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978-1-107-04468-5 - Early Social Interaction: A Case Comparison of Developmental Pragmatics and Psychoanalytic Theory

Michael A. Forrester

Excerpt

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## 1 Introduction

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How a child learns to talk and so gain membership of a culture is something that social scientists have long sought to understand. Whether or not matters are quite so straightforward is something that will become clear as we proceed. The central idea that informs this book is that when engaged in everyday interaction people are simultaneously oriented to the conventions that inform social-action *and* to the emotional or affective state of the people they are engaging with. The framework outlined in the following chapters is offered as a guide to understanding the complex nature of the processes involved when accommodating these two distinct yet interrelated dimensions; one concerned with learning how to monitor what we, and those around us, are *doing*; the other with learning how to recognise *feeling* or *affect*. Correspondingly, for any child what is most significant for attaining membership within any culture is gradually being able to display an orientation towards these domains – *doing* and *feeling*, or *social-action* and *affect*. The simplicity of such a proposal carries with it certain presuppositions that require clarification.

First, I am proposing that these parallel domains are at a certain level incompatible, somewhat ambiguously related and one might say paradoxical. My aim is not an attempt at conceptual or theoretical integration, but rather to outline how one can investigate simultaneous dimensions of human experience from contrastive perspectives in a coherent manner. Second, the theoretical positions adopted in this book when studying each of these domains – a social-discursive perspective (doing) and a psychoanalytic orientation (feeling) – have very contrasting conceptions of what constitutes learning and development during that period of time when a child becomes a member of a culture. Third, each approach has strikingly different epistemological leanings with the ethnomethodological social praxis of conversation analysis somewhat distant from psychoanalytic or psychodynamic accounts regarding knowledge of oneself and our relationships with those around us. However, in one respect they are similar in that for conversation analysis and psychoanalysis the smallest apparently mundane piece of social-action could be of considerable significance but for very different reasons.

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In order to extend and develop these opening proposals, in what follows I bring together and describe various lines of research I have been engaged in over the last ten-to-fifteen years. The material is based on a longitudinal video recorded study of one of my daughters who was filmed when she was learning how to talk between the ages of one year and three years/six months.<sup>1</sup> In one sense, the book serves as a statement about my understanding of how a young child becomes a member of a culture through the practices and procedures of everyday conversation. An additional aim is to present the research as a case-study on the interdependence between the analysis of social interaction and subsequent interpretation. This will be achieved through the contrast and comparison of two different theoretical approaches addressing the same data corpus – one informed by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, the other by psychoanalytic developmental psychology.

The four main themes underpinning this book are first, the suggestion that when a young child is learning how to engage in everyday interaction she has to acquire those competencies that allow her to be simultaneously oriented to the conventions that inform talk-in-interaction *and* at the same time deal with the emotional or affective dimensions of her experience. A second and corresponding theme is that in order to understand the various ideas and theories in developmental psychology regarding early social relations (parent–child interaction), it is necessary to understand both early pragmatic development *and* emotional development. The theoretical positions underlying these domains provide very different accounts of human development and we could benefit with understanding why this might be the case. An additional focus is the question of methodology in the study of early social interaction. My aim is to highlight the fact that quite distinct theoretical interpretations can inform material taken from the same original source, i.e., the video recordings of parent–child interaction alongside transcribed extracts of the sequences examined. A framework for understanding the relationships between video recordings, the production of data (transcribed extracts) and interpretations derived from such data is developed and some preliminary evaluation of its potential value considered. The fourth and final theme I am concerned with is the idea that when children learn how to talk they also learn how to repress – either through learning what cannot be said or participating in practices which help initiate

<sup>1</sup> In the history of developmental psychology and child language studies, there are a number of books that document language acquisition based on diary methodologies or audio/video recordings (Brown, 1958; Bloom, 1970). In such research, the longitudinal data serves as the background for one or other theory of language acquisition. More recent examples address issues such as grammatical development and bilingual acquisition (Tomasello, 1992; Deuchar & Quay, 2000). These books are firmly located in the field of child language research, addressing questions germane to formal elements of language acquisition – however, they have not focused on early social relations and conversational skills.

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the displacement of the ‘non-recognisable’. The analyses of the relevant data chapters make some assessment of this proposition possible. The remainder of this introduction outlines a summary description of each chapter providing an overview of how the various themes are realised.

Chapter 2 begins by providing a picture of the research background to the core of the book. Here, I trace out certain topics prevalent in developmental psychology over the last thirty to forty years highlighting why the dominant views in the discipline regarding cognition and language may not be particularly helpful if one is interested in studying children’s everyday language use. My background interests in developmental psychology, psycholinguistics and associated topics in semiotics and discourse studies engendered a keen curiosity into how young children learn how to talk. My originating question revolved around the puzzle, ‘how does a child become *language*’, or in other words, how does a child become an encultured being through the use of language? This led me to the study of pragmatics and here I consider some of the theoretical and methodological challenges in the areas of developmental pragmatics and child language that initiated an interest in perspectives within social science and philosophy that underscore social discursive approaches to early social interaction. The first section concludes with a brief commentary on Wittgenstein’s deliberations regarding language as a ‘form of life’, a view that informs contemporary theories of pragmatic development, if only indirectly.

The remainder of the chapter then provides an introduction to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis in order to provide detail on the background of the research. After an outline of the general approach of ethnomethodology and where it originates, attention turns to a summary account of the two main approaches found in conversation analysis – sequence-focused CA (CA&E from here) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA). The former approach is the one adopted in later chapters and these introductory remarks should help situate the context of the developing argument.

Building on the preliminary introduction to ethnomethodologically informed conversation analysis, Chapter 3 provides a review of current research and thinking in child-focused CA&E. The discussion is structured in three parts: an introduction to what is unique about this approach, particularly as regards the notion of membership (of a culture); a second section providing an overview of contemporary work in child-CA; and finally, a commentary on the significance of early language and conversational contexts for children. An explanation here of what ‘being a member’ of culture means for ethnomethodology helps bring out what researchers mean by ‘half-membership’ – a position children are said to inhabit in talk (Shakespeare, 1998). The second section provides a summary overview of child-CA&E research categorised into five sub-areas. This overview is for the most part descriptive and aimed at giving the reader a sense of the contemporary field. As other researchers have noted,

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a reading of the literature highlights the observation that attending to the interactional detail of children's everyday conversation might raise challenges for certain concepts in developmental psychology – such as intersubjectivity and theory of mind (Leudar & Costall, 2009).

The final part of Chapter 3 considers a number of insightful comments originating from Harvey Sacks (1992) on how children learn to become members of a culture. In particular, Sacks (1992) discussed the question of how children learn to 'see what other people might be thinking', and his observations on the fact of their discovery that adults do not know what they (children) are thinking, serve as a rich exemplar of the essence of the social practice orientation of child-CA&E. Chapters 2 and 3 together provide the background to the constructs informing a social-action focus on early social relations. The social practice dimension of early social relations and particularly the focus on the fine-detail of actual talk-in-interaction highlights the problematic nature of theories that privilege an internalised private individuated self – the central presuppositional bedrock of many theories of early social development (e.g., Stern, 1985; Harter, 1999). For a social practice orientation, one particularly challenging question turns on the issue of where exactly the boundary between the 'inside' and 'outside' of social relations might be?

Re-configuring the dual social-action/emotion perspective of the book, Chapter 4 provides a change in orientation and an introduction to psychoanalytically informed considerations of early social relations. Doing so indicates where one answer to the question of interiority might lie. The aim in this chapter is to highlight key ideas and themes in psychoanalytic developmental psychology that will provide a frame for understanding and examining the 'internal' psychological life of the developing infant and pre-school child – again, with particular reference to the specifics of participation in talk-in-interaction. This is not an attempt to outline a theory of early emotional development (e.g., Saarni *et al.*, 2006; Zahn-Waxler, 2010). Rather, I am suggesting that the psychoanalytic perspective may be a rich explanatory framework or discourse for discussion of the realm of internal experience, feeling, affect and whatever we take to be the recognition and monitoring of 'emotionality' in others and ourselves. My suspicion is that many who research early parent–child interaction, particularly in the child language and developmental pragmatic traditions, may not be particularly familiar with the psychoanalytic take on early social relations (and similarly many in psychoanalytic developmental psychology may have limited familiarity with child-focused CA&E).

For this reason, Chapter 4 considers a selection of key ideas and themes in psychoanalytic developmental psychology that will help inform our understanding of emotionality or the 'internal' psychological life of the developing infant and pre-school child. A number of these underpin the analysis of the chapters that serve as a contrast to the child-focused CA&E-based data chapters.

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While fully recognising that there is a multiplicity of approaches to be found within psychoanalytic thought, three main schools relevant to this focus on social relations are summarised and explained – Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott. The first section looking at Freud provides an outline of key points regarding the underlying concept of mind in psychoanalytic thought, including the instincts, the unconscious and identification. The reasons why such ideas are relevant for considerations of emotion and affect are brought out during this description. For example, one consideration is the suggestion that repression is a necessary part of the process of enculturation. In other words, repression is something that culture demands and requires, and Freud is credited with showing how the history of any one individual is somehow marked by the manner in which she/he has managed to reach some sort of equilibrium in attaining individuation.

The initial outline of Freudian psychoanalytic thinking helps introduce the work of Melanie Klein. Klein's emphasis on the significance of the earliest moment of a child's life will be discussed alongside concepts such as projective identification and the different developmental phases known as the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. My aim is to highlight reasons why these ideas help formulate or outline the affective/emotional dimension of psychoanalytic thinking on early social relations. The remainder of the discussion in Chapter 4 will describe and explain the thinking underpinning Winnicott's development of the Kleinian position, and his introduction of constructs such as the transitional space and 'good-enough' parenting. This way of thinking emphasises why social relations are critical right from the beginning, and with Winnicott we begin to understand the subtle ways in which an 'inside' is possible and how that 'inside' is permeated by, and interdependent with, the 'outside' (the social). At the same time, some discussion is necessary regarding the metaphorical and potentially paradoxical nature of psychoanalytic discourse on early socialisation. While recognising the challenges involved in engaging with this discourse, there is nevertheless an important sense in which the psychoanalytic perspective provides an explanatory framework for interpreting the realm of internal experience, feeling, affect and the monitoring of emotionality in ourselves and others during everyday social interaction.

The theories and ideas informing the two perspectives of social-action and emotional monitoring/affect having now been laid out, in Chapter 5 an account of human interaction that simultaneously embodies recognition of the significance of *both* social-action and psychological affect or emotion is introduced. To do so, a brief overview of the classic CA&E orientation to the analysis of social-action is provided, followed by a consideration of what underpins the ethnomethodological focus on methodic practice in the study of everyday action. The idea of methodic sense-making and how this finds expression in the production of conversational structures is then developed – in a manner

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that introduces the unfamiliar reader to the methodological stance of conversation analysis. At this point, I sketch out one of the key proposals of the book – the suggestion that the reason why people are interested in and closely monitor displays of excessive emotion is linked to a pervasive orientation they have to the on-going production of order-at-all-points (Jefferson, 1984). During every interaction, there is a potential awareness of our own and others' emotional state but such an awareness or orientation is rarely if ever recognised in the moment-by-moment dynamics of 'doing being ordinary'. In essence, my suggestion is that CA&E's concern and focus on the fractal orderliness of talk-in-interaction highlights and reflects something endemic to human life – a deep concern with being orderly, relatively foreseeable or predictable. If, during everyday interaction, we not only monitor social-action but also emotion or affect, then the underlying impetus for being attentive to the latter derives from the ever-present possibility of disorder. This is another way of describing what Freud and other psychoanalysts would call the dynamic unconscious – an interminable and unrecognised force in human interaction. Maintaining, producing and displaying a constant orientation to the fractal orderliness of human interaction seems testament to our success at keeping disorder and the 'extra-ordinary' at bay.

Having drawn out aspects of these parallel dimensions of interaction, one issue or problem with this 'problem of order' is then introduced and explained. This is then followed with examples from publicly available recordings that highlight extreme moments of 'disorder' demonstrating the nature of the problem. The examples also lend support to the proposal that the CA&E analytic enterprise seems in part to be predicated on a sense of anxiety, anxiety about the possibility of 'not-order', or 'disorder' or 'extraordinary' order. Employing a medical trope, one might suspect that such attentiveness to, or anxiety about, the possibility of 'not-order' requires attentiveness to all that might constitute disorder or 'trouble' – very occasionally 'acute', yet presuppositionally 'chronic'. Essentially, I am proposing that it is this concern that constitutes the basis for the underlying impetus during human interaction for the monitoring of emotion or affect.

The following chapter (Chapter 6) turns to the specifics of the context of this case-study. Although in developmental psychology and child language there is a long-established history of researchers studying their own children and documenting their development (Darwin, 1877; Brown, 1958; Fernyhough, 2008), Tony Wootton's (1997) *Interaction and the development of mind* was the first work within child-focused CA&E to examine in detail the everyday interactions between a young pre-school child and her family. Based on audio and video recordings of his daughter between the ages of 12–36 months, Wootton (1997) provided a detailed account of how a child begins to use contextual knowledge so as to be able to make requests – how she acquires

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the skills necessary for ‘locally arrived at understandings’. Wootton’s (1997) work stands out as a unique contribution in both developmental psychology and sociolinguistics and I hope that this monograph might be seen as carrying on this line of research and indicating how the methodology of conversation analysis can be further extended. In this instance, the case-study approach that was adopted is best described as an exemplary case, that is, one which provides an account of an instance held to be ‘representative’, ‘typical’ or ‘paradigmatic’ of some given category or situations. In addition, Chapter 6 sets out a particular framework or methodological template that should help situate the relationship between the process of analysis and the production of data from the perspective of a participant-researcher. This template highlights the interdependence between any research object, and the interpretations one can derive from such objects, and which then informs our understanding of the production of social scientific accounts of the ‘everyday’, the ‘real-life’ and the ‘mundane’. When considering the analysis of naturally occurring events and the position of the analyst and/or participant, we need something to help guide our consideration of the interpretations offered. This is particularly the case where the analyst himself is a participant – as parent-researcher.

With regard to the material basis of the study, an emerging practice in CA&E studies is the making available of originating video or audio recordings so as to make it easier for other researchers to evaluate the interpretations proffered (Filipi, 2009). Chapter 6 details the recordings, transcripts and video recordings and other relevant background information. This includes details of the data corpus that has been produced from the original recordings. This is lodged at the CHILDES resource, and the specific details of the material are given, alongside guidance for access. It should be noted that the child language research community is fortunate in having available the CHILDES facility, where individual researchers can log data for future analyses by other parties (MacWhinney, 2000). It may be the case that such access to video recordings is particularly valuable in this instance, given my own role as participant-researcher and the contrasting perspectives that are offered in the data-focused chapters. The closing section of Chapter 6 also discusses particular concepts found in CA&E relevant to the analytic considerations. These include ideas surrounding participant-oriented evidence and the unique adequacy requirement, alongside a detailed example of an extract analysis highlighting participant-role and the particular challenges which arose with carrying out this case-study.

Coming to the second half of the book, the next six chapters (Chapters 7–12) examine extracts and recordings from the point of view of each perspective, doing so by alternating each data chapter (CA&E then psychoanalytic; back to CA&E; and so on). Throughout, the focus is on understanding how a child gradually becomes oriented to the conventions that inform talk-in-interaction *and* at the same time learns to deal with the emotional or affective dimensions



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of her experience. In this first of the data-focused chapters from the CA&E perspective, Chapter 7 documents the development of a conversational skill that is a good indicator of our predisposition to monitor each other's social-actions during talk: the ability to repair our speech, or self-repair as it is commonly termed. The analysis described here shows how Ella begins to employ relevant conversational resources that bear upon the incidence and expression of repair as a social practice. A number of issues are examined, including the incidence of self and other-initiated self-repair in adult-child interactions, the range of resources associated with the child's production of self-repair practices and the variety of discourse contexts within which Ella employs repair.

What becomes clear is that certain distinctions and differentiations can be made between what is specific to what constitutes self-repair of 'trouble-sources-in-talk' and more general sequence repair phenomena. In a number of extracts, Ella alters an action or utterance following the non-response of her co-participant, and the form of her repairs indicates a growing sensitivity to and monitoring of other people. Furthermore, we find that early repair skills seem to involve considerable sound-alteration on Ella's part. By age 2, for example, the manner of the alteration takes into account what might be presupposed by an addressee not responding. We find that whether or not a listener has registered receipt of a turn-at-talk can have a particular bearing on the likelihood of a self-repair 'in pursuit of a response'. Self-repair as a social practice also appears to be related to the increasing interest Ella has with taking up social role or status positions appropriate to her particular cultural context. Repair organisation seems to provide the interactional circumstances within which a child's evolving repertoire of skills and resources become embedded and realised as repair practices. In mapping out the incidence and form of self-repair, it would seem that the predisposition described in the CA&E literature towards self over other-repair is reflected in the data for this child. The analysis in this chapter provides insight into the manner in which relatively simple initiation sequences gradually take on more complex forms, increasingly serving the demands of different discourse contexts.

We then switch perspectives, and in Chapter 8 move from the social-action orientation to emotion or affect, and a corresponding change in the theoretical interpretation offered, i.e., from child-focused CA&E to psychoanalytic psychology. This is the first examination of the suggestion that by adopting a psychoanalytic perspective on early social relations we are provided with a coherent discourse foregrounding the realm of internal experience, feeling, affect – i.e., whatever we take to be the recognition and monitoring of emotionality in ourselves and others. At the same time and in service of methodological consistency, the analyses of the various extracts discussed in this chapter rest on the conventions and practices of sequence-focused CA&E. In other words, in Chapter 8, and Chapters 9 and 12, although a psychoanalytic reading or



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interpretation of the interaction is provided, this is done alongside a CA&E analytic orientation, that is with reference to transcription practices, orthographic detail and a considered focus on the sequential implicativeness of the talk-in-interaction.

The specific examples in this chapter highlight the interactional detail of moments when a child learns what *not* to say and how those around her use strategies for repressing and displacing the uninvited and inappropriate. We find for instance, that by 18 months old, Ella has learned something of what is involved in ‘performing’ emotional displays in order to gain attention – with corresponding surprise and amusement on my part that she can display an orientation to the reflexively accountable nature of her ‘act’. Another example examines the strategies Ella employs to overcome an on-going disagreement in the interaction. Here, the emotional performance is displaced or repressed through Ella producing a short narrative and eliciting a positive response from her co-participant. What is striking is the manner in which humour is used as a strategy for transforming interactional trouble. A third extract considers a sequence where Ella employs her understanding of inappropriate taboo words to good effect such that she manages to stop her sister tickling her excessively.

Another extract turns on an examination of what precedes and follows Ella’s use of a highly ambiguous phrase. This draws attention to the circumstances where what might seem like an innocuous comment on examination turns out to be a negative act on the child’s part. It becomes clear that this difficulty is successfully displaced or glossed over through one of the most frequent practices a child will be exposed to – deliberate non-response by a co-participant. Finally, the trouble engendered by Ella’s mispronunciation of one small word highlights one of those rare instances where the edifice of the ‘doing being ordinary’ of everyday social life shakes or tremors slightly. What happens is that through my own mishearing, Ella and I seem to be suspended in a kind of momentary interactive vertigo. Considerable effort had to be made on my part to ensure that the difficulty is first identified, then repaired, and any possible unconscious communication displaced. Although it is difficult to ascertain the significance of such moments for the development of social relationships, the fact that they are noticeably rare may indicate the considerable work necessary for maintaining what one can call fractal orderliness under all circumstances.

The next chapter (Chapter 9) returns to the theme of social-action and conversational practice, and how Ella learns what is involved in producing and responding to questions and answers. These practices, which can be expressed in numerous different ways, often serve as exemplars of the classic adjacency pair structure evident in conversation (Sacks *et al.*, 1974). Following a brief consideration of relevant literature from CA&E and child language studies, analysis focuses on how a child learns what constitutes answering, i.e., how does Ella learn to see the ‘project of a (the) question’ (Sacks, 1992), seeing in

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this instance meaning displaying her recognition ‘of the fact that’ she understands what a question wants to find out. For example, in one case Ella displays a clear recognition of why and how questions are designed and draws attention to the inappropriateness of asking questions just for the sake of it. However, there is a subtle difference between a child being able to recognise that a question is a particular kind of action requiring a response, and understanding the form that response should take. Tracing out the development of this competence we find, for example, early instances where Ella can produce the correct format of questioning, but not quite have the skill to change these formats according to whether the addressee understands or not. Between the ages of 2 and 3, we find out that Ella begins to be held accountable for the form of her answers, e.g., if they are inappropriate or odd in some way.

The mapping out and description of the emergence of questioning and answering highlights how we might understand those situations that have a consequential bearing on how children learn what Garfinkel & Sacks (1970) called members’ methods, i.e., the methodic practices that constitute question–answer routines, repair procedures, formulations and many other (if not all) conversational actions. It becomes clear that once a child has reached a certain age, participation itself makes demands of a kind not evident in earlier social encounters. What is interesting, in light of the examples examined in this chapter, is that by age 3 the actions that make question and answer sequences realisable can be produced and oriented to by Ella as reflexively accountable practices.

Maintaining the alternation between contrasting themes, in Chapter 10 we return to the domain of affect and emotion, and how the latter is expressed and recognised in social interaction. Here, the work of Winnicott is explained in more detail and his particular emphasis on social relations from the first moments of an infant’s life brought out. The suggestion from psychoanalytic developmental psychology is that Winnicott’s conception of the transforming movement that occurs from the mother–infant unit to infant and mother as separate entities helps us to understand the subtle ways in which an ‘inside’ is made possible. Furthermore, the form of this transformation implies that the ‘inside’ is permeated by, and interdependent with, the ‘outside’ – the social. Winnicott (1971) also drew out the significance of this transitional space as a potential, or rather, potentiating space, suggesting that the infant has very intensive experiences in the ‘potential space between the subjective object and the object objectively perceived’ (p. 135), in other words between aspects of the child’s experience of there being ‘nothing but her’ (omnipotence) and what is really ‘not-her’ (reality). This potential space both joins and separates simultaneously, and from the child’s point of view, objects and toys used in such a space are things that are both ‘not me’ but at the same time, carry ‘me’ within them. For this reason, play creates a method whereby the child