

**‘What do you want me to say?’
On the Conversation Analysis approach
to bilingual interaction**

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ABSTRACT

Is language simply a medium for the expression of intentions, motives, or interests, or is it also a site for uncovering the method through which ordered activity is generated? This question has wide-ranging implications for the study of bilingual interaction in particular, and for sociolinguistics generally. This article attempts to explicate the principles behind the Conversation Analysis (CA) approach to bilingual interaction. It addresses some of the criticisms that have been leveled against the CA approach, using both new data and new analyses of previously published examples. (Keywords: Conversation Analysis, bilingual interaction, code-switching).*

The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed an increasing diversity of analytic approaches to bilingual interaction, with a gradual move away from an earlier dichotomy between the grammatical analysis of code-switching and the socio-psychological analysis of language choice. One of the new research paradigms is the application of Conversation Analysis (CA) to bilingual interaction; an example is Auer 1998. This work follows the tradition first developed by Gumperz 1982, who described code-switching in bilingual conversation as socially orderly discourse strategies which index localized norms and values (see also Scotton 1988). Particular attention is paid to the way in which individuals strategically use the codes in their bilingual repertoires to achieve specific interactional goals. The CA approach facilitates the analysis of fragmentary and unidealized data and gives primacy to interpretations that are demonstrably oriented to participant actions rather than to global social categories. Nevertheless, the disciplinary heterogeneity of the researchers who use the CA approach to bilingual interaction, often with diverse agendas, has led to confusion and misreading of some key concepts and procedures of the approach. For example, the technical concept of “preference” in CA has often been wrongly equated with the attitudinal notion of liking, acts of compliance, or the grammatical construction of af-

firmatives (Burt 1990, 1992; Wardhaugh, 1985; see Bilmes 1988 for a discussion of the problems associated with the concept of “preference”).¹

The CA approach to bilingual interaction has also been criticized for its apparent overemphasis on transcription techniques and minute details of conversational turn-taking, often without any attempt to explain the speakers’ motivations for their language choices (Myers-Scotton 1999, Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001). CA has been described as atheoretical, empiricist, or circumstantial, and even as bordering on being trivial (see ten Have 1990). At least part of the problem is of CA practitioners’ own making: Researchers who adopt the CA approach to bilingual interaction have rarely bothered to explain their rationale systematically and explicitly. For instance, I have not been able to find any article in international academic journals that explains the CA approach to bilingual interaction, although there are plenty of published studies applying the CA framework, nor have conversation analysts contextualized their work within a broader sociolinguistic theoretical framework. Some researchers use CA largely as a transcription method, applying the transcription conventions and level of detail associated with CA but not drawing CA-like inferences. Nevertheless, in my view the CA approach requires nothing less than a radical change in the focus of social scientific enquiry. Its belief that language is not simply a medium for the expression of intentions, motives, or interests but also a site for uncovering the method through which ordered activity is generated has wide-ranging implications for the study of bilingual interaction in particular, and for sociolinguistics generally.

Although this essay continues the CA tradition of focusing on methodological issues, I attempt as well to explicate the principles behind the CA approach. I review some studies that aim to apply CA principles to bilingual interaction, and I discuss the criticisms that have been leveled against the CA approach, using both new data and new analyses of previously published examples. In doing so, I wish to clarify some of the misconceptions about CA and to highlight its potential contributions to the study of bilingual interaction.

THE INTELLECTUAL ROOTS OF CA

In order to counteract the myth of CA as an atheoretical, purely descriptive approach, a brief outline of its intellectual history is necessary. CA of the kind practiced by students of bilingual interaction originated in the work of a break-away group of sociologists in California in the 1960s, known as “ethnomethodologists.” The research agenda of ethnomethodology was developed by Harold Garfinkel, whose point of departure was the theory of social action formulated by his mentor, Talcott Parsons. Parsons’s theory focused on a dialectical relationship between the teleological (i.e., “I have an end in mind”) and the rationalistic (“I work out the means to achieve my end”) aspects of social action. In working out the means, Parsons suggested, social actors had a “normative orientation,” which he regarded as the “motor” of social action – a sensitivity to the rights and obli-

gations in society, of which they take account in acting. Parsons argued: “These normative rules both define what immediate ends should and should not be sought, and limit the choice of means to them in terms other than those of efficiency. Finally, they also define standards of socially acceptable effort” (quoted in Hamilton 1985:62).

Garfinkel saw Parsons’s theory as addressing two main questions, “what” and “why.” The former concerns what is said or done, which then receives an answer expressed in causal terms, often alluding to the notion of “rationality.” However, what of the “how”? The issue here, in Garfinkel’s view, is one of disjuncture between the “concreteness” of people’s activities in everyday life and their analytical representation in the Parsonian theory of social action. This has the result that “real society” is only “specifiable as the achieved results of administering the policies and methods of formal, constructive analysis” (Garfinkel 1991:13). Thus, Parsons’s social action theory does not do justice to the very phenomena it sought to understand, because it seeks to impose a rationality on human conduct that is separated from the practical concerns of situated everyday life.²

Garfinkel raised three specific questions regarding Parsons’s theory of social action: First, what is the status of the actors’ accounts of their own actions, especially when these accounts conflict with the analytic, causal accounts offered by sociologists? Second, what is the status of people’s shared knowledge? Third, how do people make strategic choices that involve the manipulation of their environments? Garfinkel suggested that social action should be analyzed in terms of “senses,” with a focus on “common sense” and without any particular recourse for this purpose to the notions of intentionality or motives. He argued that social phenomena are meaningful BEFORE an analyst appears on the social scene. Social-scientific constructs, therefore, must satisfy the “postulate of subjective interpretation.” They would then faithfully reflect these everyday meanings. This contrasts with the approach whereby “ideal types” of action were constructed, which then served as bridging mechanisms between subjective meanings and relations of cause and effect. In Garfinkel’s view, such an approach failed to address the nature of the relationship between social-scientific analytic categories (“second order” constructs) and the lifeworld (“first order” constructs).

Garfinkel advocated abandoning epistemology in favor of methodology. For ethnomethodology, social order does not reside in the dictates of external rules as applied to situated activities. Instead, it emerges from within the practical circumstances of social life. Ethnomethodologists reject what they see as the reductionist (simplifying and generalizing) nature of rationalistic explanations for complex data. Theirs is a sociology in which the problem of social order is reconceived as a practical problem of social action – as a members’ activity, as methodical, and therefore as analyzable. Rather than being interested in motivations, functions, or distribution, reduced to conceptual schemes or numerical tables, ethnomethodologists are concerned first and foremost with the procedural study of common-sense activities. To return to one of the problems in the Parsonian

theory of action – the actor’s rationality – the illumination of social life through models of formal rationality in social science may be required for scientific theorizing, but it is not required “in theorizing activities employed in coming to terms with the affairs of everyday life” (Garfinkel 1967:280). Everyday rationalities are data to ethnomethodologists, not impediments to their enquiries:

The activities whereby members produce and manage settings of everyday life are identical with members’ procedures for making those settings ‘accountable’ . . . When I speak of accountable . . . I mean observable-and-reportable, i.e., available to members as situated activities of looking and telling. I mean, too, that such practices consist of an endless, on-going, contingent, accomplishment; that they are carried on under the auspices of, and are made to happen as events in, the same ordinary affairs that in organising they describe. (Garfinkel, 1967:1)

Thus, the proper object of sociological study is, in the ethnomethodologist’s view, the set of techniques that members of a society themselves utilize to interpret and act within their own social worlds – hence the term “ethnomethodology,” the study of “ethnic” (i.e., the participants’ own) methods of production and interpretation of social interaction.

Armed with these intellectual antecedents, Conversation Analysis focused on a central problematic: How do social actors come to know, and know in common, what they are doing, and the circumstances in which they are doing it? Conversation analysts argue that the only way to address this question is by exposing the interpretive procedures on which people routinely draw in face-to-face interaction, and that the data that can most effectively illuminate these procedures come from naturally occurring conversation. From the very beginning, the ethos of CA consisted of an unconventional, intense, but respectful intellectual interest in the details of the actual practices of people in interaction (ten Have 1999). The widening availability of the technology of audio recording in the 1960s made it possible to go beyond earlier practices of gathering data, such as interviews and field observation, which were much more manipulative and researcher-oriented than the simple mechanical recording of “natural” – that is, nonexperimental – action.

CA characteristically takes shape as pieces of inductive reasoning structured around short extracts of transcripts from tape-recorded conversation. These extracts are repeatedly scanned for evidence of procedures whereby the participants accomplish an interactional task, such as disagreeing or changing a topic. Little attention is paid to what traditional sociolinguists might consider as key social variables, such as the identity of the speaker (gender, age, occupation, etc.), his or her relations with the other participants in a conversation (e.g., whether they are friends or distant acquaintances), or the formality of the context. It is not that the relevance of these factors is denied a priori, but simply that it is not assumed; if participants themselves can be rigorously shown to employ such categories in the

production of conversation, however, they would be of interest to conversation analysts (Levinson 1983:295).

The basic principles of CA, then, can be summarized as follows: (i) Social order resides within everyday social life, of which face-to-face interaction is a critical part; (ii) to “know” what people are doing in their everyday life does not require any recourse to hidden motives or models of rationality, but only showing how people actually do it; it then follows that (iii) every claim we as analysts make about what people do must be proven by evidence from the everyday social life of people, which entails a focused, systematic analysis of their face-to-face interaction. In Garfinkel’s words:

‘Know’ consists really in a structure of activity. This is what the ‘know’ consists of. It is not that the member has it somewhere in the nervous traces or that he has it according to a theory of personal action, and that this will not permit someone to elicit what he has available to tell you. . . . The ‘know’ resides in the ability to generate . . . recognisable sentences. (Garfinkel, untitled transcript of oral contribution, quoted in Hill & Crittenden 1968:47)

Although conversation analysts made it clear from the beginning that their problematic was a sociological one, their interest in language has been critical in distinguishing the CA approach from those of other sociological inquiries. At the heart of the difference between CA and other sociological perspectives is a tension between language as a medium for the expression of intentions, motives, or interests, and language as a topic for uncovering the methods through which ordered activity is generated – the latter being the CA position.

Sacks and Schegloff, for example, devoted much of their effort to the analysis of turn-taking in conversation (e.g. Sacks et al. 1974). Turn-taking is part of what Sacks and Schegloff call “members’ procedures” of achieving orderly and meaningful communication. The ways in which conversation participants design and modify their utterances are “naturally occurring statements” made by the social actors themselves of how they make sense of each other’s contributions. This tacit, organized reasoning procedure is critical for our understanding of how social relationships are developed and higher-level social orders achieved. The acquired knowledge of conversational organization can then be applied to institutional organization in order to show how these institutions were “talked into being.”

There now exist many studies that can be described as Conversation Analysis, and within them, two strands are identifiable. The first focuses on the institution of interaction as an entity in its own right, or “pure” CA; the second examines the management of social institutions in interaction, or “applied” CA (Heritage 1989). The latter tends to focus on specific interactional situations, on local, interactional requirements, and especially on the ways in which interactants show their orientations to these situations and requirements.³ I now turn to the application of CA to the study of bilingual interaction.

The applications of CA to the study of bilingual interaction began against a background of the quantitative analysis of grammatical patterns in bilingual data, and the macro-level sociolinguistic analysis of external factors affecting language choice. In particular, researchers tended to explain meanings of code-switching – the alternation of language choices in conversation – in terms of power relations within the speech community, the symbolic values of different languages, and/or the socio-psychological motivations of speakers. Peter Auer, one of the first researchers who used CA to examine bilingual interaction, questioned the way in which the meaning of code-switching was understood. Echoing Goffman (e.g. 1974), Auer 1984a argued that participants of conversational interaction continuously produce frames for subsequent activities, which in turn create new frames. Every utterance and every turn, therefore, change some features of the situation and maintain or reestablish others. In bilingual conversation, “whatever language a participant chooses for the organisation of his/her turn, or for an utterance which is part of the turn, the choice exerts an influence on subsequent language choices by the same or other speakers’ (Fluer 1984a:5). It then follows that the meaning of code-switching must be interpreted with reference to the language choices in the preceding and following turns by the participants themselves, rather than by correlating language choice with some externally determined values. As Auer pointed out, “The proper locus at which semantic values may be assigned to the codes are the very same situations in which language juxtaposition is used for communicative purposes” (1984b:92). From a methodological perspective, we require an analytic procedure that focuses on the sequential development of interaction, because the meaning of code-switching is conveyed as part of the interactive process and cannot be discussed without referring to the conversational context. Such a procedure is provided by CA.

For those who are interested in the meaning of code-switching, the CA approach has at least two advantages. First, it gives priority to what Auer calls the “sequential implicativeness of language choice in conversation” – the effect of a participant’s choice of language at a particular point in the conversation on subsequent language choices by the same and other participants. Second, it “limits the external analyst’s interpretational leeway because it relates his or her interpretation back to the members’ mutual understanding of their utterances as manifest in their behaviour” (Auer 1984a:6). Examples of the CA approach to bilingual interaction include Auer’s study of Italian migrants in Germany (esp. 1984a, 1984b, 1988, 1995), Sebba’s study of young Caribbean Londoners (Sebba 1993, Sebba & Wootton 1998), and Stroud’s study of various groups of multilingual speakers in Papua New Guinea (Stroud 1992, 1998; Kulick & Stroud 1990). (See Auer 1998 for a more recent collection of studies of bilingual conversation.)

The conceptual apparatus on which Auer builds his analysis is Gumperz's notion of CONTEXTUALIZATION. In general terms, contextualization denotes the strategic activities of speakers in varying their communicative behavior within a socially agreed matrix of conventions, which are used to alert participants in the course of the ongoing interaction to the social and situational context of the conversation (Gumperz 1982:132–35; 1992:42–43). In order to signal contextual presuppositions, conversation participants appear to exploit variable spoken-language elements at all linguistic levels (prosodic, phonological, morphological, and syntactic; see, e.g., Local 1986; Local et al. 1984, 1986) and also to utilize resources at the nonverbal level (gestural, kinesic, and proxemic; see, e.g., Duncan 1969, 1972; Kendon 1977). In Gumperz's terms, these are contextualization conventions, or CONTEXTUALIZATION CUES, and their chief function is to signal participants' orientation to one another. Sometimes they are used primarily to contextualize the imminent completion of a turn at talk or a topic shift, but at other times they have the capacity to signal meanings like irony or seriousness, as well as the social identities and attitudes of participants. Auer (e.g. 1984a) argues that bilingual code-switching should be analyzed as a contextualization cue because it works in many ways like other contextualization cues. Nevertheless, code-switching has some characteristics of its own, in addition to those it shares with such elements as gestures, prosody, and phonological variables. In particular, the SEQUENTIAL ORGANIZATION OF ALTERNATIVE CHOICES OF LANGUAGE provides a frame of reference for interpreting the functions or meanings of conversational code-switching. Following the CA procedure, Auer identified a number of sequential patterns of language choice and proposed a distinction between discourse-related and participant-related code-switching: The former contributes to the organization of the ongoing interaction, while the latter permits assessment by participants of the speaker's preference for and competence in one language or the other (see Shin & Milroy 2000 for a recent application of this distinction.)

Sebba took issue with the “we code” vs. “they code” dichotomy introduced into the literature on code-switching by Gumperz 1982. For most researchers, “we code” and “they code” refer, respectively, to the “ethnic” language of a bilingual community and to the language of the wider society within which that community forms a minority. The opposition of we- vs. they-codes thus presupposes particular relationships between communities or speaker groups, which in turn entails a semantic opposition of the languages symbolizing different communities and groups. Although Gumperz warned explicitly that the association of “we” and “they” with particular codes “does not directly predict actual usage” (1982:66) in a given instance, many subsequent writers have employed the concepts as the basis for interpreting the meaning of code-switching in conversation; for example, a switch from “we” to “they” is said to be marked and to symbolize social distance or authority. As Sebba & Wootton 1998 point out, the boundaries of communities and languages are not always clearcut, and the we- and they-

codes are often hard to establish empirically. For example, the British-born Caribbeans in London whom Sebba studied used both London English and London Jamaican, a localized variety of Jamaican Creole (Sebba 1993) as their we-codes. London “Jamaican is a ‘we code’ because it excludes outsiders (particularly white people) and its province is the family and peer group, especially during information conversation. But London English is also a ‘we code’: it is used among family and peers in the most intimate discussions and is the preferred code for use most of the time for most of the speakers in the study (Sebba & Wootton 1998:264). In situations like this, which are by no means rare, the we-code and they-code dichotomy is both too gross and too remote from the participants’ situated, local practices, so it should not be used as an a priori schema to interpret the meaning of code-switching. Sebba argues for conversation-internal criteria of accounting for code-switching. Following the CA procedure, Sebba examines self-repairs, speaker-initiated insertion sequences, quotations, and other mid-turn or turn-final code-switches; echoing Auer, he demonstrates how code-switching “contextualizes” various speech activities (Sebba 1993, Sebba & Tate 1986, Sebba & Wootton 1998; see also Gafaranga 2000 for a recent application of the CA approach to the analysis of bilingual interaction where the identification of the base language is potentially problematic).

In a similar vein, Stroud considers the we-code and they-code distinction, as often used in the literature, to be “at best a contextually specific one” (1998:335). Working with a speech genre known as *kros* in the linguistic repertoire of speakers in Papua New Guinea, Stroud shows how code-switching between Tok Pisin and Taiap is used as a “double-voicing” or “polyphony” (Bakhtin 1984) technique, not only to show the speaker’s sensitivity to the co-participant’s language preferences but also to reflect a language ideology that fosters opaqueness, in the sense that it is often unclear in *kros* how much of what is said is the speaker’s own words and how much is an echo of others’ speech. Using sequential analysis as practiced in CA, Stroud illustrates the complex intertwining of linguistic varieties in *kros* and the difficulty of distinguishing what is the speaker’s own words and what is an echo of others’ speech – let alone distinguishing we- and they-codes (see also Stroud 1992, 1998; Kulick & Stroud 1990).

As mentioned earlier, the CA approach to code-switching was developed against the background of an overwhelming tendency in bilingualism research to explain code-switching behavior by attributing specific meanings to the switches, and by assuming that speakers intend these meanings to be perceived by their listeners. As Stroud 1992 points out, such tendencies can misrepresent and obscure the complexity and dynamics of code-switching. In Stroud’s words, “The problem of intention and meaning in code-switching is the problem of knowing to what extent the intentions and meanings that we assign to switches can in fact be said to be intended by a speaker or apprehended by his or her interlocutors” (1992:131). The CA approach to conversational code-switching

avoids the imposition of ANALYST-ORIENTED classificatory frameworks and instead attempts to reveal the underlying procedural apparatus by which conversation participants themselves arrive at local interpretations of language choice. In contrast to other existing theories of bilingual code-switching, the CA approach dispenses with motivational speculation in favor of an interpretative approach based on detailed, turn-by-turn analysis of language choices. It is not about what bilingual conversationalists may do, or what they usually do, or even about what they see as the appropriate thing to do; rather, it is about HOW the meaning of code-switching is constructed in interaction.

The CA approach to code-switching does not in any way deny that code-switching as a contextualization cue carries more social meaning in bilingual conversation than do gestural or prosodic cues in monolingual conversation. Because of the differences in historical development and political status of languages, different speakers and speaker groups in the same community may acquire languages for different reasons and at various rates. Consequently, their preference for and attitude to the languages co-available in the community may be different. Nevertheless, we, as analysts, must be extremely careful about assigning meanings to individual instances of code-switching simply on the basis of our own knowledge of the community's social history and of the individuals' language attitudes, especially when we are outsiders in the community in question. (The issue of the outsider-analyst's effect on data analysis and interpretation has been discussed extensively in the sociolinguistics literature, e.g. by Briggs 1984, Eades 1982, Gumperz 1982, Milroy, Li and Moffatt 1991, and Li 2000.)

Accepting that the coexisting languages in the community repertoire have different social significance for different speakers, the methodological question, then, is how much of the meaning is "brought along" and how much of it is "brought about" in interaction (Auer 1992). Social-motivation-based theories of code-switching emphasize the "brought along" interpretation, according to which the languages involved in code-switching have distinctive social-symbolic values, which merely have to be indexed in the interaction in order to become or to remain relevant. Consequently, the communicative act of code-switching itself is not seen to have any interactional meaning. In contrast, the CA approach to code-switching stresses the "emergent" character of meaning: Meaning emerges as a consequence of bilingual participants' contextualization work and thus is "brought about" by speakers through the very act of code-switching.

I can illustrate this point by examining two examples from a Cantonese–English code-switching corpus gathered as part of a larger research project on language maintenance and language shift in the Chinese community in Tyneside, UK. Details of the social and demographic structure of the community, and of the fieldwork methods, can be found in Li 1994. Ex. (1) is taken from an exchange during dinner in B's family dining room. A is a man in his late twenties, and B is a 40-year-old woman; also present is B's teenage daughter, C.

(1)

- B *Sik gai a.*
eat chicken PA
'Have some chicken.'
- A mm.
(5.0)
- A Haven't seen XXX (name, three syllables) for a long time.
(2.0)
- A Have you seen him recently?
- B No.
- A Have you seen XX (name, two syllables)?
- B (2.0) (To C) *Ning ngaw doei haai lai.*
bring my those shoe ASP.
'Bring my shoes here.'
- (To A) *Koei hoei bindou a?*
he go where PA
'Where was she going?'

The conversation up to the beginning of this example has been mainly in Cantonese. When B, the mother, offers A chicken, A gives a minimal response. The pause that follows indicates an end of the current interactional episode. After a five-second silence, A attempts to introduce a new topic (the whereabouts of a friend). This topical change is accompanied by the choice of English, which contrasts with B's choice in previous turns. B gives no response, so A reinitiates the topic, this time with an interrogative. The response from B is in English, but negative and minimal. A continues by asking about a different person, again in English. After a short pause, B selects a different addressee (C) and switches from English to Cantonese, temporarily excluding A from the conversation, before she turns back to address him in Cantonese again.

In some earlier work (e.g., Milroy, Li & Moffatt 1991, Li & Milroy 1995), we have suggested that the reason B in this exchange selected a different addressee and switched to Cantonese was that she did not like to be addressed in English by another adult; and the reason B did not like to be addressed in English by another adult was that she belonged to a generation whose language choice and language preference (in attitudinal terms) were both clearly Chinese-dominant. Although I would maintain that this interpretation is correct, I now believe that it told us little that we did not intuitively know already about bilingual speakers' language behavior. What seems to be needed is not an analysis that depends on interaction-external interpretation, but a detailed, turn-by-turn analysis of the participants' conversational work, which can demonstrate how such issues as attitude, preference, and community norms have been "brought about" in the actual contributions of the participants. For instance, the woman B in the above example actually did use English, albeit a single-syllable word, in responding to A's first question. It was only after A had asked the second question, and after two seconds had elapsed, that B chose to switch to Cantonese and a different addressee. At the local level, she suspended the second pair part of an adjacency pair (her response to A's question) and in-

serted first pair part (request to C). In doing so, she softened the impact of her language alternation. When she returned to A in the next turn, her choice of Cantonese appeared to be more legitimate because it followed from the immediately preceding turn. Nevertheless, her second pair part took the form of a question, not a direct response to A's previous question. B's language alternation, together with her strategic use of the turn-taking mechanism as a way to shift topic and to change addressee, helped to "bring about" her language attitude and preference.

Similarly, ex. (2) demonstrates how the language preference of speakers of different generations and the authority structure of Chinese families have been "brought about" in the language choices of the participants.

(2) A is an 8-year-old girl; C is A's 15-year-old brother; B is their mother, in her forties.

- A Cut it out for me (.) please.
 B (2.5)
 A Cut it out for me (.) mum.
 C [Give us a look.
 B [*Mut-ye?*
 'What'
 A Cut this out.
 B *Mut-ye?*
 'What?'
 C Give us a look.
 (2.0)
 B *Nay m ying wa lei?*
 You NEG. answer me PA
 'Why don't you answer me?'
 A (to C) Get me a pen.

The exchange takes place in the family sitting-room. A is making a folder from pieces of cardboard; C, the brother, is looking on, while B, the mother, is knitting in a chair nearby. A's initial request for help to the mother receives a null response. A then repeats it, now using a vocative to specify her mother as the next speaker. B's subsequent question *Mut-ye?* 'What?' overlaps with C's turn as he self-selects. A then issues her request for the third time, but B repeats the same question as if she has not heard A's request properly, or has not understood it. Again A fails to amend her request.

The lack of cooperation between the speakers is salient, as is the lack of alignment between the language choices of A and B. A's three repeated requests are in English and show no sign of change in form, while B's questions are in Chinese; the latter could be described, in CA terms, as repair initiators offering A opportunities to amend her utterances. A fails to repair her turns, which B apparently expects, and A hardly changes her form of request. At the end of exchange, we find something close to a communicative breakdown, in the sense that B offers no response at all to A's repeated requests. After a two-second silence, B asks A why she does not respond to her. A then turns to C, abandoning the exchange between herself and B.

As noted earlier, Chinese adults in the Tyneside community where our examples were collected generally preferred to speak and to be spoken to in Cantonese, whereas Chinese children in the community preferred English. At the same time, the authority structure of the family in Chinese culture expects children to comply with their parents. They are expected to behave in a manner appropriate to their specific status in the family, which means that they should do as their parents (or adults generally) tell them. These two aspects of the background context are, of course, relevant to our analysis of the sequence; yet the task of the analyst is not to be satisfied with an interaction-external explanation, but rather to show how the two aspects of the wider context have been “brought about” by the participants in the exchange in ex. (2) through their insistence on divergent language choices.

The mother may believe that she has the authority over her children, and when the daughter asks her to do something, she can decide whether the request is reasonable or not; if she thinks it is not, then she can either reject it or request an alternative. Her repeated use of the repair initiator *Mut-ye* ‘What?’ is therefore strategic: She is competing for turn control. She replaces a second pair part of an adjacency pair with a first pair part, or she responds to a request with a request. Her use of Cantonese contradicts the daughter’s language choice. These two aspects of B’s local management strategy – responding to a request with a request, and choice of Cantonese – help to “bring about” her role as the authority figure in the family. In the meantime, the daughter’s insistence on her nonconvergent language choice highlights intergenerational differences in language attitude and preference. Although it is not possible to predict on an “if only” basis a possible alternative outcome of A’s requests, we can note that A’s failure to achieve the desired compliant response from B has contributed to the eventual communication breakdown.⁴ (See Gumperz 1982:133 for a comparable case, where failure to read contextualization cues by the interactants gives rise to a similarly unsatisfactory interactional outcome.)

CRITICISMS OF THE CA APPROACH TO BILINGUAL INTERACTION

The CA approach to bilingual interaction is not without its critics. Some people who look at CA from the outside have been “amazed by the number of superficial features of CA’s practice” (ten Have 1999). It seems to them that CA refuses to use available theories of human conduct to ground or organize its arguments, or even to construct a theory of its own. Furthermore, it seems unwilling to explain the phenomena it studies by invoking “obvious” factors like identities, power relations, rights and obligations of the participants, their motivations, or the institutional context of the interaction. Specifically, the CA approach to bilingual interaction has been criticized for neglecting aspects of the wider social context (e.g., who participants are in demographic, social-network, and even ethnographic terms), the socio-psychological associations and therefore the social mes-

sages that a particular linguistic choice carries, and the speaker's motivations. Finally, CA seems to be obsessed with the details of its materials. These impressions are not far off the mark; but, as ten Have points out, "the issue is why CA refuses to use or construct 'theories', why it refuses interaction-external explanations, and why it is obsessed with details" (1999:28). The short answer is that these refusals and obsession are necessary in order to get a clear picture of CA's core phenomenon, the in-situ organization of conduct, and especially of talk-in-interaction. Thus, CA is not atheoretical; it has a different conception of how to theorize about social life, and a different notion of the nature of evidence and of how to validate hypotheses.

In general, conversation analysts believe that there is no independent social reality that exists separately from the daily social interaction between people. Society is viewed as the fitting together of joint actions between individuals (Bulmer 1969:76). So-called individual motivations take a myriad of forms and are therefore viewed as the "formation of workable relations." Joint actions fit together through the acts of interpretation and definition in pragmatic mode. By identifying the social acts that he is about to join, an individual can then orient himself. These acts of interpretation guide actions and also serve as orienting mechanisms toward the actions of others. The explanation for action, therefore, lies in its meaning for others in the same interactional process rather than in interaction-external causal origins (Bulmer 1969:76).

In its strictest form, CA would argue that social settings are not of interest because people use conversational devices to account for what they do, regardless of the situation in which it takes place. The talk itself will then reflect methods of accounting that may even transcend cultural context. They may omit reference not only to the purposes of the conversations but also to the setting in which it takes place. What is or is not admissible into the analysis and interpretation needs to be determined empirically.

For those who adopt the CA perspective, there are three fundamental points in the approach to conversational code-switching: (i) relevance, (ii) procedural consequentiality, and (iii) the balance between social structure and conversational structure. Given that code-switching can be described and interpreted in so many ways, how does an analyst show that his or her description and interpretation are relevant to the participants in an ongoing interaction? As pointed out earlier, there is a tendency in code-switching research to attribute macro-social value to individual instances of switching and to assume that speakers intend such meanings to be understood by their co-interactants. Analysts who adopt the CA approach argue that, while code-switching is indeed a socially significant behavior, their task is to show how analyses are DEMONSTRATIVELY RELEVANT to the participants.

The point of procedural consequentiality involves demonstrating whether and how extra-linguistic context has determinate consequences for conversational interaction. Analysts cannot simply import their intuition about, say, the family-like or work-like character of the interaction; instead, they must demonstrate

what gives a particular piece of interaction its specific “family” or “work” character. This is what some practitioners of CA call “co-construction” (see the studies collected in Jacoby & Ochs 1995).

This relates to the third point, the balance of social and conversational structures. Those who adopt the CA approach to code-switching argue that one must not assume that, in any given conversation, speakers switch languages in order to “index” speaker identity, attitudes, power relations, formality, and so on; rather, one must be able to demonstrate how such things as identity, attitude, and relationship are presented, understood, accepted, or rejected and changed in the process of interaction.

These three points imply an important shift of analytic interest. It is suggested that any interpretation of the meaning of code-switching – or what might be called the broad *why* questions – must come AFTER full examination of the ways in which the participants are locally constituting the phenomena: the *how* questions. In Auer’s words, one needs to look for the procedures

used by participants in actual interaction, i.e. that they are supposed to be interactionally relevant and ‘real’, not just a scientific construct designed to ‘fit the data’. So there is an analytic interest in MEMBERS’ methods (or procedures, as opposed to an interest in external procedures derived from a scientific theory. In short, our purpose is to analyse MEMBERS’ PROCEDURES TO ARRIVE AT LOCAL INTERPRETATIONS OF LANGUAGE ALTERNATION. (Auer 1984a:3; emphasis in original)

Let us look at one example. Ex. (3) was originally published in Li (1994:163) as an example of how code-switching can be used to contextualize preference organization in bilingual conversation. It has been reanalyzed by Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai 2001 in terms of Myers-Scotton’s “markedness” theory of language choice, which has recently been recast in what has been called the “rational choice” (RC) model.

(3) Mother speaking to a 12-year-old boy who is playing with the computer.

A: Finished homework?

B: (2.0)

A: Steven, *yi mo wan sue?*

want NEG. PERF. review book

‘Do you want to do your homework?’

B: (1.5) I’ve finished.

The starting point of Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai’s analysis is the assumption that mother (A) and son (B) have different preferences for unmarked languages in mother–son interactions: The mother prefers to speak Cantonese, and her son prefers English. The mother’s initial choice of English is therefore “unexpected,” or “marked.” Her motive, according to Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, “seems to be to suspend the unmarked RO (rights and obligations) set in order to bring about a

desired effect” (2001:20). When the mother does not get an adequate response to her question, she switches to Cantonese. Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai suggest that the switch displays how the mother weighs and prioritizes her goals differently at this point: Taking account of the available evidence (lack of response to English), she makes her goal and her preferred RO set (i.e., her desires and values) unambiguous for her son. The focus is now on her desires and goals and not on accommodating to her son in any way. Presumably, her main goal is to have her son pay attention and respond. The switch is from the marked (and, in this case, ineffective) choice of English to her unmarked choice of Cantonese. When she does not succeed in establishing her authority about school matters through speaking some English, she satisfies her ultimate goal by switching to Cantonese. Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai further argue that assessing available evidence is one of the mechanisms that guide choices under an RC approach. Under an RC interpretation, the mother’s choice to switch to Cantonese is motivated by the evidence that both mother and son know that she has some measure of authority in the RO set that her use of Cantonese indexes. Her authority is recognized: The son replies, albeit in English.

While I believe Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai’s interpretation is largely correct, the point I want to make here is whether the meaning of the mother’s code-switching could be interpreted WITHOUT invoking interaction-external factors such as marked and unmarked choices and the RO set, which are not always consistently empirically definable. Using the CA approach, we can demonstrate the “responsive treatment” (Schegloff 1982) by mother and son of each other’s language choices, and the procedures they themselves use in interpreting the meaning of code-switching in conversation; for example, when the mother asks the son in English if he has finished his homework, the son’s response is a “noticeable silence,” a typical dispreference marker. It is this dispreference marker that prompts the mother to switch to Cantonese to reiterate her question. This reiteration is apparently understood by the son as an indirect request to do his homework. A pause marks his turn as another dispreferred second pair part, and his choice of language contrasts with that of his mother in the immediately preceding turn, reinforcing dispreference. Note here that we use “dispreference” as a technical term of CA to refer to various kinds of structural complexity that accompany particular instances of second pair parts of adjacency pairs, not as a social-psychological notion (cf. Levinson 1983:307; Pomerantz 1984; Sacks 1987).⁵ This is a general procedure whereby conversation participants signal their understanding to each other. By focusing on such commonly used procedures, conversation analysts aim to reveal the evidence of social reality and to pinpoint the origin of social meaning – HOW meaning is generated from face-to-face interaction. For those who adopt the CA approach to code-switching, the meaning is not given through the inculcation of values and norms, or any structural forms that pre-exist or underlie individual actions and utterances. Instead, it resides in conversational interaction itself.

EVIDENCE-BASED ANALYSIS

Conversation analysts have a different concept of evidence, based not on the analyst's own intuition (as perhaps is characteristic of some schools of generative linguistics) nor on quantitative information (typical of sociolinguistics of the variationist paradigm), but on members' (conversation participants') procedures of interpretation and interaction. This has led to a preoccupation with transcription conventions for recording conversation that, in many people's view, has become an obsession. The preoccupation arises from two characteristics of CA: the belief that such evidence is extremely rich – nearly inexhaustible – in the complexity of its details; and skepticism regarding the authenticity of some of the data used to support other theories and models of bilingual interaction.

It has long been recognized that transcription is not only a technically complex process but also an ideologically laden one, in which the theoretical position of the transcriber is fully implicated (Ochs 1979). All transcripts take sides, enabling certain interpretations and advancing certain theories. As Bucholtz points out, "Embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber toward the text" (2000:143). Conversation analysts in the early days of the approach sought to develop a complete convention that would faithfully represent relevant features of the actual interaction in the original context. They have succeeded in raising awareness among researchers of the importance of minute details of communication (silence, prosody, nonlexicalized discourse markers, nonverbal cues, etc.), but they have come to realize that an ideology-free transcription is impossible (Schegloff 1997).

Although most published studies of bilingual interaction give fairly clear accounts of the transcription methods used in the work being reported, readers do not often make the link between the transcriptive representation of the data and the researcher's ideology, identity, and preference. Let us now look at one specific transcript of an extract from a conversation between two Mandarin Chinese–English bilingual youths:

(4a)

- A: Tim rang and wanted to borrow me bike.
 B: Oh yeah?
 A: Again, you know?
 B: (Silence)
 5 A: You're seeing him tonight, aren't you?
 B: Yup.
 A: Oh don't know. I think I'm going to ask Susan to tell him.
 B: *Rang Susan shuo shenma?*
 let say what
 'What do you want Susan to say?'
 A: He broke the bloody gear you know? I mean...
 10 B: mm
 A: *Ni gen ta shuo wo yao chuqu yitang.*
 you PREP. him say I want go-out once
 'You tell him that I'm going out'.

- B: *Susan buhui guan de.*
 NEG. will bother PA.
 'Susan won't bother (about that).'
 A: (Silence)
 B: What do you want me to say?

A transcription of this kind calls for an interaction-external, motivation-based explanation. For the sake of argument, we can assign English as the preferred (in the non-CA sense) language of speaker A, as this is the language in which he initiated the exchange. His intention, one would assume, is to persuade speaker B to let Tim know that A does not want to lend Tim his bicycle. Upon realizing B's reluctance, A switches to Mandarin Chinese (line 11), which could be B's preferred language – he has used it in his first full sentence (line 8). What is interesting is that B ignores A's request and tells A that Susan would not help him, though he clearly understands A's intention. Perhaps in order to maintain his friendship with A, B finally switches to English and asks the obvious, *What do you want me to say?*

Of course, there is no guarantee that English is in fact A's preferred language. It may well be that he started off in what he assumed to be B's preferred language to help ensure that his request would be accepted. Evidence in support of this assumption is B's eventual use of English in asking what A wants him to do. Such an interpretation would then trigger a rationality-based discussion of how the speakers evaluate the cost and benefit of their choices.

In fact, however, the two speakers in this conversation are "routine" bilinguals who code-switch frequently and regularly as part of their daily conversational routine. They are very rarely in monolingual mode, and their code-switching is not triggered by the so-called rights and obligations (RO) set (Myers-Scotton 1993a). A CA approach will not only give a rather different interpretation of the meaning of code-switching in this sequence of conversation; it will also reveal the members' procedure of accomplishing an interactional task, in this case making and refusing a request. To undertake a conversation analysis, a more detailed transcription is required. Ex. (4b) presents the same extract of conversation in CA conventions:

(4b)

- A: Tim rang [and (.) wanted to borrow me bike.
 B: [oh yeah?
 (1.0)
 A: again you know?
 5 B: (1.0)
 A: You're seeing him tonight, aren't you.
 B: Yup.
 A: (1.0) ohhh dunno (.) I think I'm going to ask Susan to tell him.
 B: (0.6) *Rang Susan shuo shenma.*
 let say what
 'What do you want Susan to say?'

- 10 A: He broke the bloody gear you know? (.) [I mean...
 B: [mm
 A: *Ni gen ta shuo wo yao chuqu* [yitang.
 you PREP. him say I want go-out once
 'You tell him that I'm going out'.
 B: [Susan buhui guan de.
 won't bother PA.
 'Susan won't bother (about that).'
 A: (1.5)
 15 B: What do you want me to say.

Transcription conventions relevant to this extract.

- (0.0) number in parentheses indicate elapsed time in silence by tenth of seconds.
 (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a tiny 'gap' within or between utterances.
word Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude
 .? Punctuation marks are used to indicate characteristics of speech production, especially intonation; a period indicates a stopping fall in tone; a question mark indicates a rising intonation.
 worddd Repeated letter in a word indicates lengthening of the syllable or sound.

The first thing to be noticed here is the amount of detail that was missing in the previous transcript – especially overlaps, gaps, and prosodic cues. It is exactly such details that provide the local management mechanism whereby conversation participants interpret each other's moves and achieve joint understanding.

In CA terms, A's initial utterance is a pre-sequence, introducing a new interactional episode and at the same time checking B's position. Following a sequential analysis, we can see that B's utterance in line 2 comes in the middle of A's turn, although at an appropriate turn construction unit. Nevertheless, it results in a one-second gap, which cannot be attributed to either A or B. A then reinforces his invitation to B for comment and makes it more explicit by using stress, discourse marker, and rising intonation. The one-second gap that follows is attributable to B, and in CA terms, it constitutes significant silence, indicating a dispreferred response. A does not give up at this point (if he did, he would have changed the topic completely) but pursues the topic by reiterating it with a tag question. B gives a "preferred" response this time, but only in structural terms. He offers no clear evidence to A whether he understands B's real intention, for the time being. Realizing that he has failed to convey his intention to B, A changes his tactics and says he is going to ask Susan to tell Tim. B's response is clearly marked as dispreferred, with a 0.6-second gap and a switch to Chinese. This forces A to make his request more explicitly (lines 10 and 12). Noticeably, he switches from English to Chinese, the language B has chosen in the previous turn to make the request. B's decline to A's request comes in two parts: First, in Chinese, he remarks that he does not think Susan would help; then, after a longer than usual silence by A (normally, one-second is the maximum tolerable silence in English conversation; see Jefferson 1989), he switches to English and asks what A wants him to say.

Here, it is not the choice of one language over the other that is meaningful, but the switching between the languages, in sequential context, that triggers an interpretation first and foremost by the interactants themselves, and secondarily by the analyst. The immediate task, as far as the interactants are concerned, is how to make and refuse a request. A sequential analysis can show how code-switching is used to accomplish this task. Such an analysis can be done without alluding to interaction-external norms and values, or to the psycholinguistic mode of the speaker (Grosjean 2001), but it requires a much more careful transcription than that used to support a motivation-based analysis.⁶

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the CA approach to bilingual interaction is very different from other sociolinguistic models that have been proposed. Rather than attempting to describe structures of code-switching in quantitative terms and divorced from its natural site of occurrence (conversation), or to explain meanings of code-switching by invoking interaction-external concepts such as speakers' rights and obligations, the CA approach focuses on collaborative achievements of the conversation participants, especially the methods and procedures they deploy in achieving understanding. The relevance of the sociological background of CA to sociolinguistics generally is the methodological preferences that derive from it. The belief that language is not simply a medium for the expression of intentions, motives, or interests but a topic for uncovering the methods through which ordered activity is generated has driven CA to focus on the observation of "naturally occurring" statements made by participants in social activities at the expense of premature theorization, epistemology, and philosophical speculation. The CA approach will remain unattractive to those who still wish to "predict" social behavior; however, contrary to what some commentators have claimed, CA is by no means a purely descriptive technique. In fact, it requires nothing less than a radical shift in the focus of social scientific enquiries. As May points out, "Sociologists, for example, should no longer assume Durkheim's notion of social reality as *sui generis*, or view human behaviour as following the impersonal and general rules of a role, or the covering laws of cause and effect. Instead, social order is a direct result of people's 'accomplishments' in their everyday lives. Psychologists should cease experiments which are of no relevance to the practical activities of people as they go about their daily lives" (1996:98). CA goes beyond methodology; it is a theory of a different kind, an ideology and a worldview that cannot be overlooked, trivialized, or dismissed.

NOTES

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¹ To complicate the matter, leading practitioners of CA, such as Auer, talk about “language preference” in Pomerantz’s (1984) sense of “preferred-action turn shape.” Schegloff 1988 calls it “practice-based” use of the concept, as opposed to “structure-based” use, which refers to the structural regularities that mark alternative second pair parts. In this article, “language preference” is used in a non-CA sense.

² Similar comments could be made on the sociolinguistic work in the quantitative-variationist paradigm.

³ There has been considerable debate about the legitimate “uses” of CA in different contexts. For example, Wetherell 1998 has tried to contextualize CA within a post-structuralist framework. See Schegloff 1997, 1998 for comments.

⁴ In the strictest CA sense, it is the sequence failure – i.e., no party was willing to give the second pair part – that contributed to the breakdown.

⁵ The notion of preference in CA is very close to the linguistic concept of markedness, especially as used in morphology, where there is an opposition between two members and one member is felt to be more usual, more normal, and less specific, and to have less material than the other. As Levinson points out, “The parallel is therefore quite apt, because in a similar way preferred (and thus unmarked) seconds to different and unrelated adjacency pair first parts have less material than dispreferred (marked seconds), but beyond that have little in common (cf. ‘irregular’). In contrast, dispreferred seconds of quite different and unrelated first parts (e.g. questions, offers, requests, summonses, etc.) have much in common, notably components of delay and parallel kinds of complexity” (1983:333).

⁶ In this article, I have not discussed the notion of “language” in bilingual interaction (and associated notions of “matrix language” or “base language”). Many researchers who apply the CA approach to code-switching argue that the information that there are two languages involved is potentially interaction-external. One of the tasks of the analyst is to demonstrate, through a sequential analysis, that the languages are oriented to by the participants as different (see, e.g., Auer 1999, Gafaranga 2000, Alvarez-Caccamo 1998).

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