Advances in Membership Categorisation Analysis

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Introduction to Membership Categorisation Analysis

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Introduction

This book is about an ethnomethodological approach to the study of talk-in-interaction that is gaining wider popularity and interest from across the social sciences. Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) refers to the study of the range of practices that members of a given speech community deploy alongside complementary and aligned ethnomethods in the routine accomplishment of everyday social interaction. A core principle here is the anthropological notion of *membership* and its relationship to the categories of culture and society that form the stock in trade for the routine accomplishment and co-ordination of social life. Categories are central to social life and experience and an empirical understanding of their actual use in real-time at the situated and granular level can generate insights into a wide spectrum of social behaviours and problems. This book draws from the pioneering work of Harvey Sacks and his concern with membership categorisation (in addition to other aligned forms of conversational practice) and the wide range of rich and fecund studies that have followed. Many of these studies have explored the relationship between membership categorisation practices, language and identity in a variety of settings and through the study of a diverse set of activities. Of course membership categorisation practices are more than the study of identities and identity work-in-action but this is a convenient place to begin our journey. Identity matters have been and continue to be an important site for sociological and related inquiry; not least because they represent a field through which individual and collective life intersect.

Membership Categorisation Analysis and Identity

While the sociological and psychological interest in social identity has a long history, this interest has tended to conceptualise identity as either a role or as an analytic group, collecting people together and predicting how they will behave. Underpinning

this notion of identity as a role (or further analytic type) has been the development of theories about the interrelationship between individual identity and group membership. In psychology, this has tended to stem and develop from the early work of Erikson (1993), who made the distinction between the individual 'self' and people's social roles as the primary frame for locating social identities. This focus on social identity is also developed through the social psychology of Tajfel and Turner (1986), who theorised group formation and individual perceptions of group behaviours under the heading of Social Identity Theory (SIT). While SIT was mainly concerned with group formation, this was followed by the development of Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987) and its interest in the dynamics of group membership. For SIT and Self-Categorisation Theory the focus remains fixed upon the way individuals integrate into groups and encounter other groups within perceived hierarchies. While these approaches are mainly concerned with theorising identity at social group level they have become shorthand for a general theorising about social selves (Haslam et al., 2010) or a general theory of social categorisation (Turner and Reynolds, 2010). This is especially relevant here as the tendency to treat Self-Categorisation Theory as a general theory of social categorisation is sometimes tethered to the goal of cognitive science in developing an explanatory mental schema for things in the world including people and social identities (Lakoff, 1987). However, while explicitly interested in social and cultural identity these approaches tend to remain couched at the theoretical level rather than examining how people actually make sense of their own social categories and the particular social environment in which they engage (Edwards, 1991, 1995a). This is in contrast to examining how identity is done, managed, achieved and negotiated in situ, whereby these approaches tend to pass over this lived experience in favour of a more abstract conceptualisation of social identity. Furthermore, the focus on the term 'identity' can remove from view the practical concern of describing the use of an array of social types and categories within a wider sense of social structure or culture as a routine aspect of naturally occurring ordinary activity. Thus, the sociological or indeed ethnomethodological use of this term requires some qualification and caution.

For sociology, the interest in 'identity' has been directed towards the question of how much the individual is affected by their society, and vice versa, and for psychology the interest is in how group and group identity operates; though, we would argue, each tends to generate an effective separation of the research phenomena from the actual phenomena of the day-to-day work of being and acting in a society – in vivo. As such, the theoretically driven approach to understanding social identity is largely removed from day-to-day lives and routine actions where social identities are both practical accomplishments and essential resources in achieving and co-ordinating everyday tasks and actions.

Within a sometimes polarised environment characterised by debates concerning macro vs micro explanation and other dichotomies (Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981) little attention was paid to examining how people understood social identity and how they used social identities in their everyday business. That is to say social identity is

something people in society do, achieve, negotiate, attribute things to and act upon as part of their daily lives. It was this lived work of social identity of how people do things with identities as social categories that Harvey Sacks saw as offering the chance to develop a particular take on the sociological imagination; namely the study of society from the practical participatory view of members. Sacks then, rather than trying to delve into people's heads to gain an understanding of how people perceived and engaged each other in their society, or pursuing research that sought to categorise people into groups so as to predict behaviour, was interested in how people use and deploy ideas and notions of aggregated behaviours as they go about their routine business. This focus on the use of routine ordinary common-sense knowledge to competently navigate society was to be found in people's descriptions of their social world and conveyed through text, symbolic representation and interaction; where displays of practical theorising about the world and how it is organised and common-sense reasoning about how it works in particular instances are reflexively and accountably constituted through these and associated practices. Professional sociological categories were treated no differently in this regard, a stance that at the time was seen by some as a direct attack on the work of professional academic research. However, Sacks and Garfinkel (see Hill and Crittenden, 1968; Gellner, 1975) were simply pointing out that their work also relied upon common sense ('common' to the field of professional social science) practical theorising; an argument that generates less controversy today.

Thus, the study of 'identity' categories and social types is key to a general conceptualisation of social science and sociology and has provided a central theoretical, methodological and empirical anvil upon which many current research tools and concepts have been formed and forged. Harvey Sacks's concern with how everyday members of ordinary society, as competent members of a linguistic community, use categorisation in everyday life is novel but it also resonates with core sociological concerns and allied forms of inquiry. Sacks, of course, was completely cognisant of this disciplinary fact and this is a theme that will be explored during the course of this book in ways that demonstrate the conceptual and practical relevance of membership categorisation practices to contemporary social relations and contemporary topics of social inquiry.

It has been argued that Sacks's work on membership categorisation represented an operationalisation of Schütz's (1973) phenomenology (see Watson, this volume). The moral and practical 'typing' of persons, labelling and the like became a key concern for so-called micro studies of social life that ranged from education to everyday work settings (Atkinson and Housley, 2003). However, the significance of Sacks's concern with categorisation practices is that it represented a move to a much finer level of granularity that renders visible the relationship between morality, practical action and the social organisation of everyday social life through linguistic practice and the circulation, reception and use of texts. This is not to say that these are the only means through which social life and social relations are organised as an order of action; just that they remain a compelling feature of social organisation as a situated accomplishment by members. The importance of this focus on social

categories and types (inclusive of what we might term identity) is expressed eloquently in Sacks's classic 1979 paper 'Hotrodder: a revolutionary category': '… any person who is a case of a category is seen as a member of a category, and what's known about that category is known about them, and the fate of each is bound up in the fate of the other' (1979: 13).

This ontological orientation towards categories and categorisation as members' phenomenon:

> [D]irects attention to the locally used, invoked and organized 'presumed common-sense knowledge of social structures' which members are oriented to in the conduct of their everyday affairs … This presumed common sense knowledge or culture is made available through a method by which the ordinary sense of talk and action is made problematic (for the purpose of analysis) and is conceptualised as the accomplishment of local instances of categorical ordering work. The aim of such analysis is to produce formal descriptions of the procedures which persons employ in particular singular occurrences of talk and action. (Hester and Eglin, 1997a: 3)

In this way, Sacks pointed to the routine common-sense theorising employed by members to explain, predict and describe others' behaviour as part of the routine work of everyday social action. It might be argued that Sacks was not so much interested in observing *that* people mention social categories in the course of their interaction or within textual forms but rather in the unique configuration of categories and their associated predicates and attributes through which social categories are deployed in any particular instance. That is to say, his interest was in just how they were brought to life in any particular instance, for the participants, just here, just now, and for just this purpose.

For Sacks, the ability of capturing this ordinary routine practical theorising and common-sense reasoning through tape recordings held out the possibility of examining society as a public achievement, a possibility that involved the examination of members' own understanding of society as they engaged with it. To Sacks this offered the possibility of developing a 'primitive' sociology based on empirical observations and recordings of people enacting (doing) society when going about their routine business. While he was not particularly interested in language to begin with, but rather in the stable reproduction of data, the affordances of the new tape-recording devices with the ability to record, play back and listen repeatedly allowed him to collect instances of locally achieved sense-making where people relied upon common-sense social knowledge and engaged in practical theorising. Thus, underpinning Sacks's developing interests was an orientation to an empirical 'proto-sociology' based on observing what people do as a way of engaging with the classic sociological question of how social order and organisation are possible.

It is from Sacks's early interest and examination of the practical work of members' 'sociological' theorising that Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) has

developed, as a rigorous approach to the study of how social knowledge is organised and used during the course of everyday situations and events. The focus of MCA is on peoples' routine methods of social categorisation and local reasoning practices as a display and accomplishment of 'doing' society, or what has been described as 'culture-in-action' (Hester and Eglin, 1997b). Membership Categorisation Analysis is part of the broader research work of Ethnomethodology and allied disciplines, which includes Conversation Analysis (CA), and more recently Discursive Psychology. Ethnomethodology is a sociological approach founded by Harold Garfinkel (1964) that approaches the classic sociological question of 'how is social order achieved?' through studying what people actually do, how they conduct themselves and how they interact with others. In this sense, rather than *theorising* how society is organised, ethnomethodology focuses on how people routinely accomplish social life, where social facts are not treated as things but as accomplishments (Garfinkel, 2002).

The focus of ethnomethodology and of MCA is exemplified in the collection of studies brought together by Roy Turner entitled, unsurprisingly, *Ethnomethodology* (1974). While this work includes a section on the way institutional records are constructed and organised, and how theorising as a practical accomplishment might be scripted, the final section is on the methodological basis of interaction. It is in this section that Sacks and Schegloff produce two of the most influential and enduring discussions in their emerging observational discipline with its goal of dealing with 'the details of social action rigorously, empirically and formally' (Turner, 1974: 195). Although both published previously (Sacks, 1972b; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), the two chapters in Turner's collection, 'On the analysability of stories by children' (Sacks, 1974) and 'Opening up closings' (Schegloff and Sacks, 1974), point to the emerging research trajectories in what has become known as Conversation Analysis and Membership Categorisation Analysis. The foci of the two papers followed different trajectories, with CA developing rapidly and finding an audience in the linguistic area of pragmatics, rather than sociology. However, while this move towards linguistics certainly did not cover all CA-inspired work (see for example Pomerantz and Mandelbaum, 2005) the linguistic appeal of CA also corresponded, until recently (Heritage, 2013; Watson, this volume), with a lessening of the ties to an explicit sociological agenda; these debates remain current.

While the rapid rise of CA tended to overshadow Sacks's concern with categories and categorisation, under the heading of MCA his work has continued to be developed into a principled analytic approach used across a range of disciplines where the focus is on how people display a working social knowledge about social categories, and their actions both in and about a setting. Of course, although developing a strong focus on social interaction, MCA is not confined to spoken interaction. From the early lecture on a child's story (which we discuss in detail below) to the lecture on the 'Navy Pilot' (Sacks, 1995, Vol. 1, Lecture 14, 205–22) various materials have provided a rich source of members category work which have included newspaper headlines (Hester and Eglin, 1992; Lee, 1984) and wider newspaper coverage (Eglin and Hester, 2003), and

continues with contemporary texts drawn from social media (Stokoe and Attenborough, this volume).

In the following sections we turn to focus on some of the main aspects of Sacks's category work before tracing these aspects towards contemporary themes in MCA research. However, before doing so it is useful to note that MCA is not so much a fully worked out methodology but rather a collection of observed practices employed *by members*. Thus MCA has not tended to establish a fully worked out set of methodological tools to be applied to data, but rather to develop a concern with the empirical examination of just what people seem to be orienting to in order to achieve whatever it is they are doing. That is to say MCA is interested in observing, uncovering and detailing the methods, techniques and orientations employed by members as they go about their routine tasks. Thus MCA is not so much a method of analysis but rather a collection of observations and an analytic mentality towards observing the ways and methods people orient, invoke and negotiate social category based knowledge when engaged in social action. In this way, and as we work through Sacks's basic observations in the following sections, it is worth bearing in mind that the concepts and analytic 'tools' outlined are those drawn from observing people *doing category work* (Licoppe, this volume). In this sense, the initial observations about how social categories work in the story below provide an introduction to the phenomena of categorial work, which allows us to begin to open up and examine in ever increasing detail, subtlety and analytic sophistication just how shared social knowledge (a baseline definition of culture) is profoundly flexible and adaptable to task and purpose. We begin, then, with Sacks's well-known discussion of the kinship story before moving to some of the recent areas that have been developed from Sacks's original work.

Harvey Sacks and Membership Categorisation Analysis

For Sacks the classic sociological question of 'how is social order possible?' is not answered by asking people what they do but by examining what people actually do, i.e., how *they* engage with and make sense of the world in doing or going about their everyday routine activities. As mentioned previously, with the advent of the portable tape recorder, Sacks was able to collect recordings and snippets of everyday interactions and he became increasingly interested in the way people used social categories for describing people in the world and how these social categories were used to account for, explain, justify and make sense of people's actions. As Licoppe (this volume) demonstrates, this routine category work can have consequences for the participants if not performed adequately. For Sacks, then, the classic question of 'social order' could be found in the way such categorisation work embeds and trades on assumed taken-for-granted knowledge about the social world and, in particular, how the actions of social categories are made to operate within as well as organise interaction in particular instances.

The classic illustration of how taken-for-granted knowledge of social categories and routine assumptions about how they operate in particular instances is found in Sacks's

detailed exposition of the first two sentences of a 2-year-old child's story, 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up' (Sacks, 1974). The enduring analytic power of these two sentences is found in the gestalt shift Sacks achieves through his careful unpacking of the 'simple' story to reveal how complex layers of social knowledge and social action are inbuilt and trade on 'common sense' knowledge of who was involved, what happened and why. This simple yet profound observation, which we discuss below, revealed the scope and potential for examining members' social reasoning practices through a focus on members' use and methods of social categorisation and the work this is put to in doing some form of social activity.

Membership Categorisation Analysis – the Basics: 'The Baby Cried. The Mommy Picked It Up'

As indicated above, Sacks's interest in social categories was developed over a number of years and appears throughout his lectures and publications, where it finds its clearest exposition in his discussion of a child's story – 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up' (Sacks, 1972a, b, 1974, 1995). In 'On the analysability of stories by children' (1974) he embarks upon the analysis of this story by assuming an un-problematic but nonetheless remarkable understanding of the events by his readers/listeners.

> The sentences we are considering are after all rather minor, and yet all of you, or many of you, hear just what I said you heard, and many of us are quite unacquainted with each other. I am then dealing with something real and something finely powerful. (Sacks, 1974: 218)

What Sacks proposes, then, is that this story is heard and understood by many who hear it as meaning what was intended by the author of the story. That is to say, it is perfectly recognisable to unacquainted members without recourse to whom the particular people involved are, and who it is told to. Sacks (1974: 218) then poses a question as to whether it is possible to arrive at a methodological apparatus for explicating this mundane, yet detailed 'known in common understanding' in order to

> … give some sense … of the fine power of culture. It does not, so to speak, merely fill the brains in roughly the same way, it fills them so that they are alike in fine detail …
>
> What one ought to seek to build is an apparatus which will provide for how it is that any activities, which members do in such a way as to be recognisable as such to members, are done, and done recognisably.

The premise, then, is that the child's story is mundanely recognisable, and that, as such, the goal is to try to account for this recognisability through the building of an apparatus that can deal with these abstract references to persons and actions. To this end, and

in the subsequent analysis, Sacks introduces a number of concepts or tools including 'membership categorisation devices', 'membership categories', 'category bound activities', the 'rules of economy and consistency', and the 'viewers and hearers maxims' to tease out an analysis of how this common understanding is arrived at.

Membership categorisation 'devices' are, for all practical purposes, the lynch-pin for the analysis. The 'device' is the 'organisational relevance' providing for, collecting together and organising social categories and their relevant actions, *in any particular instance*. Categories are described as references to persons such as 'fireman', 'brother', 'prime minister', 'teacher', etc., or in this instance 'baby' and 'mommy'. Categories, then, may be used by members in such a way as to form co-membership with other categories in an organisational and situational relevant 'device'. This means that references to such categories as 'butcher, baker, candlestick maker' can be seen to be connected in terms of occupations, or rather the device of 'occupations', which provides an organisational relevance for *these* categories for *this* topic here and now. That is to say, the use of any *particular* categories, 'baby' and 'mommy' are heard to *go together* within the organisational device, 'family' in this instance, and further that *these* categories in *this* device also involve working knowledge of background expectancies such as their expectable actions and their legitimate attributions in relation to each other. This points, then, to the way that categories are selected, used and configured by members with an orientation to the topic at hand, that their use in any particular situation is purposeful or practical for that topic, rather than simply abstract references.

Furthermore, Sacks (1972a) suggests that the categories 'baby' and 'mommy' comprise a further class of categories which go together in a strong associated pairing, or 'standardised relational pair', such as 'doctor/patient', 'mother/baby', 'girlfriend/boyfriend', etc. This class of categories are common pairings, whereby mention of one *suggests* the other. However, although quite recognisable as 'going together', the category 'doctor' may not necessarily be found with 'patient', for example, the pairing of doctor/nurse may be heard to have an equal level of practical association. Some category pairs or 'standardised relational pairs' such as 'husband and wife' suggest stronger ties, where one category references the other to such an extent that mention of one of the categories may include reference to the other. In this sense, certain categories stand in relation to each other as a signature of the normative parameters of culture and social relations that are routinely configured, interpreted and reproduced by members.

The associated category-bound actions (or predicates) of social categories comprise a kind of stock of knowledge-in-action or *culture-in-action* (Hester, 1994; Hester and Eglin, 1997a), which involves common-sense knowledge about the world and how social categories are expected or assumed to act in general and in particular situations. That is to say, while there are any number of ways categories, devices and their associated actions can be configured prior to their use, it is only through their use in any particular situation that they become operative for the participants. From this basic categorisation 'apparatus' Sacks then offers some further observations, which he refers to as 'rules of application', that provide some further insights as to how social categorisation practices are realised.
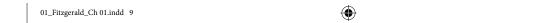
Sacks describes two 'rules of application', the 'economy rule' and the 'consistency rule' (1995: 221), that work to inform and organise participants' interpretation and understanding of categories in use. The economy rule states that when a member refers to a single category from any device then this is an adequate reference to a person for all practical purposes here and now and without further need of elaboration (e.g., 'mommy, baby' need not be described beyond these categorisations). The 'consistency rule' is derived from the observation that if a member of a given population has been categorised within a particular device then other members of that population can be categorised in terms of the same collection (e.g., mommy and baby are in the device 'family'). Sacks then derives a corollary known as the 'hearer's maxim' (1974), which posits that if two or more categories are used to categorise two or more members of some population and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection, then: hear them that way (e.g., mommy and baby are heard as belonging to the *same* family). These rules of application and corollary therefore work as practical registers that reinforce the observed or described actions of persons which draw upon common- sense understandings for their practical sense making through the *occasioned* use of membership categorisation devices.

Sacks, then, shows how a common-sense understanding of the story can be made analytically interesting. By proposing that the use of 'baby' and 'mommy' can be heard as belonging to the same 'device' of 'family', this provides for a hearing that identifies the 'baby' as a young child, and the 'mommy' as the mother of *that* child. They are related through the 'obvious' device of co-members of the *same* family. Further, the actions contained in the story are sequential in that the mommy picks the baby up after, *and because*, it is crying. Thus, through common and recognisable 'category attributes' related to the categories 'mommy' and 'baby', whereby babies cry and their mothers pick them up to comfort them when they are crying, the actions carried out in the story can be heard as recognisable, common, *expected* actions and attributes of the categories displayed. Furthermore, that this recognisable and mundane action can be heard to be done is itself *unremarkable*, i.e., we do not need to look any further to understand what the story means as all that is needed is contained in the two sentences.

It is with this apparatus, then, that Sacks provides an empirically grounded analytic set of observations that seeks to produce principled empirical observations of naturally occurring social categorisation.

However, before going on to examine recent developments of Sacks's work it is worth pausing to examine some of the criticisms that have been raised about his analytic discussions. While his *Lectures* (Sacks, 1992, 1995) offer a vast array of insightful observations they are transcripts of his lectures and so they do not contain a systematic method or a coherent set of procedures. Rather his observations (edited by Jefferson and with introductions to each volume by Schegloff) offer a unique and valuable insight into Sacks's own working through various ideas and observations, including impromptu responses to questions from the student audience. While this provides an excellent insight into the process and development of Sacks's analytic interests, a tendency has also been identified (Edwards, 1995a; Hester and Eglin, 1997b; Schegloff, 1995;

Watson, this volume) in some of his analysis and discussion towards giving a more solid, fixed or reified property to some categories and their organisation in social action. As Watson (this volume) points out, this is not that surprising given the intellectual trends at the time, and this deserves some critique – but within a framework of his overall work. While this has been raised by various analysts (and is discussed in depth by Watson, this volume), this tendency was first tackled head-on by Hester and Eglin in their introduction to the book *Culture in Action* (1997a), who tease out a set of principles and concepts and critique the possible analytic separation of the observed phenomena (i.e. categorisation practices) from the actual lived tasks the phenomena are embedded within.

In other words, at some points Sacks seems to be advocating an analysis which could produce decontextualised accounts of category work. This, as Schegloff (1995) in his Introduction to Volume 1 of Sacks's *Lectures* argues, has the potential for the analysis to be *promiscuous*, where the analyst relies upon *their* understanding rather than those displayed by the participants (see also Fitzgerald, 2012; Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2013; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002a; Stokoe, 2012a; Watson, this volume). Thus, rather than reiterate the locally occasioned character of sense-making, some of Sacks's own concepts serve to undermine his insistence on an empirical focus upon locally occasioned work. Although acknowledging that Sacks's own words contribute to the perceptions of static forms of knowledge and analytic decontextualisation, subsequent work in MCA clearly demonstrates the contextualised underpinning of in situ occasionality, evident in the overall thrust of his analysis, and evident in the contributions to this volume.

While Sacks's story provides an excellent way of introducing the principles of MCA, we now move from the static text of the child's story to interactional conversational work where further levels of complexity are observable; as any category work is irredeemably part of a flow of interaction and therefore necessitates a concern with the mutually elaborative work of both categorial and sequential aspects of 'talk-in-interaction'. For MCA, this means treating category work as flowing through the interaction as sequential and topical relevancies emerge and recede through various tasks. It is important then that in any analysis of members' category work this is conceived as part of a multidimensional flow of interaction in which sequences and categories are multi-linear, flowing through time, changing and adapting according to the immediate and distal relevancies if, as, and when they become salient to the participants' orientations.

Membership Categorisation Within Multi-layered Interaction

While Sacks's story provides a detailed example of the culture-in-action embedded within the two sentences, and demonstrates an elegant way of analytically unpacking the organisation of category work, he was also interested in members' category work within interaction and as interactional work. For Sacks (1995) it was equally of interest not just how categories were organised but also how they were invoked, used and negotiated within the flow of interaction. For MCA, this means conceiving of members'

category work within an inextricably entwined multi-layered sequence that permeates multiple layers of participant orientation and interactional tasks.

Treating category work as part of the flow of any interaction highlights that interaction and the tasks at hand do not routinely reside at just a single layer of category orientation, such as the explicit use of social categories, but within multiple layers of category work oriented to by participants. From this position it becomes important to understand MCA as a way exploring members' category work within a multi-layered sequential flow of interaction that continually changes as the interaction moves from speaker to speaker and action to action. For Sacks and later Watson (1994) this involved examining the sequential turns of interaction through a categorial lens, as 'turn generated', or more recently 'turn formed' (Watson, this volume), categories. Treating turn sequence as but one layer of category work conceives of interaction as multi-layered and as a site where further layers of category work and category-based orientations become analytically observable in a rich mutually implicative interactional texture. In the next part of our introductory discussion this layered interactional work is explored through an example of MCA analysis drawn from a radio phone-in (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2002; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002a). We begin at the level of sequentially formed categories, highlighting the way sequential turns can be seen to have categorial organisation, before building further layers of membership category orientations. For the second level we examine how a caller's opinion about a topic is eventually tied to a membership category, which then serves to account for that opinion. At the third level of analysis we highlight how the context of the interaction, a radio phone-in, is oriented to by the participants through a categorisation device for the interaction – a kind of 'who we are and what we are doing' device (Butler and Fitzgerald, 2010) – that the participants orient to at various points in the programme.

Multi-layered Organisation of Category Work

For Sacks, sequential actions could be treated and analysed in a similar way to membership categories, in that they can be seen to involve and make relevant various attributes for these actions. For example, to ask a question requires the asker to construct an utterance that can be recognised as a question, and relatedly the obligation of the answerer is to produce a recognisable answer to *this* question in the next turn slot. The attributes tied to a sequential action then are 'turn generated' (or, following Watson, this volume, 'turn produced' or 'turn-formed',) as they relate only to the interactional action and the job that action is doing. At this level the idea of 'turn-formed' does not stipulate in advance of the occurrence who should fill the slot, indeed as a 'turn-formed category' slot this is adequately categorised through the action, i.e., 'caller/called' or 'questioner/answerer'. The occupation of these categories is a sequential matter, as who occupies the turn-formed category 'questioner' is fulfilled by the person who performs the action.

Sequential turn-formed categories are occupied only for the duration of their occurrence, and upon satisfactory completion the sequential category membership is ended.

The questioner does not remain the questioner; rather, the questioner may then become the answerer or something else, including a new turn-formed category 'questioner', in the next sequence. In other words, they are turn-formed categories occupied for the duration of the sequential action that can, in turn, touch off new turn-formed categories, as seen in this example taken from a UK radio phone-in programme.

EXTRACT 1: TURN-FORMED CATEGORIES

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01N: Frances Smith from from Birmingham what do you think
02F: urrr..I.feel that the age of consent should stay at
03   twenty one()I believe that society is going to send a
04   message to young people..that..um..gay sex is OK
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In this opening sequence of a radio phone-in the interactional work of N involves moving F from 'off-air' to 'on-air' and into a sequential position to speak about the topic. N achieves this through producing the full name and location of F during which time N occupies the sequential category 'introducer', which is then followed by N producing a question/invitation to speak. In this way, the speaker, N, occupies the turn-formed category of introducer before mid-sentence shifting categories to question/inviter. F then begins to speak and in so doing occupies the sequential category 'answerer' by fulfilling the turn-formed requirements of the response to N's question. In this example, the turn-formed categories of introducer/introduced and questioner/answerer are made operative and fulfilled only for the duration of the turns.

Through the deployment and occupation of turn-formed categories and the completion of such categories, these categories are seen to 'continually flow' through the interaction being occupied, used, completed, re-used, modified etc., as the interaction unfolds. This highlights the continually changing occupation of such categories, whereby, as speaker change occurs, the predicates associated with the turn-formed categories change with them. The term 'turn-formed categories' is also useful as it highlights the *social* obligation involved in occupying such categories where the non-fulfilment of the category action can be drawn attention to or sanctioned by, for example, asking someone to speak up, to repeat the question, to ask if what they said was a question or to describe their action as a statement rather than a question. In other words, they are an important feature of accountable action.

Membership Categorisation in Interactional Sequence

In a similar way to turn-formed categories, members' explicit use of category references and descriptions are embedded in a multi-layered sequential environment. For example, returning to the previous extract of the phone-in opening, F invokes

various membership categories along with associated predicates as the work of the call progresses. Following N's introduction F begins to give her opinion on the topic, the proposed of lowering the age of homosexual consent from 21 to 18 years of age. Her opinion at this point is not explicitly tied to any membership category. However, as the call progresses, and in response to N's question, F does claim membership of a category.

EXTRACT 2: CATEGORY FLOW

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01N: Frances Smith from from Birmingham what do you think
02F: urrr..I.feel that the age of consent should stay at
03   twenty one()I believe that society is going to send a
04   message to young people..that..um..gay sex is OK
05   and..uh..I just don't agree..I think it's unnatural..I
06   think with the fear of Aids..it's very frightening..
07   that..our young men can go out and and..and..and..will
08   not be so much worrying whether the girls can become
09   pregnant as to whether our (.)sons are going to catch
10   Aids
11N: can I disassociate..try and disassociate the two issues
12   here and lets talk about them separately. One is the
13   public health ()one [and one] is the one of excluding
14F:                      [ yes   ]
15N: that..of of ethics and whether..ur..[um((inaudible))   ]
16F:                                      [I' m..well..I' m a]
17   Christian and I do believe it is against the Christian
18   ethics I believe St Paul spoke quite strongly against
19   homosexuality
```

At line 2, F begins to offer her opinion on the topic of lowering the age of male homosexual sexual consent. The point she makes is that she holds a concern for the well-being of young people who may get involved in this type of activity *because* society is giving the wrong message. In the course of this opinion she offers various categories in relation to the topic. She suggests that '*our young men*' and '*our sons*' are vulnerable to catching AIDS; that societal concern will shift from unwanted pregnancy to fear of infection. While not explicitly claiming membership of any category, F's reference to 'our young men', 'our young sons' and 'the girls' works to collect these categories together in a

device 'family' with F possibly speaking as a 'concerned parent'. For the audience, the opinion and concern could reasonably be predicated to the category parent. As the call continues, however, any initial and tentative predicated category assumption is replaced with an explicit category relationship tied to her opinion.

When N attempts to narrow the debate, F claims membership of the category 'Christian', '*16F: I'm...I'm a Christian and I do believe [it] is against Christian ethics...*'. The category membership claimed by F is now explicitly tied as a reason for her opinion. That is to say her opinion is now made a predicate of her membership of the category Christian such that her opinion about the topic is now tied (Reynolds and Fitzgerald, this volume) and made accountable to her 'new' category membership. Furthermore, her claim to membership of the category Christian serves to *retrospectively* account for her foregoing contribution in relation to that category in that it can now be seen as an explicit category-based opinion. Her past and future contribution can now be seen in the light of this newly available category and associated predicates of the category.

This example highlights, and as Stokoe and Attenborourgh (this volume) discuss in more depth, the on-going in situ nature of members' category work whereby category and predicates do not remain static but are continually developed, clarified, made accountable and even retrospectively modified. Having examined an instance of category work at the level of sequence and topic we now turn to a further layer of category-based orientation.

Omnirelevant Categories and Devices

As demonstrated in the previous example, members' category work flows through the interaction being developed and transformed over the course of interaction as new categories are used and are made topically relevant in both description and incumbency. However, while new categories may be made relevant and further category work undertaken at any time these do not necessarily make the previous categories redundant, or mean that they cease to operate, for they may now form part of the background relevancies to the participants. That is to say, while the development of categories within the interaction may continue apace, previous categories may remain or be re-invoked within the interaction. Moreover, some categories and devices may be potentially relevant for the whole or at any time during the interactional event, such that they are 'omnirelevant' categories. As Sacks (1995: Vol. 1, 594–5) observes in relation to a group therapy session:

> What I want to be able to say is that 'therapist'/'patient' is 'omni-relevant' for the 'group therapy session'. I don't want to say that it's the only collection of category used or usable in this session; that would clearly be absurd. And I don't want to say it's the only collection that's omni-relevant; there may be many that are omni-relevant. It is one omni-relevant collection.

Here Sacks observes that although categories may be deployed and negotiated in the course of the interaction, as topics develop and shift there may remain omnirelevant categories that are, or may be, oriented to as relevant throughout the interaction. In terms of the radio phone-in extract above, the categories of 'host' and 'caller' are omnirelevant as these organise the programme and remain relevant throughout the show even though the category of 'caller', F in the example above, is occupied by a series of 'callers'; that is, omnirelevance indicates that categories and devices operate at a local contextual level of 'who-we-are-and-what-we-are-doing'. Thus, to describe these categories as omnirelevant is to say that they can permeate the interaction at different levels, for example operating at an organisational level and at an immediate level and invoked as relevant at particular points in the interaction. It is then at the immediate level, when they are invoked and oriented to by the participants, that they become observable/accountable as operating at the organisational level. This means that just because the example above can be described as a radio phone-in, it does not mean that this context or the constituent identities/categories are always immediately relevant or oriented to for any particular task undertaken by the participants. For MCA, this has to be shown as being oriented to by the participants (Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2013; Fitzgerald et al., 2009; Hester and Hester, 2012; Rintel, this volume). For example, while within the particular radio programme discussed above it is possible to describe the institutional roles of the participants as 'host' and 'caller', we avoided these labels in the data and discussion as these categories need to be seen to be oriented to and relevant for the participants. The analytic focus then is on how the participants occupy and make observable and relevant the categories 'host' and 'caller', i.e., how the participants 'operationalise' their category membership through performing certain category specific actions such as introducing the programme/topic, introducing the callers, inviting callers to speak, discussing issues raised with the callers, and managing caller transition. That is to say, in performing these actions N is both doing 'hosting' and also making relevant another programme-relevant category 'caller'. These are programme-relevant categories as they relate to the programme 'radio phone-in' rather than to the actual business of topical debate where topical relevant categories are used. In this way, MCA approaches members' category work in interaction as embedded within a multi-layered and multi-sequential environment while embracing the complexity of interaction and the orientations of, and to, those present.

As discussed above, while MCA offers various analytic tools it does not stipulate a formula or process to follow when undertaking analysis. Rather the relevant analytic tools are assembled by the analyst in relation to the particular data being examined, as *occasioned* by the data. Central to MCA then are a modest collection of routine categorisation features that Sacks observed in his analysis of the child's story which have subsequently proved to be resilient over time and provided a rich resource through which to develop a remarkable insight into the complexity of members' reasoning practices in a range of settings. Thus, while there was some early criticism of the approach, for example whether Sacks intended to continue to focus on members' category work (Schegloff, 2007a; see also Stokoe, 2012a; Watson, 1994), subsequent

MCA research undertaken has nonetheless developed a strong and flexible methodological framework which continues to produce a robust cumulative body of research.

So, to reiterate, the achievement of MCA has been in developing an empirical understanding of members' interactional category work within a complex multi-layered social environment and which in turn has provided a basis for the study of more complex categorial organisation including category-based moral ordering (Jayyusi, 1984; Watson, 1978), the display of social norms (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2009a), and traditional social science topics such as racism (Whitehead, 2009), gender (Stokoe, 2003) and childhood (Butler, 2008). An additional and important dimension of Membership Categorisation Analysis also relates to practical categorisation work around non-personal collections, categories and modes of predication within particular activities (see Hester and Eglin, 1997b; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002a; Housley and Smith, this volume). The 'sociality' of artefacts, objects and things finds resonance in the symbolic interaction of Mead where mind, self and society are extended into a wider cosmic frame of being and becoming that is inclusive of interaction between subjects and objects within a broad continuum of sociality that is inclusive of but more than just individuals, groups and institutions. More recent developments have cited actor-network theory (Latour, 1999; Law, 1994) as a lens through which the ordering of actors, objects (and other material formations) and networks can be re-specified. The debate and connections between actor-network theory and ethnomethodology lie beyond the scope of this book but deserve further scrutiny in terms of common roots but also important differences. Approaches to the study of members' non-personal category use have adopted an empirical approach. As we have noted elsewhere:

> MCA had also, in some respects, developed from the initial Sacksian concerns with personalized membership categorization devices into an interest in the use of non-personalized membership categorization devices in members' talk. For example, McHoul and Watson (1984) examine how common-sense knowledge of the children's own locality is used as a resource in the explanation of formal geographical knowledge … Further work which has extended the analytic role of MCA into the domain of non-personalized categories, as opposed to Sacks's early emphasis on the descriptive categories of person, includes work carried out by Coulter (1983). He seeks to locate categories of social structure within both institutional and organizational conversational contexts as well as everyday non-institutional contexts. (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002a: 63)

Further advances in the field of membership categorisation have involved an engagement with related and aligned aspects of interaction. Of course, while the study of membership categorisation practices has dealt with talk and texts from the beginning, other orders of action and their relationship with different modes of interaction are also reflected upon within the *Lectures* (Sacks, 1995). Perhaps the most important of these less frequented avenues has been the development of the 'viewer's maxim' to an

understanding of how membership categorisation might operate in terms of mundane visual order (see Hester and Francis, 2003) and in relation to other orders of ordinary interaction where membership categorisation practices (amongst others) are salient and recognisably relevant resources for the routine situated accomplishment of social organisation and conduct. The arrival of new forms of communication technology and the emergence of social media often constitute 'places' where the multi-modal characteristics of the interaction order are reassembled within specific communication formats oriented to affordances of connectivity across time and space. An understanding of how categorisation practices move between 'audio' and 'video' cues is increasingly a practical problem for networked members utilising new forms of communication technology (Licoppe, this volume; Rintel, this volume).

The study of membership categorisation practice, as an aspect of everyday order, is beginning to develop apace with the flowering of a coherent set of studies bound together through common problems, analytic descriptions, core studies and common sites of interest. Whilst the analytic flexibility of MCA, as a branch of ethnomethodological enquiry, provides an opportunity to explore new domains it also remains firmly a part of a broader programme of research and inquiry that is deeply implicated in key sociological issues and debates.

Chapters in this Collection

The chapters in this collection bring together some of the foremost authors in Membership Categorisation Analysis. Each of the chapters examines a particular set of concepts within MCA and develops these in relation to contemporary directions in the field of Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis. In this sense each of the chapters advance the analytic sophistication of particular concepts within the overall development of MCA as an approach. As will be discussed in more detail as we introduce each chapter, this includes examining category predicates, entwined categorial and sequential flow, the contextual layering of omnirelevance, the relationship between categorial identity and interactional sequence, and the consequences of not being 'ordinary'. As a methodologically oriented collection the chapters also provide a wide range of data examples that contribute to both substantive and emergent topical areas as well as discussions around data collection and use. For example, Stokoe and Attenborough utilise data examples from personal instant messaging, rolling TV and online print media, Rintel uses data taken from couples in long-distance relationship using video chat facilities, Edwards and Fitzgerald use videos posted on the social media sharing site YouTube while Licoppe uses video linked judicial hearings. By utilising an increasingly wider range of data sources the chapters highlight how MCA contributes to a range of analytic interests as well as contributing to the discussion of what counts as 'data' for discourse and language research.

So far in this chapter we have covered the basic concepts within Membership Categorisation Analysis through Sacks's work and traced subsequent directions that

are currently being developed. Following on from this introduction to MCA, each of the chapters develops some of the main concepts discussed above. The collection kicks off with a discussion by Watson, who focuses on the fundamental concepts underpinning MCA and the main conceptual shift necessary in undertaking MCA research. Watson argues that MCA is not a set of tools to be applied but relies on an analytic attitude to observing and documenting the categorial work, methods and techniques utilised in any particular event. That is, to get to the heart of successful MCA research entails an important conceptual shift in analytic mentality from selecting and applying methodological tools to explain what members do, to putting members at the centre of the analysis and allowing members' category work and the methods used in any particular situation to emerge. In doing this Watson also addresses some of Sacks's writings that have sometimes seemed equivocal on this point and which have potentially obfuscated the development of MCA. As Watson and others (Edwards, 1995a; Hester and Eglin, 1997a) have shown, within some of Sacks's writings and lectures there is a tendency at times to lean towards treating some membership categories and associated features as somehow pre-existing or as fixed in time and space prior to any particular instance of their use. For example, the categories of 'male' and 'female' within the device 'sex' are described as 'natural' categories as opposed to categories which are 'occasioned' in situ. While echoing previous critiques of this, Watson provides an in-depth level of critical detail to this element in Sacks's work and from this argues strongly for the praxeological *principle* clearly underlying his work.

From this position, Watson then moves on to raise the issue of context and how the focus on single elements of action or categorisation ignores the way any action and categorial work is part of a complex interrelationship of contextual relevancies. Here Watson introduces the term 'gestalt contexture' to make the complexity of context conceptually visible and analytically approachable through the way interactional and categorial elements are seen to exist and be visible through each other. In this way membership categories and their use, relevance and invocation shift through time while their immediate and essentially reflexive retrospective and prospective here-and-now relevancies are preserved.

During the course of Chapter 3 Stokoe and Attenborough address and develop a major theme in recent MCA research focusing on the relationship between category work as part of sequential practices. The aim of the chapter is to present and exemplify a practical and sequential approach to MCA. In their discussion they demonstrate that not only are these mutually entwined, but entwined within an essential reflexivity where each relies upon the other. To this end the chapter focuses on the particular set of reflexive practices described as 'prospective and retrospective' (Watson, 2009a), where initial categorisations are subsequently reassessed within an on-going and dialogic (Leudar et al., 2004; Nekvapil and Leudar, 2002) inter-textual media. After initial discussion of the practice the authors then examine this practice as part of a particular media practice during a breaking and rolling news story.

Drawing on a range of spoken and written discourse data, Stokoe and Attenborough show how practices of description and categorisation get used in and as part of

sequential practices to do particular kinds of inferential work. The authors consider these description-categorisation practices as sequentially paired actions (Watson, 2009a, this volume) where the first is *prospective*, the second *retrospective*. From this, they consider how the practice is used within rolling news coverage of a breaking news story where a news channel replaces routine news coverage to dedicate coverage to a single breaking story. Examples such as the attack on the World Trade Center (Jaworski et al., 2005) have become noted as a particular form of news coverage, described by Liebes (1998) as 'disaster marathons' where journalists working in the absence of any certainty, lacking immediate information but with the need to fill air-time, provide descriptions of actions (bombings, mass-shootings, etc.) and categories which 'fit' with the present actions but which then have to be modified and changed as more information becomes available. What becomes clear through their analysis is that the on-going reassessing of the initial and later categorisations, involving prospective and retrospective categorisation, constitutes a key mechanism for the practical negotiation of news work during such events where actions and biographical details of potential suspects get prospectively and/or retrospectively categorised – using category-implicative features – in various different ways before a breaking news story solidifies into a report of 'what actually happened'. The chapter considers the implications of these findings for MCA research as well as debates about analysis, inference and context in discourse and interaction analysis.

Chapter 4, by Christian Licoppe, addresses the essential principle underpinning the analytic attitude of MCA by exploring how members' own membership category analysis is an expected part of being socially competent. In this Licoppe returns to one of Sacks's initial observations that people *work* to be 'ordinary' (Sacks, 1995) by focusing on the routine everyday work of *being* socially competent, demonstrable through in-situ and accountable Membership Categorisation Analysis work. The data for the chapter is taken from a judicial hearing, conducted over video link, where being able to be seen to perform category analysis 'correctly' can and does have serious consequences when not deemed adequately performed. Here the perceived inability to perform routine Membership Categorisation Analysis is not only treated as a lack of social competence, in this case it results in continued incarceration.

The chapter then turns to the very basis of Sacks's observations of categories and their understanding as taken for granted social knowledge and *their* culture in action. In so doing the discussion forcefully provides an important bearing on the overall view of MCA research by refocusing on one of the profound observations made by Sacks and bringing this conceptual point to the fore. That category analysis is first and foremost a routine members' practice and it is the task of MCA research to observe and reveal the ways in which categories are oriented to *by members*.

In Chapter 5 Reynolds and Fitzgerald focus on the relationship between a membership category and associated features, or predicates, of that category. The authors highlight how MCA has successfully been able to highlight and demonstrate how and in what ways various activities, rights and obligations are routinely related to membership categories and membership devices. While this reflexive relationship between

category and predicated feature, initially restricted to 'category bound activities' (Sacks, 1974) and subsequently developed by Watson (1983) as 'category bound predicates', has proven immensely useful it has also tended to serve as a catch-all term for *all* relationships between category features. In Reynolds and Fitzgerald's discussion they argue that it is possible to examine the subtle *differences* in the ways category features (rights, knowledge, activities, etc.) are deployed. Through their analysis the authors explore this relationship by examining further levels of refinement to further understand the relationship between membership categories and locally invoked associated features.

Using a collection of data where participants are engaged in public arguments (Reynolds, 2011, 2013) the authors trace out three distinct differences in the types of relationship between categories and category features. The first relationship adopts Sacks's (1995) term '*category tied*' and refers to the link between a category and category features which are made explicit by participants; the second '*category bound*' relationship identifies where category-based features are *treated by members* as *naturally* related to a category, in a taken for granted, but nevertheless explicit way; and thirdly, '*category-predicate*', where category features are implied by the operation of a membership device or category. The authors identify and explore the different *forms* of relationship between category features and categories/devices to show how these further levels of observations are analytically useful.

In Chapter 6, Rintel examines the concept of omnirelevance as a central feature of 'technologised interaction' (Hutchby, 2001a). As Rintel observes, the concept of 'omnirelevance' has recently re-emerged within Membership Categorisation Analysis as attention is given to participants' multiple orientations to various levels of context within interaction or 'reflexive oscillation' between interaction and context (Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2013) organised through membership devices. Omnirelevant devices then tie the particular interactional moment to the contextual pattern of the activity by drawing attention to 'who-we-are-and-what–we-are-doing'. Rintel utilises this concept in examining couples engaged in remote video interaction, or 'technologised interaction', interaction in which the material and social affordances of technology are 'laminated and compounded' (Hutchby, 2001b: 448–9) such that technology is a frame but not a determiner of social action. The combination is illustrated through examples in which couples cope with distortions in video calling through orienting to omnirelevant laminations of relationship and technology categories. From this Rintel observes that the notion of omnirelevance can provide a principled and nuanced understanding of an omnirelevant technological device the couples orient to as a background organising device. In this chapter omnirelevance provides a principled and grounded approach to exploring the practices through which interaction is technologised and the wider sociological interest in the interdependence of technology and society. In so doing the chapter makes important inroads into further understanding the lived experience of technologised interaction while also developing the concept of omnirelevance and the subtle dynamics through which interactional and task context are oriented to and managed in situ.

In the concluding chapter Housley and Smith explore the situated use of membership categorisation practices within research team interaction. The chapter explores real-time examples from a research team setting where social scientific matters are being routinely attended to, and builds on methodographic studies of related phenomena (Mair et al., 2013). The chapter examines how interview data is coded and explores the interactional processes and centrality of membership categorisation to negotiation and deliberation around the topics of consistency, validity and reliability (amongst others) as they relate to data and practical interpretation. Furthermore, the chapter explores the process of coding data within a research context where computer assisted qualitative data software (CAQDAS) is being used. Housley and Smith note the visibility and centrality of membership categorisation work to coding practices and methodological reasoning within social scientific research teamwork where, in this particular case, large amounts of interview data are being processed by a number of different team members. This provides for an analysis of and insight into the interactional accomplishment of data coding by research team members where matters of framing, alignment, repair and recognisability feature as matters of membership categorisation work and associated reasoning practices.

In summary, this book delivers a suite of chapters that explore interrelated advances in studies of membership categorisation. The chapters make connections with established literature, open new avenues for research and provide further grounds for a cumulative paradigm of research that complements an ethnomethodology that is critically and practically engaged with a *sociological* programme where social facts are treated as uniquely and adequately human accomplishments. We believe that this collection is timely and we hope that it provides inspiration to both early career and more established scholars who have an interest in language, interaction, culture and society. The study of membership categorisation practices is a field that is a rich resource for empirical inquiry, where the stability of social categories and the practical requirement to realise social organisation for all practical purposes is underscored by rapid social and cultural transformation. In this sense, membership categorisation, as a matrix of ethnomethods, is inexorably and inevitably tied to the mundane reproduction of human society.