Analyzing Authority and Power in Interaction:
A case analysis of one Q-A adjacency pair using Conversation Analysis

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Authority and power have been discussed extensively in varying contexts. One promising context, in which this topic can be better understood, is naturally-occurring human interactions. In this paper, we use Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007)) as a method to investigate how KIM and DAVID and orient to authority and power in talk-in-interaction.

The target turns of the analysis are line 13 & 14 in the transcript:

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12                  (2.0)
13   DAVID:    How many times have you been married, Kim?
14   KIM:      I just want to let you know that we are not issuing marriage licenses [today=
15   OTHER:                                                                          [Why?
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At line 13, DAVID initiates a question-answer (Q-A) sequence (Schegloff, 2007) regarding KIM's marriage history. The question is the first pair part (FPP) of the two-pair-part adjacency pair, which makes a certain second pair part (SPP) relevant next. This FPP sets up two types of agenda: action agenda, and topical agenda. Therefore, a type-conforming response should be 1) an answer, and 2) regarding KIM's marriage, preferably a number. However, KIM does not produce such a response. Her turn at line 14 neither answers the question, nor provides a preferable type of answer. It thus breaks the sequential mold (Stivers and Heritage, 2008) of the Q-A sequence, and sequentially deletes DAVID's prior question. When such an event happens in social interactions, it generates implications such as disrespect and negligence for the co-participant.

Additionally, the turn design of line 14 also displays how KIM orients to the epistemic authority and deontic authority that she has. *Epistemic authority* deals with interactants' agreement in terms of whose view is more significant or more authoritive (Heritage and Raymond, 2005). First, in delivering the announcement, KIM chooses the lexical form "let you know". By doing so, she claims more epistemic right regarding the access to the information presented, and displays herself as higher on the epistemic gradient in the information transfer process. *Deontic authority* deals with participants' common ground regarding rights and responsibilities (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012). Besides conveying a piece of

information, KIM is also making a plan for the joint future event – whether the marriage license will be issued to DAVID in this turn. There are several ways to make a plan for a joint future event; among them are proposals and assertions. According to Stevanovic and Peräkylä (2012), proposals suggest more evenly distributed rights to determine future actions; while assertion embodies a rather blunt deontic authority claim, which suggests an asymmetric distribution of deontic authority. The fact that KIM chooses an assertion over a proposal in this turn demonstrates KIM's understanding that she has more deontic authority than DAVID, and that this plan for future event has been decided, regardless of what private judgment DAVID has.

The theoretical framework of Conversation Analysis makes it possible to investigate how talk is understood by interactants through next-turn proof. Therefore, the analysis is rigorously based on information evident in the turn-at-talk, such as turn design and sequence organization. Through examining how micro-level social activity is organized, it sheds light on how macro-level issue such as authority and power is constructed and enacted.

(Word count: 482)

Reference:

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