

Speech Codes as the Cultural Context of Membership Categorization Devices

Menno H. Reijven

Ethnomethodology and the ethnography of communication do not provide research frameworks which are mutually exclusive. In the early days, in *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, Hymes and Gumperz (1972) included a variety of papers from ethnomethodological scholars, including Sacks and Schegloff. Later, Hymes (1974), in his own work, cites these scholars frequently (Maynard, 2013). Yet, the current research stemming from these two fields does not engage much and could gain from more mutual engagement. In this paper, I discuss how Sacks' (1972) idea of membership categorization devices and Philipsen's (1997) idea of speech codes can be placed in conversation.

With regards to membership categorization devices, Sacks argues that certain terms are connected in webs of terms unified through a categorization device. Categories, activities and predicates part of this web inform each other's meanings. For example, the term 'mother' may activate the device of 'family' if conjoined with the term 'child'. Then, 'caring' becomes a relevant activity, and being 'older' a relevant predicate. A particular wording of the discourse is necessitated and expected because of the use of the device.

Similarly, speech codes activate a variety of terms which mutually implicate each other. When talking about "fighting", "winning" and "helping the community", the terms can be coherently interpreted under the code of honor (Philipsen, 1986) which connects the values of "courage", "glory" and "magnanimity". This code is activated through using categories, activities and predicates which instantiate values belonging to that code and thereby each of the terms goes together under this code. Thus, terms used in discourse are meaningful due to the values of the overarching code.

Given that both speech codes and membership categorization devices let us perceive coherence in the use of sets of terms within discourse, the question comes up how these two analytic concepts are related. I look at how devices change when they become a part of a different speech code, which shows that such devices are dependent on their cultural context. What is a categorically expectable action in one culture for a particular device, may be different in another. With regards to the device "gender", in Teamsterville, a "man" is not supposed to "realize a great amount of talking" (Philipsen, 1997, p.128) when dealing with people of a different status. However, as Philipsen notes, his cultural inclination was to solve problems with youth he was supervising was to talk. Thus, depending on the code, the device of gender yields different stereotypical activities (as suggested by Gumperz & Hymes' introduction to Sacks, 1972). By going through examples, the relationships between these two concepts are elucidated.

Methodologically, this has a couple of implications. Speech codes should be used by ethnomethodologists, as these inform the interrelationships within and among categorization devices used within the same social order. Additionally, this should urge ethnomethodologists to also compare devices which center on similar categories while articulating different activities, as invoking different speech codes can hinder the production of intersubjectivity in social interaction among participants (for this focus of ethnomethodology, see Schegloff, 1992).

References

- Gumperz, J.J. & Hymes, D. (1972). *Directions in Sociolinguistics. The Ethnography of Communication*. Rinehart & Winston.
- Hymes, D. (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics. An Ethnographic Approach*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Maynard, D. (2013). Everyone and no one to turn to: Intellectual roots and contexts for conversation analysis. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis* (pp. 11-31). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Philipsen, G. (1986). Mayor Daley's council speech: A cultural analysis. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 72(3), 247-260.
- Philipsen, G. (1997). A Theory of Speech Codes. In: G. Philipsen & T. Albrecht (Eds.), *Developing Communication Theories* (pp.119-156). SUNY Press.
- Sacks, H. (1972). On the Analyzability of Stories by Children. In: J.J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics. The Ethnography of Communication* (pp.325-345). Rinehart & Winston.
- Schegloff, E. A. (1992). Repair after next turn: The last structurally provided defense of intersubjectivity in conversation. *American journal of sociology*, 97(5), 1295-1345.