




INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE *ARTYKUŁ WPROWADZAJĄCY*

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“SACKS STUDIES”: LEGACIES AND INNOVATIONS

Abstract

The basic aim of this essay is to orient readers to legacies of Harvey Sacks, and subsequent innovations that take these legacies forward. It also points towards the relevance of Sacks’s own innovations to social structure and to theory. Another aim of this essay is to introduce contributions to the present part of the Harvey Sacks thematic issue of *Przegląd Socjologiczny*. The second part of the thematic issue is scheduled for publication in March 2026.

Keywords: Harvey Sacks

In his introductory textbook, Silverman [1998: ix] writes “[t]his book is based [...] on the assumption that people doing conversation analysis (CA) do not need to be told about the significance of Sacks’s work”. As editors of this thematic issue, which celebrates and commemorates Harvey Sacks’s legacies, we are not convinced that this assumption remains a valid one. Accordingly, we have collected together a selection of authoritative voices, each of whom talk to Sacks’s multiple legacies through a mixture of empirical and explicatory papers. This procedure affords an inclusive sweep of Sacks’s inquiries. We pluralize “legacies” because the papers in this issue take Sacks beyond CA *simpliciter*.

Another “good organizational reason” [Garfinkel, Bittner 1967] to celebrate Sacks’s legacies in this way is our reading of a commentary on the scholarship of Erving Goffman [Watson 2021a]. Within a wide-ranging paper, Watson suggests that the sophistication and potentialities within Goffman’s work are, perhaps, being stifled by the emergence of hagiographic tendencies and standard lines on Goffman, which exclude what are perceived to be criticisms and are therefore discouraging “innovation” in what have become known as “Goffman Studies”.¹ Applying Watson’s suggestion to Sacks and commentaries on Sacks’s work, those interested in continuing Sacks’s legacies – ourselves (authors and editors of this thematic issue) included – have to ask themselves whether they have done enough to explain how Sacks’s legacies extend beyond CA and Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA); to ensure that Sacks does not settle into obscurity; and whether recent contributions to CA and MCA detract from Sacks’s legacies.

Harvey Sacks is known for developing the fields of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorization Device (MCD) analysis [Schegloff 2007]. With thanks to our contributors, in preparing this two-part thematic issue of *Przegląd Socjologiczny*, which this orientation note seeks to contextualize, we confronted – for “another first time”² – how Sacks’s legacies are not reducible to these fields.³ The scope of Sacks’s “disquisitions” [Coulter 1995] was vast and, as accurate as it is to link Sacks irrevocably with MCD analysis and CA, a growing corpus of Sacks scholarship [Carlin 2021; Danby 2021; Mair and Sharrock 2021; McHoul 2005; Watson 1994, 2015, 2021b] encourages us to

¹ Goffman Studies is “...a descriptive term to cover the range of careful analysis and critical commentary that has amassed around his sociological studies” [Jacobsen, Smith 2022: 8]. At the risk of stating the obvious we are not advocating the institutionalization – formal or otherwise – of “Sacks Studies”, if only because it has been in progress for decades. This thematic issue and the papers of which it consists is an addition.

² This is one of Garfinkel’s expressions that is found throughout his work [Garfinkel 1967; Garfinkel, Livingston, Lynch 1981]. It is possible that in subsequent work adopting an ethnomethodological approach, constant reiteration of his colloquial and technical expressions has lessened the radicality of Garfinkel’s meaning.

³ A problem for discussions of ethnomethodology is, how to explicate methodological approaches in their variety [Lindwall 2025], and to distinguish ethnomethodological approaches from constructive-analytic approaches, without reference to ritualized, incantatory formulations that amount to sloganeering [Mair 2025]. Garfinkel’s caveat “for another first time” did serve the first two purposes but, arguably, has become a rhetorical device, a “sales pitch” [Garfinkel, Sacks 1970: 339] absorbed into a routinized, background contexture of ethnomethodological presentations. “Constructive analysis” is not a synonym for “constructionism”; it refers instead to forms of inquiry that prioritize analysts’ theoretical and/or methodological procedures over members’ practical reasoning procedures.

think that Sacks’s legacies are traduced by limiting these to MCD analysis and CA. In addition to opening up the domains of categorization practices and order properties of conversation, i.e. sequencing, for rigorous research; it is evident also that, throughout his work [Lee 1987], Sacks addressed foundational issues for sociology, such as aspects of sociological description and “correspondence” between analytic accounts with members’ activities.⁴ For, as well as the *reflexivities* of Sacks’s approaches identified elsewhere [Watson 1997] papers in this thematic issue manifest the *continuities* within Sacks’s approaches, in terms of *recognizable* description. What is discernible within Sacks’s early works is a concern for how members’ activities were described and accounted for – or otherwise – by discipline-specific practitioners, including sociologists; whereas his later emphases on categorization and sequencing were concerned with members accounting for members’ activities.⁵

There follows brief discussions of the role of theory and the relation between CA and social structure. Although these sections advance a “unitarian” position [Schegloff 1987: 228] regarding the incorporation of external standards, i.e. external to the setting or talk being studied, it is a coherent position in terms of the logical grammar of forms of inquiry and the integrity of data, as argued for by Sacks [1984, 1995].

SACKS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Recognizing Sacks as being ultimately responsible for the development of CA and MCD analysis will inevitably, for some, locate his work at a particular end of a ‘spectrum’ within sociology and its relation to social structure. This can be a problem for sociologists in reconciling the relevance of what is perceived to be “micro-analysis” – as some commentators [Rudaz 2025] erroneously suggest – to social problems and social structure. There are a number of answers to this problem, which are traced back to Sacks’s pronouncements on his work, and some of these are set out below.

One of the bases for Sacks’s work – a thematic principle that is at the heart of all his lectures and publications – is that analysts share the same cultural competencies as those members who are studied. This base was the common

⁴ The term “foundational” may be contentious here as some readers will caveat this to forms of “interactionist” sociology. However, as the sections on theory and social structure demonstrate, Sacks’s work and these foundational issues that he addresses have a wide relevance throughout sociology.

⁵ This is not a mutually exclusive distinction though, as we note below.

ground for the very first generation of ethnomethodologists – Egon Bittner, Aaron Cicourel, Harold Garfinkel, Edward Rose, and Sacks himself. This principle was formulated by Harold Garfinkel:

In indefinitely many ways members' inquiries are constituent features of the settings they analyze. *In the same ways*, their inquiries are made recognizable to members as adequate-for-all-practical-purposes. [...] In the actual occasions of interaction that accomplishment is for members omnipresent, unproblematic, and commonplace. *For members doing sociology*, to make that accomplishment a topic of practical sociological inquiry seems unavoidably to require that they treat the rational properties of practical activities as "anthropologically strange" [Garfinkel 1967: 9; my italics – APC].

What Garfinkel is making clear in this quotation is that sociologists are members too, and their status as accredited sociologists does not exempt them from their status as being members of society. Often, our attention is drawn to the procedural policy of standing back from those matters that are usually taken for granted through membership of society. Yet the treatment of activities as "anthropologically strange" can displace consideration of what these activities might be and to what these may concern. In Garfinkel's quote, we see that the micro-macro distinction collapses in the face of real-world data because members are oriented, ongoingly, to the contingencies of the settings they are in. One of these contingencies is "social structure":

Social structure consists of matters that are described and oriented to by members of society on relevant occasions as essential resources for conducting their affairs and, at the same time, reproduced as external and constraining social facts through that same social interaction [Wilson 1991: 27].

Drawing attention to the relevance of social structure is not always a priority within empirical studies of talk and may remain implicit. What this means is that CA and MCD analysis (later MCA), as cumulative fields, have diversified into specialized fields – classroom interaction and education, coach-player interaction and sport, courtroom interaction and law, doctor-patient interaction and medicine, parent-child interaction and family studies, service encounters and organizations, etc. These afford convenient place-holders for researchers to develop concentrated lines of inquiry whilst at the same time relocating attention to social structure within instances of interaction. In other words, these empirical studies "reproduce the social-structural context by which that interaction is intelligible for [participants] in the first place" [Wilson 1991: 40].

Emanuel Schegloff – Sacks's long-time colleague, who also features in this thematic issue – suggested that the *de facto* relation between CA and social structure in terms of topical relevance was incidental to its focal phenomenon. CA studied

the structures of talk in context, wherein participants to conversations orient to and use social structures that are both endogenous to the conversation itself (“context-sensitive”) and generalizable across different conversations (“context-free”).⁶ These structures – and members’ orientations to these structures – are themselves sociological:

Whatever substantive gains there are to be had from focusing on the relationship between talk and social structure in the traditional sense, this focus is not needed in order to supply conversation analysis with its sociological credentials. The work which is focused on the organization of talk-in-interaction in its own right – work on the organization of turn-taking, or on the organization of sequences, work addressed to the actions being done in turns and the formats through which they are done, work on the organization of repair, and work directed to the many diverse practices of talking and acting through talk which do not converge into domains of organization – this work is itself dealing with social organization and social structures, albeit of a different sort than in the received uses of those terms [Schegloff 1991: 46].

In his early writings, Sacks engaged with the founders of sociological thought, in particular with their classic texts. His first publication [Sacks 1963] was a detailed exposition of *Suicide* [Durkheim 1952], examining Durkheim’s reasoning in and legacy for sociology. Using a metaphorical device (the “commentary machine”) Sacks held Durkheim’s reasoning up to the spotlight. One of the interesting features of his critique, in hindsight, is that what may usually be taken as a substantive reorientation (between different forms of sociology) is perhaps less consequential than Sacks’s distinction between what members of society do and sociological theory. This becomes a praxeological matter not just an issue of epistemology. In a contemporaneous paper (published later as [Sacks 1999]), Sacks examined the methodological entailments of *Ancient Judaism* [Weber 1953]. It is through the explication of the methods that Weber uses that Sacks problematizes sociological procedures, which he would later embark upon restructuring in terms of studying observable events rather than hypothetical or theorized events. In a similar vein to his “Durkheim paper”, Sacks’s “Weber paper” acknowledges but does not prosecute standard, available lines of critique, e.g. on the grounds of scientific logic. Instead, Sacks’s observations are internal to the text itself and nothing beyond the text.

Like Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, Sacks would challenge what sociology could be, how it could proceed, what sort of phenomena it could investigate. Through the reading of this pair of papers [Sacks 1963, 1999] we can appreciate that the ways sociologists (of all persuasions) approach the world is steeped in the

⁶ The terms “context free” and “context sensitive” are from Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson [1974].

ways that members approach the world, yet Sacks would address directly those sociologists who had a profound influence on what sociology was and what it would become. Rather than accept the legacies of Durkheim and Weber, Sacks was determined to initiate an “alternate” form of sociology, one that involved “developing another grammar” [Sacks 1995: 30], i.e. not starting from the legacies of Durkheim and Weber but reorienting the terms of inquiry *ab novo*. Whilst there is a common focus between sociology and CA – in terms of social action [Schegloff 1991] – the means of investigating the relation with social structure differs: “we must abandon any standard Durkheimian conception of social structure that takes externality and constraint for granted as a methodological stipulation” [Wilson 1991: 27].

It remains the case, however, that the relation between CA and its parent field, sociology, is direct [Lee 1987]. It is observable and empirically demonstrable:

CA’s enterprise, concerned as it is with (among other things) the detailed analysis of how talk-in-interaction is conducted as an activity in its own right and as the instrument for the full range of social action and practice, is then addressed to one of the classic themes of sociology [Schegloff 1991: 47].

Namely, the empirical identification and explication of “structures of social action”. Durkheim and Weber were instrumental in setting the terms of sociology’s engagement with social structures. One of Sacks’s legacies is to challenge sociology’s relation with social structures⁷ and how social structures can be located as properly sociological.

SACKS AND THEORY

Another problem for the reception of Sacks’s work and conversation analysis (CA), one that is related to but not coterminous with social structure, is the role of theory. It is related to issues discussed in the previous section because some analysts have started to treat CA as a method for research, a tool of similar status to questionnaires or interviews, rather than as a research approach which takes members’ contextualized use of language as its topic. It is observable that Sacks’s legacies – CA and MCD analysis – are being used to fulfil research objectives for scholars wishing to study age, gender, or race. In effect, bringing an aprioristic agenda to the study of social order as embedded in talk.

⁷ “Social structure” is a problematic term within sociology [Znaniecki 2025] in terms of sociological, discipline-specific reasoning. Sacks’s work offers a new start.

A roll call of theorists who have had and still have influence for sociologists today includes Adorno, Bauman, Bourdieu, Butler, Deleuze, Foucault, Gadamer, Giddens, Goffman, Gramsci, Habermas, Lacan, Mead, Parsons, Wacquant, Žižek. This is only an indicative rather than a complete list, of course! As interesting as these theorists (and others) are for doing sociology and for enhancing the theoretical “toolbox” that is at the disposal of sociologists, theories – regardless of provenance or school of thought – do not constitute first-order orientations to social phenomena by members themselves [McHoul 2015]. Confronted by real-world data in the forms of audio/video files and transcripts of talk, “standard sociological theories cannot describe or account for the detailed orderliness of interaction on particular concrete occasions as they develop over their course” [Wilson 1991: 27].

It is not that theorizing is a challenge to and for empirical work. Nor is it the case that theorizing is devoid of sociological interest in and of itself. Instead, it is the relation between theorizing and the integrity of members’ practical reasoning, what Sacks demonstrated as members doing practical theorizing, that is at stake. Simply put, the introduction of theory is a different project. There is a debate in regards to the extent that incorporating theory into EMCA programmes is desirable or even possible [Bogen 1989; Schegloff 1987, 1997; Watson 1992; Wilson 1991].⁸ Importing an external standard in the form of theory to considerations of talk-in-interaction distorts the self-contained nature of the data. It is less an issue of protectionism or intellectual conservatism than a matter of coherence.

Throughout his lectures, Sacks explicated the procedural logic used by members in producing order; and he argued for and enabled the sustained empirical focus required for the analysis of order production within and through talk. Recognizing that Sacks alone was able to unpack the logic of members’ activities [Carlin 2021], Schegloff brought the collection of instances to this empirical focus. This move aligned with Sacks’s advocacy of empirical analyses, albeit arguably at the expense of studying members’ logical grammar in use.

In sum, theorizing is not logically compatible with CA as it was conceived by Sacks [Schenkein 1978]:

A solution must be found to the analytic problems which obstruct the conversion of intuition, casual (however well-informed) observation, or theoretically motivated observation into demonstrable analysis. For without solutions to these problems, we are left with “a *sense* of how the world works”, but without its detailed explication [Schegloff 1991: 48; emphasis in original].

⁸ For reasons of space this is a brief list of citations, one which does not encompass all positions on this debate.

In developing CA, Sacks set out the terms of a solution to this problem. Sacks identified a rhetorical device in textbook presentations of sociological theories that also undermined these theories: “the understanding and use of objects like «X are more complex than they appear to be at first glance» is precisely what we want to be studying” [Sacks 1995: 30]. The incorporation of theory into CA is more than a dilution, it is a dismantling of CA in that it reverts to the position of stipulating what Schegloff [*ibidem*] refers to as “theoretically motivated observation”. Combining CA with theory transforms CA into a variety of “Critical Discourse Analysis”.

The papers in this thematic issue do not set out to address these concerns because authors prefer, instead, to treat data as they are. The principled absence of theory is a strength of the analyses that follow.

STUDIES IN THIS THEMATIC ISSUE

The thematic issue commences with two shorter pieces, followed by four full articles. The shorter pieces are intended to introduce and demonstrate the research perspective of CA, and the entailments of Sacks’s reasoning.

The first contribution is a Précis for a paper, perhaps one that was never written, by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff. It seems to be a preliminary version of what became “Preference for self-correction” [Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks 1977] though, as we note below, not in this form. We are including this to mark both the anniversary of Sacks’s death; and the sad news that, after a long illness, Schegloff passed in 2024. Publishing an abstract for a co-authored talk is tribute to *both* Sacks and Schegloff, who had such a profound influence on each other’s work.

The Précis was given to one of the editors of this thematic issue by Edward Rose, Garfinkel’s senior colleague in the development of ethnomethodology. Rose discovered the Précis in a drawer in his office, while searching for a different manuscript. Rose could not recall whether the proposed paper was intended to be delivered during meetings of the Sociolinguistics section of the International Sociological Association or the World Congress of Sociology, both of which Rose had been organizing; if it was actually presented at one of the less formal meetings on ethnomethodology, which were held regularly at his home in Boulder, Colorado; or if it was being prepared for a collection of papers to be co-edited by Sacks and Garfinkel. Importantly, bearing in mind that ethnomethodology and conversation analysis were in their infancy, and those participating in the emergence of these approaches were very familiar with the few writings that were

becoming available at the time, Rose was certain of two significant aspects of this Précis. First, that Sacks had handed him this document in person, probably in 1971 or 72 – certainly prior to his drafting of the “Simplest systematics” paper [Fitzgerald 2024; Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson 1974]. Although the Précis points to work on the identification of a turn-taking system for conversation, Sacks had already been working on turn-taking [Burns 2025; Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022; McHoul 2005; Sacks 2004]. In other words, for those who were following the work of Sacks and Garfinkel as these happened, the “Simplest systematics” paper was not “news” [Sharrock 2000]. Second, while it appears to be a forerunner of Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks [1977], in that it contains various resemblances and points of contact with it, what was titled “The local repair system in conversation” was to have been a different analysis.

The final authorship of Sacks’s papers has been rendered problematic [Fitzgerald 2024]. It is conceivable that the paper trailed by this Précis, shorn of its ethnomethodological emphases⁹, did indeed eventuate in the “Preference for self-correction” analysis [Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks 1977]; and that – as Fitzgerald notes in the case of the “Simplest systematics” – it was Schegloff’s engagement with the journal editor that led to a change in the order of authorship.¹⁰ It is conceivable, also, that what Sacks and Schegloff intended to write had much to do with the open research culture that Sacks fostered at University of California, Irvine. As documented by the contents of edited collections [Lerner 2004; Schenkein 1978], Sacks encouraged his students to take his innovations further by elaborating upon phenomena that he had identified.

Readers of Sacks’s lectures [Sacks 1995] are aware that Sacks was extremely well versed in a variety of literatures – anthropology, linguistics, literature, logic, philosophy, and sociology. The ordinary language philosophy connection with Sacks is explored by Alec McHoul. There are important developments within McHoul’s contribution: first, within his brief essay McHoul provides a broader take on description; second, using Sacks to link Gilbert Ryle and the later Wittgenstein; third, specifying Sacks’s formal conceptualizations of members’ methods as Wittgensteinian language-games. McHoul suggests that Sacks’s positions are coherent both with Ryle *and* Wittgenstein, and most significantly with Garfinkel.

⁹ This is echoic of the published version of an article by Egon Bittner, as noted by Meehan [2025]. For example, that repair and error correction are locally organized.

¹⁰ As a footnote to the “Preference for self-correction” article states, “Harvey Sacks was killed in an automobile accident while this paper was undergoing final revision” [Schegloff, Jefferson, Sacks 1977: 361].

Indeed, McHoul draws out the direct connection between Sacks's view of culture and Garfinkel's *Studies in ethnomethodology*.

McHoul's ordinary language philosophical treatment of Sacks illustrates how much of Sacks's work bypasses cognitivism.¹¹ Compressed but highly effective sections guide readers to an understanding of Sacks's lecturing style: what may be taken to be references to internal, cognitive states are quite the opposite. An engagement with Sacks's work as a corpus enables readers to recognize that what seem to be physicalist aphorisms are tendentious, these stand as a critique of orthodox positions on mind.¹² Importantly, McHoul captures Sacks's notion of "culture".¹³ Culture may be taken for granted, assumed to be located in arts, literature, and music; or theorized in the pages of anthropology textbooks. McHoul encourages us to read Sacks's lectures, where we may find an alternative view: culture is interactionally produced by members themselves as they display their competence for each other, within various activities, in and through the use of language.

Stacy Burns examines some analytic affinities shared by Garfinkel and Sacks as they moved towards a radicalization of approaches to social order and socially organized activities. There is a commonly held view that there was a "gradual divergence" in the inquiries by Sacks and Garfinkel. Although the terms of the "divergence" is usually institutionalized *qua* "ethnomethodology" and "conversation analysis" as discrete forms of inquiry, the extent of the divergence may be an artefact of this institutionalization rather than absolutes, as a zero-sum game [Lynch 2019]. The assumption that the divergence was incremental is problematized by Stacy Burns, in her paper "Sacks and Garfinkel, early on". This "divergence thesis" is not evidenced by early discussion, transcripts of which entextualize complementary but divergent emphases from the outset.

In Burns's account, one of the foci that Sacks and Garfinkel explore is the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. With a transcript of a conversation between Sacks and Garfinkel to hand, Burns provides readers with pointers that their discrepant understandings of what Wittgenstein was up to was an early example of such divergent emphases. Burns's paper can be read as a candidate explanation as to

¹¹ Further to McHoul's "imagine that" scenarios, Jenkins [2024] studies practitioners' discussions of "thought experiments" as "members' methods" in the settings he describes.

¹² For a discussion of a different aspect of Sacks's lecturing style, see Lynch [1999].

¹³ Schegloff [1992: xxxvi] recalls that the course title of the lecture series was "Culture and Personality", which may have been the reason Sacks made remarks about culture. According to Schegloff, Sacks's remarks on culture are disputations with Chomsky's transformational grammar.

why Garfinkel did not publicly engage with Wittgenstein’s work more explicitly. For instance, when Garfinkel wrote:

when his later studies are read to see that he is examining philosophers’ talk as indexical phenomena, and is describing these phenomena without thought of remedy, his studies will be found to consist of a sustained, extensive, and penetrating corpus of observations of indexical phenomena [Garfinkel, Sacks 1970: 348]

we can read this as a possible example of what D. Lawrence Wieder called “ransacking”, whereby Garfinkel took what he wanted from sources but disattended key features of an author’s original argument.¹⁴

Burns’s consistent practice of citation reinforces the provenance of published texts as lecture-specific artefacts, a procedure that adds value to scholarly conventions in opening up Sacks’s *Nachlass* to bibliographic and textual analyses. Burns brings a range of unpublished sources into the purview of Sacks scholarship, some of which are located, among other places, in the Harold Garfinkel Archive.

The next three texts apply and develop CA and MCA instrumentaria, in detailed research practice, as a grammar for ethnomethodology.

As recent studies in membership categorization analysis and conversation analysis move towards the identification of novelty in interactional activities, it is refreshing¹⁵ – and appropriate in tribute to Sacks – to read a paper addressing conversational features discussed by Garfinkel and Sacks [1970]. Sara Keel’s analysis uses video data of face-to-face and remote physiotherapy sessions, through which she unpacks the use of “indexical expressions”. In accounting for members’ use of indexical expressions, Keel decouples members’ arrangements to establish “settinged-ness” from categorization. The remote character of physiotherapy sessions provides members with interactional problems, as the embodied nature of instruction in one-to-one sessions is unavailable to the participants. Keel shows how it is more than a matter of members surmounting these interactional “problems” with indexical expressions, e.g. using indexical expressions as “solu-

¹⁴ “What remains are some «methods for seeing», some rough maps of the terrain of «the situation», some initial descriptions, and some (generally) proximate-to-the-phenomena concepts whose deployment locates EM and/or CA analyzable phenomena” [Wieder, Zimmerman, Raymond 2010: 136].

¹⁵ We say “refreshing”, even revitalizing, because for the teaching of ethnomethodology there are extant accounts suggesting that the analysis of indexical expressions – identified philosophically [Bar-Hillel 1954] and made available for sociology [Garfinkel, Sacks 1970] – may be an entry-level concern, a threshold concept for students. Keel’s analysis makes clear that members’ uses of indexical expressions are not to be underestimated, nor ignored, and these remain relevant throughout ethnomethodological studies.

tions” to disembodied instructions. Furthermore, the difference between online and one-to-one sessions is more nuanced than haptic, embodied touch. Data suggests that members are attuned to the use of indexical expressions in the interactional formats of face-to-face sessions and remote sessions. Crucially, Keel shows that such uses are far from the insurmountable problems indexical expressions cause analysts [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022]. The phenomena of remote, video mediated interaction and instruction-giving are of increasing importance [Gan 2023; Lynch, Lindwall 2024], and Keel’s paper will inform future analyses in a range of settings beyond physiotherapeutic programmes.

Shintaro Matsunaga and Nozomi Ikeya use “Sacks’s gloss” to present a Sacksian “take” on what are traditionally regarded as Garfinklean¹⁶ concerns – namely, time and temporality. As reported in Garfinkel [2002: 182], Sacks’s gloss refers to an incident with methodological consequences. According to Garfinkel, rather than accepting a theoretically derived distinction on legal ownership from the literature, Sacks observed LAPD officers making a practitioner’s distinction between something seen to be owned by somebody versus something seen to have been abandoned.¹⁷ Following Sacks, Matsunaga and Ikeya select an emergency response team as a local gang who provide their analysis with members’ takes on time and temporality.

Sacks’s innovations (including the use of perspicuous settings) enable Matsunaga and Ikeya to make important contributions to ethnomethodological analysis and its engagement with a “sociology of time”. Whilst consolidating the use of “perspicuous settings” as an approach to doing ethnomethodology, Matsunaga and Ikeya demonstrate that the analytic concentration on time as both a topic of and resource for research – as rendered in purportedly ethnomethodological programs – displaces members’ orientations to time which, even when these orientations suffuse talk within the team, fall outside the scope of transcript-based inquiries. The use of perspicuous settings – formalized by Garfinkel but initiated by Sacks – requires practitioners, i.e. members competent in the activity being studied, adjudicate the adequacy of ethnomethodological descriptions.

Within Membership Categorization Device (MCD) analysis, two sources paved the way for the emergence of Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) as a distinct specification of categorization practices [Jayyusi 1984; Watson

¹⁶ This is a paradoxical phrase, of course, because with the archival and publication efforts of this century we appreciate how much Garfinkel had always been engaged with these issues despite, as Rawls [2005] argues, having been criticized for not addressing time in his work.

¹⁷ Garfinkel [2002: 181] recalls that Sacks made this distinction in 1963.

1986]; and both of these studies broadened the scope of what constituted occasioned “Devices” in category analysis. Members’ categorial relevances – and the consistency rules and preference rules for category selection – became available for analysis as contextualized, setting-specific phenomena. At the same time, however, both studies circumscribed the analysis of categorization practices as ethnomethodology – setting new standards within MCD analysis that, arguably, have not been reached in MCA.

In following the lead of these sources as specifications of Sacks’s legacies, we have included a discussion of accounts of the categorial order of a childcare centre, or kindergarten, told by a very young child to his father. The paper by Andrew P. Carlin and Younhee Kim moves away from analytically imposed, theoreticized notions of omnirelevance, i.e. constructive-analytic MCA; and challenges the foundations of subfields that are based on omnirelevant categories, in this case “parent–child interaction”. This new direction for MCA deflates the Device based architecture that regards an organization as having the potential for use as a Device, by turning away from the analysts’ ascriptions of omnirelevance, e.g. kindergarten providing an omnirelevant Device used as a preference rule for category selection. Furthermore, taking their lead from Sacks [1963] on under-described categories and Watson [1995] on determining topics, another new direction for MCA is to problematize categories as subject-based criteria for field-specific inquiries. “Particularized” category references concretize categorial relationships that are taken for granted in determining topics for analysis.

Clearly, these data used by Carlin and Kim provide warrant for claiming omnirelevance, and that certain categories are operative in accordance with the use of a consistency rule, viz. members who attend or work at kindergarten – but such claims are features of the MCD architecture, i.e. are convenient for analysis, rather than rigorous description that Sacks [1963, 1999] had sought to achieve. These data confirm members’ use of setting-specific relevances, which provide for an ethnomethodological MCA rather than the cognitivist, constructive analytic explananda commonly referred to as “omnirelevance”.

CONCLUSION

From an information science perspective, we see that Sacks’s work has become routinely disregarded as a consequence of perceived *obsolescence*. “Obsolescence” is wrapped up in considerations of scholarly communication and stipulations of paradigms and “scientific knowledge” though a pragmatic view might be, if an author’s work is not featured in current discussions the less relevant their

work seems for future scholars. The confluence of time markers for a thematic issue on Sacks – the anniversaries of Sacks’s birth in 1935, his death in 1975; and the publication of the single-volume *Lectures on Conversation* in 1995 – provide a timely opportunity to remind readers of the analytic potential left to us all within Sacks’s *Lectures*.

Readers vaguely acquainted with Sacks will know him as the originator of and driving force behind the analysis of conversation, as sequentially organized and in its turn-taking system; and persons’ use of recognizable identifications known as membership categories. These separate fields were his invention and he developed the outlines for their study. What Sacks did was to develop radical fields – essentially, wholly new approaches to the study of interaction rather than building upon existing approaches, or elaborating proximate forms of inquiry. To configure one new field is a remarkable achievement; to configure two new approaches is nothing short of astonishing.

Echoic of his intellectual mentor, Harold Garfinkel, Sacks was *indifferent* to existing approaches and eschewed the influence of previous literatures – whether these were from linguistics or sociology – for his own analyses. The outcome of this indifference was to examine how people talked with each other, using actual recordings of talk rather than invented sequences that characterized the achievements of Noam Chomsky’s “transformational grammar” and other forms of linguistics. The original recordings of people’s naturally occurring talk were Sacks’s data. With a system of transcription (developed by Gail Jefferson) data could be circulated and presented more conveniently, for subsequent analysis and re-analysis by others.

A later incarnation of MCD analysis, known as Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA), was developed to address some of the problems that remained in Sacks’s original formulations of MCD analysis, such as residua of componential analysis (that Sacks had set his analyses up against) and different forms of cognitivism [Carlin, Marques, Moutinho 2025]. Despite the developments in MCA beyond Sacks that were made by scholars it remains, like its predecessor MCD analysis, thoroughly indebted to Sacks’s innovations. Omnirelevance as cognitive residue in current MCA is explored further in the second part of this thematic issue; also, discussions of outcomes of Sacks’s lectures, such as “structured objects”, and considerations of some of the disciplinary auspices that were radicalized by Sacks. To adumbrate the second section of our orientation, we shall take a broad view on the open-textured character of Sacks’s approaches – as used in different forms of inquiry. Although in practical and procedural terms those inquiries

known as ethnomethodology and conversation analysis have been running on parallel tracks for some time, Sacks’s emphases on the activities of description – distinguishing *principled* and *recognizable* descriptions – remain operative.

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Andrew P. Carlin

„STUDIA AND SACKSEM”: DZIEDZICTWA I INNOWACJE

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Słowa kluczowe: Harvey Sacks