

Bakhtin's Dimensions of Language and the Analysis of Conversation

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The work of the Mikhail Bakhtin circle is examined to discover useful intersections between their approach to situated talk and that of conversation analysis (CA). Although the Bakhtin and CA come from distinctive traditions, they are shown to share many concepts about the analysis of conversation. Comparing the approaches yields three Bakhtinian dimensions of language: open and closed perception, ownership, and incompleteness. These dimensions are applied to three well-known samples from the literature on analysis of talk, demonstrating how the problem space in analysis of talk can be expanded. The work of the Bakhtin circle is thus shown to be a valuable addition to the investigational repertoire of the conversation analyst.

KEY CONCEPTS Bakhtin, situated talk, conversation analysis, sociolinguistics

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The voluminous and eclectic writings of Mikhail M. Bakhtin and his colleagues, known collectively as the "Bakhtin circle" or the "Bakhtin group" (Clark & Holquist, 1984; Morson & Emerson, 1990) comprise a body of scholarly literature that has profoundly affected the study of language and culture. Whether their focus is literature (Bakhtin, 1984a), semiology (Voloshinov, 1973), literary criticism (Medvedev, 1985), the act of artistic creativity (Bakhtin, 1990), or psychology (Voloshinov, 1976), the Bakhtin group consistently embraced the principle that no discourse exists which is not situated in a specific place and time. Communicating (or prior to communicating, thinking) involves turning, not toward internal ontological verification, but outward in the act of joining oneself to existence.

Methods based on Bakhtin offer a provocative alternative to some received views of conversation analysis (CA).¹ The Bakhtin perspective, judiciously employed, probes language and life in ways that point up alternative entry points to some of CA's persistent problems. Although the Circle's perspectives do not comprise a method of conversation analysis, *per se*, their insights into the nature of situated talk allow us to examine CA findings in ways potentially productive to conversation analysis, as well as other approaches to the study of socially-grounded interaction. In this essay, I explain the Bakhtinian approach to language and talk; examine its similarities to and divergences

from conversation analysis; and apply insights gained via these comparisons to study three samples of transcribed situated talk that have become part of the body of literature informing current understanding of conversation and discourse analysis. My examination results in reconfiguration of emphasis in the published findings and suggests avenues for future investigation. In addition, the overall goal of this essay is one that perhaps would, in light of their traditions, find support from adherents of both Bakhtin and CA: to establish dialogue between the two areas of study, with productive reassessments of the tenets of both.

UNITY IN POLARITY: THE BAKHTINIAN VIEW OF LANGUAGE

Bakhtin's group viewed the polarity of persons — arising because each person is in a unique place for seeing the world (the so-called "law of placement" [Holquist, 1990, p. 21; see also Bakhtin, 1990]) — as the fundamental condition for understanding. According to Bakhtin (1986d), "Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding — in time, in space, in culture" (p. 7). Moreover, the key to accomplishing creative understanding is language, since, "Language is systematically, not just metaphorically, the house of being..." (Holquist, 1981, p. 34). By words one understands the world, enacts what one discovers, and communicates the contents of one's identity. Thus words can be said to be the constituting element of social life itself. As Voloshinov (1973) puts it, "A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (p. 86).

Such language does not exist in the abstract, and is unregenerately active, and never settled or finalized. Bakhtin identified utterance as the basic unit of communication, bounded by speaking subjects in sociohistorically specific circumstances: "For speech can exist in reality only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects. Speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist" (Bakhtin, 1986b, p. 71). Bakhtin proposed this theory of discourse to counter excessive abstraction about language propounded by linguists of his time, notably de Saussure (1966). Utterance, the Bakhtin group felt, is marked entirely by social activity and not by abstractions imposed by linguists. Bakhtin's focal units of meaning are bounded by the insertion of those units into the ongoing stream of discourse, in response to what has been uttered before and in anticipation of what is to be uttered afterward. Thus, meaning is never to be found in the word as such. Instead, it can only be dialogic (Linell, 1998; Wertsch, 1991), negotiated in the process of social interaction and then only in conditions of dynamic, responsive understanding. Words, to Bakhtin, not only cannot be conceived devoid of social contextualization, but are subject to modification as they "live" through social intercourse. Words and utterances are neither stable nor self-equivalent, but rather constantly negotiated in the dynamic flux of social interaction, with the result that living language adamantly resists systematic classification: bluntly put, it is just too messy.

The act of introducing an utterance is simply a moment in the ongoing stream of discourse, with the utterance depending for its meaning on discourse occurring before and after it is ushered into social existence. Introducing utterance involves a number of

specific activities, any or all of which may bring what the speaker is trying to express into conflict with interpretations of others. This struggle is initiated when one puts one's own sociolinguistic "spin" on the utterance, structuring the message as a variant on "official" discourse to reflect the peculiarities of one's own unique place for seeing. To formulate the utterance, then, is to simultaneously answer the requirements of the individual's unique place for seeing and the social requirements involved in accommodating the idiosyncratic vantage points of others.

The Bakhtin group's approach to discourse provides a means to enhance one's insight into conversation and social life, which can lead the analyst to a deeper understanding of conversation. As we will see in more detail in subsequent discussion, the positions taken by the Bakhtin group, and by analysts of conversation, are both similar to and different from each other in important ways. It will be shown that Bakhtin and his colleagues share with practitioners of CA an affinity for seeing utterance as unique; a willingness to allow specific, often brief, examples of utterance to stand as evidence; and a recognition that we ground our understanding of utterance according to the dictates of sociohistorical circumstance. We will also see that conversation analysts and Bakhtin differ in three ways, including the fact that they have their origins in disparate scholarly traditions; they have different understandings about the sequence of utterances; and they hold distinct conceptions about the stake every person has in every act of utterance. These distinctions will be shown to result in three dimensions of the Bakhtin view that become useful in analyzing conversation.

POINTS OF ACCESS:

A COMPARISON OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND BAKHTIN

The Conversation Analytic View of Language

Traditionally, CA has dealt with interactional language that reflects repeatable and recurrent orderliness produced in situated and occasioned fashion by social actors. Moreover, conversation analysts hold that it is the interacting parties themselves who orient toward the orderliness they produce, so that observed patterns result from the activities of social actors functioning in line with their perception of structures of social action, rather than an analyst's conception of what is or ought to be done in conversation (Psathas, 1995). As originally formulated, CA aimed at achieving a science of describing conversational interaction which did not rely on preformulated theoretical conceptions; a method was sought which could analyze interaction without reference to the identities of the participants and the details of the setting, as well as other ethnographic particulars of the context in which it occurs. In its relative lack of concern with the subject matter of the conversation (except insofar as it helps to understand how the conversants are making sense of their interaction), conversation analysis differs from content analysis. Conversation analysis has largely succeeded in its goals, having "...developed rigorous, systematic procedures for studying social actions that also provide reproducible results" (Psathas, 1995, p. 1).

In addition, in the course of hundreds of studies, many of which (including seminal work which largely defined the field by Sacks [1992] and Schegloff [1968]) analyze talk performed by people in the course of doing their jobs, more recent investigations have explicitly concentrated on institutional settings, both distinguishing and analyzing the interactions between, basic conversational practices (of the kind CA pioneers focused on), but noting variations in these practices attributable to the effect of the institutions in which they were performed (the so-called "institutional forms" of con-

versation). Analysts in this CA tradition have analyzed conversation in a wide variety of organizational settings, such as police departments (Zimmerman, 1992); news organizations (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991); physician-patient encounters (Frankel, 1990; Heath, 1986); and courtrooms (Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Heritage, 1987).

Both traditional and institutional approaches to conversation analysis assume talk arises from goals, is regularly produced, and reflects individual instantiation of underlying social rules/structures. CA studies have succeeded in one of the goals set for it by the field's pioneers (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) who wanted to build empirical databases; thus, the field has stayed with its main goal of trying to prove language's orderliness. Although there has been significant work in recent years to recognize the influence on conversation and discourse of dialogicality² (a term used by Linell [1998]; for other discussions of dialogism and conversation/discourse analysis, see Bruner and Gorfain [1984]; Crapanzano [1990]; Daelemans and Maranhão [1990]; Duranti and Goodwin [1992]; Edwards and Middleton [1986]; Holt [1990]; Joki [1993a, 1993b]; Markovà and Foppa [1990]; Shotter [1993]; Tannen [1989]; and so on), the primary emphasis in CA remains on discovering regular properties of conversation.

The Bakhtin View of Language

The Bakhtin group's contention that language cannot be described entirely in terms of regularity presents – at least in some respects – a challenge to conversation analysts.³ It poses a question which has also been addressed by ethnomethodologists, ethnographers, sociolinguists, and others: how can conversation be orderly (that is, reflect patterns that can be observed over time) when each utterance is unique, never to be replicated? Bakhtin's contention that "...alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272; see also Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 291) offers a particularly succinct way of expressing the problem that has bedeviled scholars of language from and before the time of de Saussure's (1966) proposed division between *langue* and *parole*.

Bakhtin's group acknowledged the influence of unitizing forces, conventional agreements about language which make it appear on its surface to be monologic (these they called "centripetal forces"). Operating along with centripetal forces, however, they argued that there are dialogic elements which, being unique, vigorously resist unification ("centrifugal forces"). Thus, "Every utterance participates in the 'unitary language' (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces)" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272; see also Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 30). The Bakhtin group saw social language as a perpetually unsettled struggle between these two forces.

CA and Bakhtin: Similarities and Differences

Traditionally, CA has been more interested in centripetal features of language, perhaps because practitioners have seen this approach as a way to achieve the goal envisioned by early conversation analysts: to build a base of knowledge from many specific instances of conversation. While the focus in CA is changing (see, e.g., Linnell, 1998, esp. pp. 49-54), the preponderance of conversation analysis still focuses on centripetal features of talk, such as, for example, turns, pauses, pair parts, insertion sequences, and so on. To compare Bakhtin and CA, we can begin by noting what the two "camps" might have in common and where they might diverge.

Areas of commonality. The Bakhtin group would likely have found much to agree with in the tenets of conversation analysis. First, Bakhtin's relentless orientation toward specificity in utterance resonates well with the view of CA that indications of recurrent orderliness are to be sought in specific social acts of conversation. Bakhtin and his colleagues might also have agreed with conversation analysts that even a single, brief sequence of conversation, properly unfolded, contains much information about the social context that surrounds it.⁴ Another similarity between CA and Bakhtin lies in one of the Bakhtin group's credos—that there is no such thing as an abstract utterance, since all language is sociohistorically specific—a phrase which could serve as a watchword for CA, which not only seeks signs of recurrent social orderliness in conversation performed only in sociohistorically specific circumstances, but which stands resolutely against generalizations about language that have characterized so much of linguistics.

Areas of divergence. At the same time, the Bakhtin view of language encompasses ideas different from those of conversation analysis. One important distinction arises from differing intellectual roots. Because conversation analysis originates in sociology, it has traditionally been less concerned with accounting for perspectives of conversants than with how what conversants do—their performance of conversation—manifests social phenomena. The Bakhtin group, on the other hand, with origins in literary study, are very much concerned with how individuals complete the world, whether in the discourse of literature (Bakhtin, 1984a) or “real life” (Bakhtin, 1986b). The group's preoccupation with aesthetics caused them, early in their existence (the early 1920s [see Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 68-83]) and then, for Bakhtin himself, in the latter portion of his life (Bakhtin, 1986c), to focus on architectonics, the active, effortful process by which each individual assumes responsibility for him- or herself by combining the elements of the perceived world into a coherent whole.

A second divergence of Bakhtin from conversation analysis concerns sequence. Conversation analysis is greatly concerned with sequence (Schegloff, 1972); indeed, sequence is the basis of some of CA's most enduring principles (e.g., adjacency pairs [Pomerantz, 1984]; sequential implicativeness [Schegloff & Sacks, 1973]; side sequence [Jefferson, 1972]; and so on). Certain types of utterance have been shown to consistently occur after certain other types (e.g., the summons-answer sequence [Schegloff, 1979]). However, the Bakhtin view of sequence relates to the unfinished quality of utterance. Bakhtin (1986e) writes, “There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future)” (p. 170). The Bakhtin view urges us to see utterance not just in terms of where it occurs in sequence, but how it connects to all other language (both in and out of the conversation in which it is found). While some conversation analysts (see, e.g., Linell [1998]) have noted that “dialogue...cannot be adequately characterized as a series of individual actions” (p. 70), it remains a tenet of CA that certain utterances have meaning because they occur in the presence of other utterances. To achieve what it has, conversation analysis has relied on conversation samples taken from the ongoing stream of discourse in which they happened. Although we tell ourselves this is necessity caused by the nature of analytic discourse, it is all too easy to forget. Bakhtin's evocative phrasing—“neither a first nor a last word”—resonates with Linell (1998): “...some of the ‘dialogicality’ of the authentic piece of discourse will get bracketed by this kind of operation” (p. 86, n. 20).

Finally, Bakhtinian thought differs from CA in the comparative emphasis placed

on the collective stake all humans hold in every act of utterance. An interesting implication of Bakhtin's view is that, given that each individual occupies a unique place for seeing that cannot be shared, individuals inevitably formulate utterances which, while they make perfect sense in the utterer's architectonics, cannot make even approximately the same sort of sense to other individuals actively putting together the world based on their own unique places for seeing. The result of this inescapable difference is that each utterance becomes indefinitely contestable, an idea that contrasts somewhat with the strong assumption of collaboration which underpins a vast majority of CA findings (Grice, 1975; Jacoby & Ochs, 1995). While conversation analysts have addressed competition among conversants (see, e.g., Käsermann & Altorfer, 1989a, 1989b; Linell, 1990), there has traditionally been greater emphasis on collaboration.

Bakhtinian dimensions. In summary, the Bakhtin perspective presents a view of language and social life both consonant with CA, yet different in three ways. I refer to these three differences as dimensions of Bakhtinian thought. The first idea, concerning architectonics and completion of actors' perceptions of language and the world, I refer to as the *dimension of open and closed perception*. The second idea, concerning the collective stake every utterer potentially has in every utterance (and the competition this entails), I call the *dimension of ownership*. The last idea, concerning the indefinite connectedness of specific utterance to other language, I call the *dimension of uncompletedness*. These three dimensions prove valuable as frameworks for the setting of problems, yielding insights perhaps not visible through lenses to which we have become more accustomed. The following findings represent a richer exploration of our "insistent intuition" about what is going on in conversation, gained through looking at the material according to these three Bakhtin-inspired dimensions.

ANALYSES OF DISCOURSE SAMPLES

The subtlety of Bakhtin's ideas provide fresh insight into the procedural work of analyzing talk. To show how Bakhtinian thought can be applied, I rely on Bakhtin's ideas to define dimensions of open and closed perception, ownership, and uncompletedness, expressing what his group felt were some of the precepts people should keep in mind as they confront what seems, on the surface, to be unified, seamless discourse. These dimensions should be seen, not as attributes of language, but as provocative ideas which, kept in analytical focus, permit analysis of talk to be extended. Below I apply the three dimensions to transcribed conversation from well-known works representing different traditions of conversation/discourse analysis.⁵

Dimension of Open and Closed Perception

The dimension of open and closed perception holds that communication is based on the belief of the communicator that his/her system of perception is open and unfinished, but that the perceptual system of those s/he addresses is closed and finished. This dimension is derived from the principle that each individual has a systemic approach to perception and thought unique to that individual alone and that cannot be replicated, even approximately, in anyone else. The Bakhtin group called this idiosyncratic point of view the individual's "place for seeing," and they argued that, since places for seeing cannot be shared, communicators are faced with an extraordinarily difficult task: to fashion communication in ways consistent with their own places for seeing, but also in ways judged to be consistent with what are assumed to be the places for seeing of those with whom they communicate.

Specifically, the group was concerned with what they called "architectonics," defined as "a focused and indispensable non-arbitrary distribution and linkage of concrete, singular parts and aspects into a finished whole, [something that is] possible only around a given human being as hero" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, quoting Bakhtin [1986a, p. 103], p. 70). Architectonics provides an explanation of "how entities relate to each other" (Holquist, 1990): "The main components of dialogism...can all be seen...as tools for what is essentially an architectonic enterprise" (p. 150).

Given the inherent difficulty involved in reconciling the places for seeing of communicators, no two representations of events are even remotely the same. In communicating, one assumes the "correctness" of one's representation (consistency with one's own place for seeing). This ubiquitous feature of conversation broadens choices available to the communicator, enabling the expansion of his/her vantage point for seeing.

However, because such choices place restraints on other possible, alternative ways of seeing the world, the vantage point for seeing of the addressee is viewed — by the utterer — as limited ("closed"). Because the utterer cannot view the world from his/her interactant's perspective, free choice of description on the part of the utterer is simultaneously a form of confinement that prevents freedom of choice concerning the utterer's addressee (when the other conversant contributes, the situation is reversed).

This is how arguments will start: what one person says "is" the case, the other denies, and vice versa. However, the dimension of open and closed perception broadens the application of this argumentative interaction, holding that *all* interactions, disputational or otherwise, contain the seeds of conflict, simply because so much of the contents of one's place for seeing cannot be shared. By insisting on the inescapable linking of individual and social through architectonics, Bakhtin argues that every utterance not only can, but *must* be contested.⁶ This is not to say that the fact that architectonics differ dramatically means no communication occurs; indeed, the fact that architectonics systems must be accommodated guarantees that communication *must* occur. In the act of accommodation, one inevitably performs ongoing adjustments to one's own architectonics.

To demonstrate how one could use the dimension of open and closed perception to expand analytical approaches to conversation, let us turn to a well-known example from Goodwin (1984). In this segment, which takes place at dinner, there are four participants, comprising two couples: Ann and Don, and Beth and John. Ann is relating a story about a remark Don made during a visit to Karen, a friend of theirs who had recently purchased a home.

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 5 | Ann: | 'Karen has the new hou:se, en it's got |
| 6 | | all this like— (0.2) ssilvery:: g-go:ld |
| 7 | | wwa: llpaper, 'hh (h)en D(h)o(h)n sa(h)ys, |
| 8 | | y'know this's th'firs'time we've seen this |
| 9 | | house.=Fifty five thousn dollars in Cherry |
| 10 | | Hill.=Right? |
| 11 | | (0.4) |
| 12 | Beth: | Uh hu:h? |
| 13 | Ann: | Do(h)n said. (0.3) dih-did they ma:ke you take |
| 14 | | this wa(h)llpa(h)p(h)er? er(h) di dju pi(h)ck |
| 15 | Beth: | 'hh! 'Ahh huh huh |
| 16 | Ann: | i(h)t ou(h)t. |

- 17 Beth: =^hhuh huh huh huh
 18 Don: ^hUhh hih huh hu h
 19 Ann: ^hUHWOOghghJOOI!^h=
 20 Ann: =Y'know(h)w that wz like the firs' bad one.
 21 Beth: ^hUh:oh wo::w hh
 22 (0.2)
 23 Don: But I said it so innocuously y'know.
 24 Ann: Yeh I'm sure they thought it wz- hnh hnh! (p. 225-226)

According to Goodwin (1984), this story is told in response to Beth's request in the turn preceding [5], to tell "what happened." Goodwin notes that the telling is collaborative, involving particularly the participation of Ann and Don, and that the story contains "not only preface, background, and climax sections but also what may be called a parenthesis, a section of background information embedded (disjunctively) within the climax" (p. 226). The parenthesis consists of lines [8]-[10], in which Ann "backtracks" to provide the information not only that the visit was the first she and Don had made to Karen's new house, but that the house itself was a dwelling of some distinction in a good neighborhood.

Goodwin's analysis tells us a great deal about the difference between the parenthesis material and textured speech by Ann that both precedes and follows it. Through laugh tokens—that is, a muted imitation of laughter, indicated by the (h)'s, and usually taken to mean the utterer expects laughter—Ann marks off speech, both before and after the parenthesis, so that Beth and John understand that what is said in [8]-[10] is *not* a report of what "D(h)o(h)n sa(h)ys" (end of [7]), but rather is material which can be appropriately inserted to clarify that it is background for the story. This background information is necessary if Don's remark is to be viewed the way Ann wants it to be (that is, funny), since his conversational gaffe would not be funny if the house were of low quality (one would expect low quality wallpaper in a low quality house).

However, considering open and closed perception brings up an interesting question, one not much explored in Goodwin's essay: why a teller would *expect* laughter to occur in response to this story. Here I am not referring to paralinguistics or nonverbal cues, the latter of which Goodwin analyzes particularly effectively from a videotape, but a socially-grounded explanation relating to each individual's socialization to rules for telling and auditing *certain* humorous stories. While such socialization is collaborative, one's decision to introduce a humorous story into a conversation is based, in large part, on personal judgment about whether the story will be accepted as funny (Norricks, 1993; Sacks, 1974; Tannen, 1984).

The idea of open and closed perception holds that Ann, introducing her story, will see the perspectives of her three auditors as limited and closed. This is especially true of judgments about whether the others will laugh. Regardless of how well she thinks she knows these people, she must decide whether the story will be worth telling, a central concern in all conversational storytelling (van Dijk, 1984). To make the story funny, Ann has to "set up" the punch line (Don's reported remark at [13]-[14]) as well as the coda (Labov, 1967) at [23]. Her view of the horizons of the others as closed is accompanied by the assumption that her own perceptual horizon is open. Here, the opening of Ann's horizon has to do with her confidence that her story will be taken as funny. That she reaches a conclusion about the degree to which her story will elicit laughter is shown by unsolicited laugh tokens in [7] (Beth's original request merely

provides an invitation to tell the story, but does not indicate she anticipates a *specific* response, such as laughter).

To predict laughter, Ann has to have accumulated knowledge related not only to general rules for the conversational telling of a humorous story, but also with the telling of *this particular story*. This shift of attention from general to specific is one way Bakhtinian analysis operates, and in this it diverges from the methods of conversation analysts such as Goodwin who here is involved in elaborating general precepts about features of stories told in conversation, regardless of the conversation in which they occur.⁷

Without considering the dimension of open and closed perception, Ann and Don seem to be collaborating with Beth and John in the activity of jointly remembering and constructing (Edwards & Middleton, 1986) a humorous story. After considering the dimension, however, because of the parenthesis insertion that "fills in" what is needed for the punch line, it is legitimate to ask whether this is a story Ann and Don have collaborated on before. In other words, it may be less a case of spontaneous collaborative co-construction than an adaptation to this particular context of a series of utterances performed in other contexts. This, perhaps, is why Ann views the parenthesis as necessary. There is little reason for Don to characterize his remark as "innocuous" if he had not been surprised to see objectionable wallpaper in Karen's house (because it was his first visit, information revealed by Ann in the parenthesis).

Thus, one could interpret the conversation in the following way: (1) Ann opens her perception by use of contoured speech and laugh tokens (judgment that the story is humorous); (2) Ann closes the horizons of her auditors as she drops the contoured speech and laugh tokens and offers a parenthetical explanation which presumes auditors will need that information to judge the story as humorous (her judgment that available information is not sufficient for her auditors to find the story funny); (3) Ann resumes acting according to the opening of her horizon by again contouring speech prior to the punch line (again reflecting her judgment that the parenthetical information presented has been sufficient to fill in what she perceives as gaps in her auditors' knowledge, so she can resume telling the story).

Goodwin, like other analysts of conversational storytelling (Labov, 1967; Edwards & Middleton, 1986; Sacks, 1974), does an outstanding job of establishing the collaborative nature of stories told in conversation. However, this surface collaboration is purchased at a price: the inability of communicants to share worlds of meaning. The assumption of collaboration takes on a different meaning when we look at possible reasons for Ann to think her story is funny. It is an open question whether she could confidently expect to establish the story's humor "on the fly," that is, using audience feedback to correct the telling, as a skilled improvisational comedian might, or whether she could assume the story would be thought humorous just because the characters are known to her auditors. We get a more complete picture only if we ask why she would expect the story to be taken the way it is and if we therefore assume that it has something to do with the way she sees the world, as well as the way she imagines the world as she thinks it appears to others.

The result of using the dimension of open and closed perception is that, by orienting toward specificity, and asking ourselves what this might mean in terms of how one interactant views perceptual horizons of herself and her auditors (it would be equally interesting to do this sort of analysis from the unique vantage point of seeing of the other three participants), we gain new insight into the phenomenon, insight we could use to formulate hypotheses and questions for further investigation.

Dimension of Ownership

Another Bakhtinian dimension useful in analysis of conversation is the dimension of ownership, which states that all communication is jointly owned by all social actors and can never be held privately or limited to a subunit of society. While the dimension of open and closed perception allows us to analyze conversation from each individual's unique place for seeing, the dimension of ownership lets us analyze the collective stake conversants have in communication.⁸

Far from seeing utterance as privately held, Bakhtin argued that introducing utterance in social context activates alternative utterances. Utterance must accommodate each person's vantage point for seeing, a fact which makes determining ownership of any idea at any given time very problematic.⁹ The social "reality" represented by communication is known to each communicator imperfectly, incompletely, and in ways markedly different from how it is known to others. Given the instability and multiplicity of alternative representations, no utterance is owned by anyone; it depends for its meaning on both collaborative and competitive efforts of the utterer and his/her audience(s), actual and potential. Since all communication must be uttered by someone, to someone, in some context, any utterance challenges alternative utterances.

Tied closely to this idea is the assumption that conversants, aware their representations will be contested, fashion utterance anticipating imagined responses from interactants (or even an internal superaddressee who will perfectly understand and empathize with the utterance [Bakhtin, 1986c, p. 126]; see also Farmer, 2001; Joki, 1993a, 1993b). This means one must depend on others (even internally constituted others) to construct the meaning of utterances, all the while knowing that the process of communication can never be finalized (see the dimension of uncompletedness, below).

To show how the dimension of ownership can be used to expand the problem space of a sample of conversation, we turn to a conversation segment from Bennett and Feldman's (1981) study of courtroom discourse.¹⁰ In this segment, the witness (the mother of the defendant in a larceny case) seems to be answering the defense attorney's question even before it is asked, causing the prosecutor to object.

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|-----|--------------|---|
| [1] | Defense: | Now, calling your attention to state's exhibit nineteen, which is a hat, I am going to show you that hat, and ask you if you have ever seen that hat or a hat similar to it before. |
| [2] | Witness: | No. My boys would never wear... |
| [3] | Prosecution: | I will object to that, your Honor. |
| [4] | The Court: | Sustained. |
| [5] | Prosecution: | Her answer is not responsive. She is obviously answering some question from in her own mind, not the question asked. |
| [6] | Defense: | Mrs. S—, have you ever seen your son with a hat like this one? |
| [7] | Witness: | No, sir, I haven't. (p. 122) |

As the prosecutor suspects, and Bennett and Feldman point out, the witness's first turn is an attempt to establish her son's innocence by stating that none of her sons would wear a "hat like that." Given courtroom procedure, the defense would never be

expected to stop after asking a question such as, "have you ever seen that or a hat similar to it?" It would be assumed, particularly by the mother of the defendant (who had been excluded from the trial prior to testifying on behalf of her son), that the question is merely preparatory to getting to the "real point," which is to establish that it is unlikely that "her boys" would have worn a hat such as the one which serves as the State's exhibit.

This conversational segment exhibits key features of the dimension of ownership. First, because the witness attempts to establish a claim to a particular reading of the "facts" of the case, her utterance at [2] becomes immediately challengeable. It is challengeable not merely because it is made in a courtroom proceeding, where formal rules govern what utterances may be made and how they may be responded to: *all utterances are challengeable*, merely by virtue of having been formulated in line with the utterer's architectonics and introduced into the stream of social discourse.

The prosecution establishes its alternative claim in the next turn [3], the Court adds its evaluation in [4], and the prosecution (somewhat superfluously, by this time) states its claim in [5]. These three alternative representations are provoked by placing into the stream of discourse the witness's representation (or rather the beginning of that representation, since the prosecution does not allow her to complete it).

By introducing the utterance into social discourse, the mother declares *provisional* ownership of the representation. As utterer, she has staked out representational territory, almost surely in awareness that her utterance will be challenged. So ready is she to be challenged that she "jumps the gun" and answers a question she thinks defense counsel *intends* to ask (the question he does ask at [6]). By this declaration of ownership, the mother claims her representation as correct, when in fact, according to the dimension of ownership, she must rely on others to collaborate in the construction of the utterance's meaning.

Bennett and Feldman (1981) argue that this segment shows that the interaction between questioner and witness is a case of "overdone cooperation" (p. 122). Because the witness does not wait for the attorney to develop his line of questioning, her utterance is criticized as a breach of the incremental procedure whereby attorneys "produce evidence consistent with the larger underlying story that is being developed in a case" (p. 121). However, exploring this from the Bakhtin dimension, we see that, not only is the cooperation not necessarily "overdone," it is also not necessarily cooperation. The attorney (trying to put together the underlying story) and the witness (eager to see her son is not convicted) work at cross purposes, advancing alternative claims to ownership of at least one factual element of the underlying story.

At [1], for example, the defense attorney offers the sequence's most lengthy utterance, describing the hat, noting how it has been classified by the Court, and then getting to the crux of the matter (from his point of view), the question of whether the witness has seen the hat before. Through various rhetorical "moves," the attorney makes clear where his view of the ownership of the utterance lies: it has been situated with respect to the Court's system of classification, and positioned to affect the underlying narrative. In his mind, according to courtroom procedure and what his training tells him is the best strategy he has established sufficient control to guarantee the appropriate use of that item of information.

The problem is that our best-laid utterance plans, to paraphrase Burns, "gang aft agley" (Burns, 1969, pp. 101-102). What we think we establish via claims to ownership can never be sustained. Once in social discourse, such claims encounter consciousnesses

that, by definition, do not share the same view. This is what happens in this particular segment; no sooner does the attorney get the information he thinks is necessary into the stream of discourse, than he finds himself challenged first by his own witness, and then by the prosecutor. The witness, for her part, also wants to claim ownership as quickly as possible.

It is uncertain whether one should call this "cooperation," since it focuses attention on regular properties of the process of constructing one's case without necessarily acknowledging the presence of conflicting points of view. This means, first, that one cannot pursue one's rhetorical strategy by acting alone, and second, one must pay at least equal attention to the resources of others. These qualities make deciding on a narrative, depicted by Bennett and Feldman (1981) as a rational, somewhat remote process, considerably messier, riskier, and less amenable to control. By employing the Bakhtinian dimension, our attention is shifted from abstraction (i.e., optimal case presentation strategy) to specificity, where the connection of real discourse to the ideal template is much less clear.

Dimension of Uncompletedness

The dimension of uncompletedness states that all communication is fashioned in the awareness of a potential response from those for whom it is fashioned, and in the awareness of previous and subsequent communication on the same subject—hence, no communication can ever be said to be the "last word" on a subject, but rather each one is a moment in the ongoing chain of representations. The words one speaks or writes enter the social environment, not as unchanging entities, but as shifting, ephemeral agents of signification whose meaning is negotiated in the process of social intercourse.

With the dimension of uncompletedness, one is introduced to the importance of taking account of other utterances, both those that have happened and those one expects will happen. Life is impossible without this constant orientation toward the unimaginably diverse utterances in the living world. So essential was this feature of conversation that it was argued by Bakhtin to be the very key to social existence:

Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 293)

The dimension of uncompletedness extends the idea of anticipation (introduced under the dimension of ownership) from immediate social context into the presumably far distant past and future. Thus, a great number of social others (in fact, conceivably everyone) are enlisted to fashion meaning for an utterance. The Bakhtin group was so adamant about the social nature of speech because they wished to avoid problems associated with excessive abstracting of language, which they identified with linguistics, particularly formal models such as de Saussure's (1966).¹¹ To Bakhtin's group, to treat language as if it had never been spoken by anyone in particular was to rob it of the only thing that could possibly give it meaning: its orientation toward other socially specific utterance. Considered by itself, the utterance is uncompleted, and because of the multiplicity of representations, will forever remain that way.

An example will illustrate how uncompletedness functions in social discourse: social others are enlisted in the service of *attempting* to complete ("attempting," because, due to the infinite resources available to social interactants, final completion is impossible) one's utterances. This example is taken from an essay by Jacobs (1986); the conversants are Jacobs and his son Curtis:

- [1] Jacobs: Curtis, eat your broccoli.
[2] Curtis: All of it?
[3] Jacobs: Yes, all of it.
[4] Curtis: Do you like me?
[5] Jacobs: Yes, of course I like you.
[6] Curtis: Then why do you want me dead?
[7] Jacobs: *Huh?*
[8] Curtis: Well, if I eat all my broccoli my stomach will be so full that it'll blow up and I'll die. (pp. 165-166)

Jacobs's (1986) project is to "lay out a rationale for one use of examples to make arguments about discourse" (p. 150). He calls this example a "misfire," an instance which, although it has the general form of a discursive model of confrontation Jacobs refines from a model by Bleiberg and Churchill (1975), does not quite serve to illustrate the model, primarily because Jacobs and Curtis do not share a set of beliefs concerning Curtis's final utterance. The problem with the final utterance is that it is "based on a belief that only Curtis understood and accepted," despite the fact that, "clearly, there is a functional requirement that the punch line not go beyond premises mutually accepted by the parties" (Jacobs, 1986, p. 166).

Approaching Jacobs's conclusion from the dimension of uncompletedness, one would first question how one could determine whether a punch line has "gone beyond" premises mutually accepted by the conversants. According to uncompletedness, Curtis's utterance at [8] functions in two ways: first, it is an *answer* which builds its meaning on the content of previous utterances in this conversation (in fact, it builds meaning on a great deal more discourse than that, but for simplicity, I confine discussion to this segment); and second, it *anticipates* future utterances (since Curtis's is the "last" utterance, that which it anticipates would be expected after this segment).

However, to agree with Jacobs, we would have to accept that the utterance at [8] terminates the sequence defined both in his model and that of Bleiberg and Churchill (1975). In the context of these models, this particular type of utterance is described as a "punch line," a metaphor which suggests termination, not only by its common meaning as the surprise line that carries the point of a joke, but also because it represents what Jacobs takes to be the culmination of a number of strategic, game-like "moves."

That Jacobs identifies Curtis's reasoning as idiosyncratic is to be expected, given the emphasis on individual formal reasoning in his work (see, e.g., Jacobs & Jackson, 1981, 1982). However, "reasoning" is not the same for everyone; there is the formal academic logic seen in Jacobs's work, but there is also Curtis's logic. It is implied that there is a disjuncture between the worlds of Curtis and Jacobs, marked dramatically in Jacobs's astonished "*Huh?*" at [7], as if Curtis's previous question ("Then why do you want me dead?") had appeared unexpectedly. That Jacobs chooses to characterize Curtis's response as based on something *only* Curtis believed is significant: it tells us his focus is on portraying Curtis's belief as unique.

Yet, if we consider the dimension of uncompletedness, it is hard to see how it is possible for the question at [6] to be surprising. Each utterance is simultaneously an answer to previous utterances and an offering of material to provoke subsequent utterances. In this light, Curtis's questions, including [6], do not seem disjunct from other utterances, by virtue of being surprising, unanticipated, or for any other reason. If we look at Curtis's questions at [2], [4], and [6] as moments in a chain of utterances, it is clear how remarkably linked they are. Curtis follows a step-by-step progression. First, he responds to the directive at [1], "eat your broccoli," by negotiating the quantity ("All of it?" [2]). To his father's expected answer ("Yes, all of it") at [3], Curtis appears to go off-topic: "Do you like me?" [4] This question is in fact a link between [2] and [6], in that it connects ideas about eating "all" the broccoli and dying.

There are other connections related to uncompletedness. To introduce [4], Curtis must clear up one matter: if his father does not want him to eat "all" the broccoli, then he need not enact the plan to manipulate Jacobs with questions at [4] and [6], and the statement at [8]. The utterances preceding [4] are needed for the question "do you like me?" to make sense; this same question is needed for utterances [5]-[8] to make sense. The question at [4], like all utterances, bridges preceding and subsequent discourse.

Because he argues that conversants must accept the same logic if a punch line is to be effective, Jacobs portrays [8] as a "misfire," since it "is based on more than what is obvious to both parties" (p. 166). According to Jacobs's analysis, that may be true; however, the implication that Curtis's structuring of the conversation is flawed is less certain. The dimension of uncompletedness shows us that Curtis pursues a well-defined, precise objective, developing questions in recognition of preceding and subsequent discourse. If one looks at the issue according to the dimension of uncompletedness, one sees how difficult it is to privilege either the worldview of Jacobs or Curtis as the standard.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The dimensions presented in this paper are valid points of access to Bakhtin and yield valuable insight into the process of analyzing talk. The use of the three Bakhtinian dimensions results in an expansion of the problem space (Engeström, 1987) of conversation samples, enabling us to think in broader terms about these utterances. The study represents at least the potential for extending and enriching accepted conversation/discourse analytic methods by thinking about the Bakhtin perspective, provoking one to look deeper into discourse to amplify the possibilities for analysis and suggest approaches that might have been previously less obvious.

The relentless grounding of the Bakhtin group in sociohistorical specificity and respect for otherness marks their work as distinctive, and in these concerns they share much with other approaches to analyzing human talk, including what we have come to call "conversation analysis." The endless linkages to contested points of view; vagaries of individual vantage points for seeing engendered by histories sensed dimly (if at all); the many contexts in which communication may transpire (which in turn invokes associated vantage points for seeing and historical circumstances) — such factors as these intercombine with each other and the dynamic flux of history to create endlessly changing worlds in which the most mundane communication takes on great significance, due to its inextricable situatedness in the tapestry of social life. To immerse oneself in the world of Bakhtin is to expose oneself to paradox, to be brought up sharply against life's infinite complexity even while realizing the futility of trying to

describe such complexity with limited linguistic tools, and therefore to come to question one's previous beliefs about language and life.

However, the rewards of this quest are well worth the effort. The Bakhtinian theory of discourse is a powerful means for infusing meaning into and thereby deriving inspiration from established tools in the analysis of conversation, just as it has extended established tools in so many other areas of inquiry, from computer programming to environmental engineering. Using the Bakhtin method, as one among many implements, the analyst of human talk is given an "edge," a creative and provocative way of attacking problems that might, at least initially, seem intractable by other means.

There are of course limitations to a study such as this. What is here presented as "Bakhtin dimensions" is a simplification—a relentless eclecticist such as Bakhtin would never have intended his approach to be rendered as "dimensions." However, to make the bridge from conversation analysis to Bakhtin—a linkage which, it should be clear from this study, is valuable and productive—requires that we hold in focus two approaches that, despite their differing origins, are, with appropriate effort, possible to connect. This, it should be noted, is in the best traditions of conversation analysis. Indeed, uniting what at first seemed disparate originally gave us ethnomethodology, which led to conversation analysis:

...[E]thnomethodology is the product of a marriage between two seemingly incompatible intellectual perspectives, the *hermeneutic-dialectic* and the *logico-analytic*.... From the former, it borrowed its theoretical interest in folk ways of making sense of the world; from the latter, it took its empirically based methodology. (Markee, 2000, p. 25)

As Markee's observation shows, one must be alert to the merging of disparate perspectives, or valuable sources of insight may pass one by.

Although there is increasing attention to dialogue in conversation studies, there has been little direct exploration of Bakhtin and how his ideas relate to conversation and discourse analysis. That Bakhtin has proven a source of ideas benefiting many fields of study should be sufficient incentive to accept the challenge of seeing how these ideas can help us in our examination of situated talk. To do that, we must be prepared to grapple with what at first seems strange, and if we are to "use" Bakhtin, we must do him the courtesy of representing his ideas in their paradoxical richness. If we merge the analytical tools of conversation/discourse analysis and the hermeneutical readings of Bakhtin, we can come to a better understanding of both perspectives.

NOTES

- 1 In this way, Bakhtin's views can function much as did the perspective of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) which, along with sociolinguistics, led CA pioneer Harvey Sacks to the "invention" of conversation analysis (Silverman, 1998, p. 23).
- 2 Although her work does not relate specifically to conversation analysis, one must also acknowledge the exploration of dialogism, dialectics, and interpersonal communication by Leslie Baxter and her associates (Baxter, 1994a, 1994b; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Baxter examines various facets of interpersonal communication research, as well as the conceptual vocabulary associated with such research, through the lens of Bakhtinian thought. She demonstrates that considering Bakhtin enriches and extends accepted ideas about interpersonal communication, much in the same way it is shown to extend conversation analysis in the present

article. The results of rethinking ideas about relationship and communication are summed up by Montgomery and Baxter (1998) in this particularly elegant and provocative way: "...communication events, relationships, and life itself are ongoing and unfinalizable, always becoming, never being. There are no ideal goals, no ultimate endings, no elegant end states of balance, and ultimate truth. There is only an indeterminate flow, full of unforeseeable potential that is realized in interaction." (p. 179)

- 3 I should clarify that those advocating a "pure" approach to conversation analysis might reject Bakhtinian thought out of hand as incommensurate, perhaps even incommensurable, with the precepts of conversation analysis. There is a great deal to be said for viewing Bakhtin and CA as fundamentally different, but this ought not deter us from investigating points where they intersect. While I have done a considerable amount of conversation analysis, I am by no means a purist and I do not regard CA as the only or even the principal method for analyzing situated talk. I find conversation analysis an interesting tool, one among many I use to understand situated talk. However, I am more interested in finding unique intersections among tools that will aid me in understanding particular conversations. What I present in this article is an approach based on Bakhtin that has provided me with inspiration when I am struggling with especially difficult problems of conversation analysis. Bakhtin's views force me to look at language in a way rather different from conversation analysis. Those who use conversation analysis and its allied methods have come to a few of the same conclusions about language as Bakhtin, but they have not by any means exhausted his insights; it is hard to see how they could have, given CA's relatively brief period of existence (about thirty years or so). That said, I am not claiming the Bakhtin view is superior to that of CA, or that he was "there first," or even that his work should be, *a priori*, the preferred approach to analysis of human talk. Human conversation is far too complex to be grasped by any analytical frame-of whatever origin-imposed in advance of analysis. This freedom from theoretical constraint, in fact, was precisely what the founders of CA wanted, and was one reason they rebelled against analytical categories imposed by functionalist sociologists. If, to understand the work presented here, one must look to the words of CA pioneers, let them be those of Emanuel Schegloff, who commented that the issue in the analysis of talk is how to convert insistent intuition, however correct, into empirically detailed analysis (Schegloff, 1991, p. 66). I concur; what is here presented is a method, using Bakhtinian ideas, to empower "insistent intuition"; conversation analysis, and numerous other similar approaches to human talk, serve as the polished methodology and body of knowledge that can convert that intuition into "empirically detailed analysis." If this conflation of two very valuable lines of investigation of human talk results in a challenging, productive dialogue between the adherents of both traditions (and I "adhere" to both), then that is only to the good; moreover, it would provide dramatic verification of the Bakhtinian idea that no language exists in the abstract and that social language is modified, contested, challenged and reworked in the hurly-burly of social interaction.
- 4 As Psathas (1995) puts it, "Whether it does or does not occur again is irrelevant for the task of showing how this single occurrence is organized, what the machinery of its production is" (p. 50).
- 5 As a cautionary note, it should be said that the examples analyzed in this paper are not offered as representative of the positions of the authors from whose work they are taken. In all three instances, the authors who first analyzed these examples have done considerable subsequent work, some of which has encompassed approaches which might be labeled "dialogic." To summarize each individual scholar's extensive body of work would take us too far afield of the purpose of this article, which is to demonstrate the usefulness of the ideas of the Bakhtin group in expanding the problem analysis space of specific passages of in situ conver-

sation, not to demonstrate that these authors' analysis was, or is, inadequate. The three Bakhtin-inspired dimensions I employ should work for anyone who wishes to take a new perspective toward any piece of conversation, whether it has "already" been subject to scholarly analysis or not. These well-known examples from well-known authors are useful precisely because they form the basis of what we know about the analysis of situated talk.

- 6 Although the dimension of open and closed perception may appear too individualistic to resonate with Bakhtin, it recalls the group's earliest work in ethics and aesthetics. In the 1920s, they had not yet focused on language as such. Instead, the Bakhtin group mounted a resistance to the Formalist project of concentrating on the novel's material aspects (such as language and literary devices), rather than on what a work accomplishes. Later, the group drifted somewhat away from discussing architectonics, at least as a way to finalize one's engagement with an artistic work, turning to topics more commonly associated with Bakhtin, such as polyphony (Bakhtin, 1984a), dialogue (Bakhtin, 1986b), heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981), and carnival (Bakhtin, 1984c). Late in life, Bakhtin returned to architectonics in a different guise. In notes toward an unfinished essay (Bakhtin, 1986c), he identifies a "superaddressee," an internal third party to every act of communication who perfectly understands and empathizes with any utterance. Bakhtin's attention to the superaddressee shows he recognized that the creation of such an entity is similar to the architectonically driven act of authoring in which an integral self is created; the superaddressee is a return to architectonics as a central issue, in that what it embodies (perhaps personifies) is the utterer's architectonics. For an authoritative picture of the span and scope of the Bakhtin group's work, see Morson and Emerson (1990), pp. 63-100.
- 7 The story structure identified in Goodwin's (1984) essay is one based on work by Jefferson (1973) (p. 244, n. 4).
- 8 It is well, though, to remember that the contributions of the Bakhtin group rest on their insistence on the presence of both individual and collective concerns in every utterance. Unfortunately, in their eagerness to use Bakhtin to fortify their own positions, commentators sometimes tend to focus on one or the other feature.
- 9 This dimension is similar the "joint construction" dimension of Linell (1998): "A dialogue is... something which participants (to varying degrees) possess, experience and do together" (p. 86). However, the dimension of ownership implies that, although communication is collaborative, this exists in tension with the view that utterances are owned by oneself, being constructed out of one's unique architectonics. Although we often pretend to own representations, at some level we know we cannot.
- 10 This sample of talk obviously differs from the preceding example from Goodwin, among other things in that it is not transcribed so as to reflect natural speech and does not appear to have been transcribed in any great detail from an audio recording. Although most of my attention in this article has been on the tradition of conversation analysis arising from the work of Sacks, which has been consistently labeled with the term "conversation analysis," analysis of talk is done in different venues, using different procedures, and arising from different traditions. Even though the sample from Bennett and Feldman may not satisfy the requirements of data required by what we have come to call "conversation analysis," it is legitimate as data to reconfigure analysis through use of the Bakhtinian dimensions.
- 11 Although much is made of the divergence between de Saussure and Bakhtin, according to Holquist (1990), Bakhtin focuses on the negative aspects of de Saussure's achievements primarily for "polemical reasons" (p. 42). Holquist cites de Saussure's theories as essential in the development of Bakhtin's ideas about dialogism (p. 43) and lists a number of important similarities between the two thinkers (pp. 44-45), as well as significant differences (pp. 45-47).

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