

## 374 INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL WORLD

**Conversation Analysis**

Conversation analysis is a specific qualitative method for analyzing the sequential organization and details of conversation. Like ethnomethodology, from which it developed, conversation analysis focuses on how reality is constructed, rather than on what it *is*. From this perspective, detailed analysis of conversational interaction is important because conversation is “sociological bedrock”: . . .”a form of social organization through which the work of . . . institutions such as the economy, the polity, the family, socialization, etc.” gets done (Schegloff 1996:4).

. . . it is through conversation that we conduct the ordinary affairs of our lives. Our relationships with one another, and our sense of who we are to one another is generated, manifest, maintained, and managed in and through our conversations, whether face-to-face, on the telephone, or even by other electronic means. (Drew 2005:74)

Three premises guide conversation analysis (Gubrium & Holstein 2000:492):

1. Interaction is sequentially organized, and talk can be analyzed in terms of the process of social interaction rather than in terms of motives or social status.
2. Talk, as a process of social interaction, is contextually oriented—it is both shaped by interaction and creates the social context of that interaction.
3. These processes are involved in all social interaction, so no interactive details are irrelevant to understanding it.

Consider these premises as you read the following excerpt from Elizabeth Stokoe’s (2006:479–480) analysis of the relevance of gender categories to “talk-in-interaction.” The dialogue is between four first-year British psychology students who must write up a description of some photographs of people (Exhibit 10.7). Stokoe incorporates stills from the video recording of the interaction into her analysis of both the talk and embodied conduct in interaction.

Can you see how the social interaction reinforces the link of “woman” and “secretary”? Here, in part, is how Elizabeth Stokoe (2006) analyzes this conversation:

In order to meet the task demands, one member of the group must write down their ideas. Barney’s question at the start of the sequence, “is somebody scribing” is taken up after a reformulation: “who’s writin’ it.” Note that, through a variety of strategies, members of the group manage their responses such that they do not have to take on the role of scribe. At line 05, Neil’s “Oh yhe:ah.” treats Barney’s turn as a proposal to be agreed with, rather than a request for action, and his subsequent nomination of Kay directs the role away from himself. . . . At line 08, Neil nominates Kay, his pointing gesture working in aggregate with the talk to accomplish the action (“She wants to do it.”), whilst also attributing agency to Kay for taking up the role. A gloss

**EXHIBIT 10.7** Conversation Analysis, Including Pictures

1. UT-23

01 N: D' you reckon she's an instructor then.  
 02 N: (0.2)  
 03 N: Of some sort,  
 04 B: → Is somebody scribing. Who's writin' it. =  
 05 N: =Oh yhe:ah.  
 06 N: (0.8)  
 07 M: Well you can't [ read my ] =  
 08 N: [((pointing to K)) She wants to do it.]



09 M: =writin' once I've [wri:ttten it.]  
 10 K: [.hehhhh]  
 11 N: We:ll secretary an' female.  
 12 → (0.3)  
 13 K: .Hh heh heh heh ((nodding, picks up pen and paper))



14 (0.4)  
 15 M: It's uh::,  
 16 K: Yeah: I'm wearing glasses I must be the secretary.=

## 376 INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL WORLD

[interpretation] might be “Secretaries in general are female, you’re female, so you in particular are our secretary.” (p. 481)

Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe (2006:61–62) used a conversation between three friends to illustrate key concepts in conversation analysis. The text is prepared for analysis by numbering the lines, identifying the speakers, and inserting ↑ symbols to indicate inflection and decimal numbers to indicate elapsed time.

- 104 **Marie:** !Has !anyone-(0.2) has anyone got any really non:  
 105                   sweaty stuff.  
 106 **Dawn:** Dave has, but you’ll smell like a ma:n,  
 107                   (0.9)  
 108 **Kate:** Eh [!huh heh]  
 109 **Marie:** [Right has] anyone got any !fe:minine non sweaty stuff.

The gap at line 107, despite being less than a second long, is nevertheless quite a long time in conversation, and indicates an interactional glitch or trouble. As Kate starts to laugh, Marie reformulates her request, from ‘↑has ↑anyone got any really non: sweaty stuff,’ to ‘right has anyone got any, ↑fe:minine non sweaty stuff.’ . . . the word ‘really’ is replaced by ‘feminine,’ and is produced with a hearable increase in pitch and emphasis. This replacement, together with the addition of ‘right,’ displays her understanding of the problem with her previous question. . . . for these speakers, smelling like a ‘man’ (when one is a ‘woman’) is treated as a trouble source, a laughable thing and something that needs attending to and fixing.

### Narrative Analysis

Narrative methods use interviews and sometimes documents or observations to “follow participants down *their* trails” (Riessman 2008:24). Unlike conversation analysis, which focuses

attention on moment-by-moment interchange, narrative analysis seeks to put together the “big picture” about experiences or events as the participants understand them.

**Narrative analysis** focuses on “the story itself” and seeks to preserve the integrity of personal biographies or a series of events that cannot adequately be understood in terms of their discrete elements (Riessman 2002:218). Narrative “displays the goals and intentions of human actors; it makes individuals, cultures, societies, and historical epochs comprehensible as wholes” (Richardson 1995:200).

The coding for a narrative analysis is typically of the narratives as a whole, rather than of the different elements within them. The coding strategy revolves around reading the stories and classifying them into general patterns.

**Narrative analysis** A form of qualitative analysis in which the analyst focuses on how respondents impose order on the flow of experience in their lives and so make sense of events and actions in which they have participated.