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Vision

A primordial environment for the emergence of language in the lived social world consists of a situation in which multiple participants are using talk to pursue courses of action in concert with each other, frequently while attending to, and construing as relevant to their ongoing projects, phenomena in their surround. Practices in which vision and language mutually elaborate each other can enter into this process in a number of different ways.

First, analysts of language have long recognized that talk is not something done by speakers alone, but instead an activity constituted through the mutual orientation of a speaker and a hearer (e.g., Ferdinand de Saussure's famous diagram of the speaking circuit). However, actual analysis of human language has focused almost exclusively on the speaker and treated the hearer as simply an entity that decodes structure in the stream of speech. One primary modality through which mutual orientation between speaker and hearer is organized as public discursive practice is through gaze. Speakers can treat all or a subset of available participants as focal addressees by gazing at them, and moreover by moving gaze from one type of addressee to another with structurally different properties (e.g., in the midst of a story moving from an unknowing recipient—one who hasn't heard the events being recounted—to someone who shared experience of those events with the speaker), and can display relevant changes in the local participation framework, a process that frequently requires changes in the structure of the emerging talk. Nonspeaking participants can use gaze toward the speaker to display whether or not they are in fact assuming the social position of hearer. Such socially organized practices for the deployment of gaze are normative and have consequences in detail for the organization of emerging talk. Speakers who find that they lack the gaze of hearers typically interrupt or abandon their utterances. These restarts and pause beginnings have the effect of soliciting the gaze of nongazing hearers. Though a transcript that covered only the stream of speech would show sentence fragments,

and thus Noam Chomsky's famous performance errors, the way in which speakers abandon sentence beginnings that were not being attended to and begin utterances afresh once they have visibly secured a hearer, in fact shows participants' orientation to the production of complete coherent sentences not into the air, but within a framework of mutual orientation between speaker and hearer as visibly displayed through gaze and other embodied practices. An important ethnographic issue for future research consists of the specification of how hearership is displayed in settings and societies where gaze toward the hearer is dispreferred.

Second, rather than being lodged exclusively within the mental life of the speaker, talk as action is constituted through the visible differentiated displays of the bodies of separate participants organized through multi-party interactive fields. The basic mutual orientation of speaker and hearer provides one example. However, this process can become considerably more complicated in more elaborated speech genres. In mundane conversations the characters being animated in stories are frequently present at the telling. In addition to speaker, addressed recipient(s) and nonaddressed recipient(s) the participation framework for such a story also includes its principal character. As what he or she did (e.g., a husband who committed a social gaffe in a story being told by his wife) emerges within the story it can become relevant for other participants to gaze not at the speaker but at the principal character, and for that party to arrange their body for the story relevant gaze that can be focused on it. The talk in progress structures not only where gaze should go, but also how someone should be seen within a multi-party participation framework. Rather than existing solely, or even primarily, within the stream of speech stories are interactive fields in which the participants are engaged in a local, situated analysis not only of the talk in progress, but also of their participation in it. The multiple products of such analysis, as displayed through both talk and the visible body, provide for the differentiated but coordinated actions that are constitutive of the story as a social activity.

Third, vision plays a crucial role in the practices through which entities in the participants' environment are made relevant to local talk, and the phenomenal world being constituted through it. At least two interrelated types of organization are relevant here. First, especially when used in conjunction with deictic gestures such as points, talk can not only help to locate and pick out relevant features of the surround, but, of equal importance, construe what is being looked at in a particular fashion. Second, visual structure in the surround can itself contribute to the organization and comprehensibility of talk and action. Visible semiotic structures such as maps, hopscotch grids, playing fields and ritual spaces, provide simple examples of resources used to build action that could not be constituted through the stream of speech alone. Such practices shed new light on some traditional concerns within linguistic anthropology. For example, when color classification is analyzed in terms of the historically shaped practices of groups who must classify color as part of their work it is found that participants use not only a mental color lexicon, but also semiotically shaped material structures such as Munsell color charts. Graphic representations of many

different types play crucial roles in the language practices used to build scientific, legal and political discourse. This interplay between talk, a domain of scrutiny, and representational practices constitutes the key arena through which work groups organize their professional vision as public discursive practice. In a court case that was followed worldwide, lawyers for the four white policemen who beat an African-American motorist, Rodney King, used language to structure the jury's perception of events on the tape from the perspective of the police, and convinced the jury that Rodney King, not the policemen, was the aggressor. While the language used by the lawyers shaped how tape was to be seen, the visible events being pointed at simultaneously contributed to the organization of the categories proposed in the talk by filling in the sense of those categories (e.g., "aggression") with apparent visual proof.

Fourth, gesture constitutes one crucial modality linking talk and vision. Like alternative approaches to the study of language itself, gesture has been variously analyzed as an external, visual manifestation of the mental processes in the speaker, as visible, socially organized interactive practice, and most recently as a manifestation of the thinking/working body's cognitive engagement with the world. Similarly, both posture and facial displays that might fall outside the scope of gesture provide crucial resources for stance-marking.

In contemporary social theory two master metaphors have emerged: Vision (e.g., Michel Foucault's panopticon) and Voice (cf. Mikhail Bakhtin). By isolating a particular sensory domain, each of these frameworks becomes blind to the way in which talk and vision are embedded within a larger ecology of sign systems that permit each to function by elaborating, and being elaborated by, each other. Neither is a self-contained island. By investigating not just the actions of the speaker, but the visible behavior of all relevant participants, and the structure of phenomena in the surround, it becomes possible to overcome perspectives that lodge the dialogic organization talk within the stream of speech alone and most frequently within the talk of a single speaker (albeit one who might be quoting the talk of another), and to investigate both human interaction and embodiment as crucial components of language practice.

(See also *color, expert, gesture, indexicality, media, participation, power, turn, voice*)

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