotiation happens – there remains little understanding of *actual* crisis negotiation ‘in the wild’. Rein Sikveland and I, also working with Heidi Kevoe-Feldman (Sikveland et al, 2019), have examined many aspects of these encounters, and we have trained negotiators in London as well as the entire cadre of Police Scotland.

In this final section of exemplar analysis, we focus on what happens at the start of a negotiation with a person in crisis. This is the place where, first, negotiators typically speak first, and attempt to secure engagement from the person in crisis, who typically resists the negotiation (e.g., Sikveland et al, 2018). In Extract 5, the negotiator (N) introduces himself to the person in crisis (PiC).

Extract 5: HN34 1

01 N: My- my name is Riley=I just want to talk to you.
02 (0.9)
03 PiC: Who are you.

One of the enduring theoretical and empirical trajectories of CA-DP work on identity is that and how it is a locally organized, oriented-to process, rather than the more MP treatment of it

as an underpinning stable trait of individuals; a ‘given’ of cognition or social structure (e.g., Antaki et al, 1996; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). For CA-DP, categorizations of self and other are resources for practice used in real settings of social interaction. Of the myriad possibilities for categorizing and referring to oneself as part of the action of a greeting or introduction, the negotiator starts by using their name (line 01). They use their first (and not last) name, and do not refer to themselves as a police officer or a negotiator. Within the same turn, they add another ‘turn constructional unit’ (Schegloff, 2007) to account for their presence (“I just want to talk to you.”).

What sort of response might this be designed to produce? A go-ahead; an agreement to talk? What actually happens next, after a gap, is a new first pair part from the PiC, who asks, disrupting the progressivity of the sequence, “Who are you.”, with emphasis on ‘*are*’. Given that the N has just introduced himself, we can see that the two parties are misaligned with regards to their situated identities (Zimmerman, 1998). The fact that he is called ‘Riley’ is not relevant to PiC – who explicitly makes some other aspect of their interlocutor relevant. That aspect is neatly evidenced in another similar opening, in Extract 6.

Extract 6: HN5

01 N: Hi darling.
02 N: <My n- my name is David.
03 (0.6)
04 N: Uh[m]
05 PiC: [Who] are you,
06 (0.2)
07 N: I’m just here to try and help.
08 (0.7)
09 PiC: Yeah. Who are you.=You know from from where.
10 (0.3)
11 N: Oh- I- I’m from the police.

Like Extract 5, the sequence starts with a greeting (that is not returned) and an introduction in the same format, ‘My name is David’. Also like Extract 5, though this time after a short gap rather than in the same turn, the N starts to produce what is probably his account for being there (line 04). However, at line 05, in overlap, and again like Extract 5, the PiC asks ‘who are you’. In response, N gives a similar account for being there as we saw in Extract 5 (“I’m just here to try and help.”). After a delay, the PiC acknowledges this (“yeah”) but then repeats her earlier question, ‘who are you’, adding a candidate answer to the end of her turn: “You know from where.” (line 09). While N then gives the PiC what she was looking for – “I’m from the police”, note that his turn starts with a ‘change of state’ token (Heritage, 1984); he now realises what aspect of his identity she wants to know; note also that he produces a category-implicative description rather than an explicit categorization (e.g., “I’m a police officer”).

One reason for these misaligned openings is that the negotiators believed that identifying as police would negatively impact the start of the encounter. We found no evidence for that concern in our analysis (e.g., Stokoe, 2018b). Instead, we found that opening sequences were often overwrought, as in Extract 6, with extended self-identifications produced in response to queries from PiCs. Such PiC questions showed what was relevant to them in these encounters. Here was another, straightforward, ‘trainable’, and one which ran contrary to prevailing training practice.

This kind of observation, along with multiple other findings, led to more positive feedback from participants, such as “I would like to say a heartfelt thank you for the workshop. I have had nothing but positive feedback, from everyone who attended, one person even puts it as the best team day of her career, and top 10 days overall” (Chief Superintendent, Operational Communications in Policing, National Police Chiefs Council). The Operations Coordinator Hostage and Crisis Negotiator from Police Scotland, said,

“Whilst carrying out the hot debrief [immediately following an incident] the negotiator told me he utilized a number of the key words he picked up during the training ... which really impacted on the subject and helped bring the incident to a swift conclusion.”

Discussion

Despite claims that “psychology pays remarkably little attention to the important things that people do” (Baumeister et al, 2007, p. 396), and that “naturalistic observation, as a methodology, has a remarkably thin history in our field” (Mehl, 2017, p. 184), this paper aims to remind psychologists of all traditions that, in fact, there are now decades of research in discursive psychology and conversation analysis that examine social interaction ‘in the wild’. Taken together, these fields have shown that it is *possible* to capture both mundane and dramatic; public and intensely personal lived realities through the basic process of recording. It is no longer acceptable to assume that one cannot get access to these kinds of materials (and so recourse to interviews) or that the recording process renders the interactions as ‘unnatural’ (particularly in comparison to interviews). DP/CA has shown how social interaction is organized and not messy; idiosyncratic yet systematic, with analysis based in participants’ displayed interpretation of each and every action, not in analysts’ ‘subjective’ reading. Contrary to assumption and caricature, DP/CA is not atheoretical; it is based in and is accountable to theories of language and action. It deals with ‘big’ topics like racism, or power. And, despite what I have presented here, it examines more than ‘just talk’; depending on the source and type of recordings, it examines all aspects of and resources for the embodied production of conduct (e.g., Antaki et al, 2017) and the richness of human psychological life.

I said in the introductory parts of this paper that I would return to the matter of whether DP and CA are qualitative methods. This is a special issue of *Qualitative Research*, a field that has seen heated debate between DP and branches of critical and qualitative psychology. From the distant perspective of MP (whatever that means), DP and CA look like the *most* qualitative of QP, with their apparent focus on micro-details of talk. However, DP and CA focus on *action*, examining the features of talk that are live and consequential for that interaction. Fundamentally, DP and CA are not readily categorized as either qualitative or quantitative research because their stance on the production of knowledge is radically different to both. What (much) qualitative and quantitative research share is the basic removal of research participants from wherever the action is to the research setting – whether it be the interview room, survey tool, or the laboratory. For instance, rather than study domestic relationships as they ebb and flow at home (e.g., Goodwin, 2007), instead researchers ask people about their relationships post-hoc (e.g., Beitin, 2008) – leading to debate about the artefactual production of knowledge (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). While QP may argue that interviews produce much ‘richer’ and experiential data that adds much value to surveys, DP and CA challenge interview-based QP in the same way it challenges survey and questionnaire methods in MP.

CA and DP both work with single cases and large datasets of tens, hundreds, and sometimes thousands of recorded interactions. But what is a ‘single case’ in CA and DP? Ten interviews do not equate to ten telephone calls, in the sense of qualitative research. This is partly because it is not useful to take ‘one conversation’ as a unit of analysis, or of data. One conversation contains multiple questions, answers, overlaps, pauses, ‘ums’ and ‘uhs’. An apparently single instance delivers lots of instances of any given phenomena. In Schegloff’s (1993) words, “one is also a number, the single case is also a quantity, and statistical significance is but one form of significance”. For instance, claims about gender and

interruption may be based on large datasets, but if there is a basic error in identifying interruption in the first place, Schegloff is correct to point out that “quantification is no substitute for analysis”.

CA and DP are a form of logical analysis. An example from linguistics makes the point¹: the sentence “Peter forwarded the letter to his aunt Mary” is grammatical (if you don’t agree with me, you don’t understand what “grammatical” means, or you don’t speak English), and its grammar can be sensibly analysed. On the other hand, “To aunt the forwarded Peter letter Mary his” contains the same words but is not grammatical and has no structure. It is not a matter of counting *how many times* people say these things or asking how many people agree about their grammaticality. It is a matter of knowing how to speak English. We may produce definitive analyses of these things on just one example. What makes a turn in conversation analysable is that it is recognizable and understandable by people, including analysts, who are members of a culture and a linguistic community that talk in those ways. CA and DP do not need huge samples and probabilistic statistics to do analysis, even though we do need collections of instances of a phenomenon to analyse, to figure out how they work. But even then, the analysis of each and every “instance” is done on the same basis, including recognizing something *as* an instance, which is the tacit ability that people have, and that anthropologists need, to understand the uses of their own natural language, or one in which they have acquired some competence. That said, CA and DP, unlike QP, aim to identify “repetitive, uniform, typical and *cohort-independent*” practices (Heap, 1990, p. 46, emphasis added).

In recent years, including in my own work, some CA (in particular) has worked across research methods and paradigms, as part of randomized-controlled trials (e.g., Heritage et al, 2007), in large-scale multi-language code-and-quantify studies (e.g., Dingamanse et al,

¹ I am grateful to Derek Edwards for providing this illustration.

2015). This has generated much debate in CA, with some ‘for’ and some ‘against’ codification and quantification. Since developing CARM, I have worked in both traditions, particularly with Rein Sikveland (e.g., Sikveland et al, 2016; Sikveland & Stokoe, 2020), coding receptionist and patient actions in calls to the doctors and correlating with patient satisfaction scores and coding the turn design of police actions in crisis negotiation. At the same time, I continue to work with single instances that have both explanatory and rhetorical power (e.g., Albert et al, 2019). I suggest that it would be strange to discount an analysis of a conversation because there is only one. Sometimes there may only be one instance to study. Compared to the numbers of patients calling their doctor, or even potential clients calling mediation, there are very few police negotiations with suicidal persons in crisis. But it is important to know how they work – according to the police themselves who co-produced our research. I urge any psychologist who has not yet paid “attention to the important things that people do” to start observing.

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