

Dr. Cornelia Gerhardt

c.gerhardt@mx.uni-saarland.de

ICCA 06 International Conference on Conversation Analysis, 10. – 14. May 2006, Helsinki

The negotiation of expertise in symmetrical talk

In asymmetrical talk, participants have been shown to orient to “exogenous or social structural identities by which [they] may relevantly be categorized” (Drew 1991:45). These exogenous identities come in pairs such as doctor/patient where one speaker is entitled to certain kinds of knowledge while the other is not.

I investigated (1) what happens when it is not clear from the outset which of the identities participants claim, (2) how strategies typically employed in asymmetrical settings can be used in conversation between friends, and (3) whether the use of these strategies by one speaker implies disentitlement on the part of the other.

The data analysis is based on transcriptions from video recordings of natural conversation among home viewers of televised football games. Two dyads were recorded, both between male British English speakers who are friends and (former) colleagues. Two of them are average football fans; the other couple consists of two former referees. One important topic in these conversations is football. In many European societies, football represents “a domain of expertise and knowledge” (Goodwin about car racing (1986:289)).

I compared the strategic manoeuvres used by experts whose identities are exogenously confirmed to the way these friends project an expert footing to become ratified members of the community of football fans. One example is ‘lecturing,’ which describes monologues by expert invitees in TV-debates (Kotthoff 1997). Similar behaviour can be found in my data. However, as the setting is non-competitive, the outcome is different. The other participant does not feel challenged or put down.

My data seem to suggest that the same strategies are used to a different outcome: namely, in the analysed setting, negotiating expert status for oneself does not imply layperson status for the counterpart.