

COMMENTARY:
**FRAMES AND CONTEXTS: ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MACRO-
MICRO LINK**

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One of the main challenges resulting from the past two decades of shift toward detailed micro-analytic studies of language and interaction has been the awareness of a need to relate microanalysis to wider social-cultural aspects of interactional situations. (Muench and Smelser 1987). The contributors to this volume have tackled head-on the perennial question of the micro-macro link by bringing together a group of papers that cover a global range of cultures and activities. They demonstrate how talk can be constitutive of social activity across a range of situations and explore how interactional accomplishments of participants are realized in varied cultural settings. They go on to demonstrate how reworking the notion of frame into one that is broader than that of context construed, as Levinson puts it, “as a set of propositions taken for granted by the participants,” (2002: 33) may provide a link to the wider cultural features of a situation through the verbal specifics of the interaction, so confronting the gap between what is said and what is actually meant at any particular time and in any particular situation involving talk. In so doing, they highlight the need for a construct that while indexical, in the sense that recognition of a frame will rely on specific features of the activity that only the participants can know, yet will also provide guideposts that enable the present event to be seen as part of set of activities having similar properties. Such a construct goes some way toward solving the issue of how we can bridge detailed micro-studies of face-to-face communication with the socio-historical concerns of linguistic and social communities.

Frame as a cognitive construct

The concept of Frame emerged in the cognitive revolution of the 1960's and 70's (Gardner 1985) as a way of accounting for the cognitive categorization of social events as guides for future behavior. Such descriptive notions as ‘scene’ or ‘script’ were regarded as super-ordinate categories through which individuals could sort and code their physical and verbal activities. Experience stored as knowledge structures, once retrieved, could give access to information essential to judging the risk or effectiveness of any future actions in similar situations (Schank and Abelson 1977). From the perspective of language and cognition the accumulation of these stocks of memories and knowledge relied on individuals’ verbal abilities to activate information essential for the situation at hand.

Psycholinguists and some linguists in the 1970's and 80's took these ideas further and explored the contribution that specific language structures made to the

building and activating of human memory and to the complex process of memory recall. Chafe (1977) suggests that analysis of linguistic and discourse structures could reveal cognitive traces of memory. Tannen (1993) discusses terms such as scripts, frames and scenes as providing an essential link between the realization of activities and their coding of events and the expectations on which any individual relies when entering into an interactive situation. Central to such a concept of frame was the idea that coded experience provided a web of expectations that could guide both an individual's actions and the interpretation of other's actions. While the cognitive notion of frame concerns an individual's categorizing of experience, frame as a set of expectations concerning other's actions links individual, personal memory to knowledge of socially shared cultural events.

More recently rhetorical analyses of media discourse referring to public events such as labor disputes, or other negotiations of public conflicts, use a notion of frame as a coding device that delimits the range of possible meanings of an event within the public domain. Such a delimitation of focus enables analysts to retrieve shifts in presentation and rhetorical meaning in public discourse. Thus frame becomes a way of making the more traditional notions of genre distinctions into interactive phenomena. In these analyses the notion of frame has the character of a stop-frame device used in film replays; as the frame is successively realized, the action moves on segueing into a newly framed set of actions. In this way, as Putnam and Fuller (2010) comment, frame becomes a lens that focuses possible meanings and actions and makes what they call a point/counterpoint argument and analytic stance possible.

Context as an interactive phenomenon

It is just such an issue of focus and contrast, foreground and background in any interactive exchange that is provided by the linguistic anthropological work on Context in language (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). As Duranti and Goodwin describe "the notion of context involves a fundamental juxtaposition of two entities: (1) a focal event and (2) a field of action within which that event is embedded." (1992: 3). Thus context defines not only what is salient and must be attended to in any interaction but also what is background. As they point out one of the critical themes developed in this research is detailed analyses that show not only "how the attentional track is sustained and shaped by on-going interactional work," but also how the dis-attended track in an interaction relies on backgrounded information crucial for participants' interpretation of each other's actions in the communicative exchange.

The early work on context and contextualizing language revealed the need to go beyond regarding context as a focusing device and background information as a repertoire of interpretive cues accessed to explain specific activities. Rather it became necessary to find out how such knowledge is organized and activated by participants within on-going interaction. The focus was not on context per se, but shifted to look at a process of situated interpretations of talk and action through inferences made by participants within the communicative exchange - that is, to a process of contextualization. Central to this concept of contextualization then is "the idea that utterances carry their contexts with them," that is the possibility of their understanding and interpretation (Levinson 2002). Research focused on how speakers and hearers recognize specific linguistic/paralinguistic features of each other's talk as contextual

cues, and how such features have both inherent and/or contrastive meanings within the specific contexts - in other words they are essentially indexical (Auer 1992). Thus, the move from Frame to Context to Contextualization deconstructed the frame-by-frame analytic imposition of an extra-situational interpretation in favor of one that was progressive, on-going and situated within the participants' own demonstrated actions.

Framing as contextualization

In this volume Takanashi and Park have shown themselves to be heirs to the interpretive tradition of situated inferential understandings as key to any language interaction investigation. In their introduction they reaffirm the need to see framing as a dynamic concept that is part of the process of communicating.

As the very brief look at the previous uses of the term "frame" has shown, this concept carries an underlying metaphor that suggests a static analytic notion and one that infuses most of its uses. To get away from such an emphasis the papers in this volume show how, by re-working the concept of frame into a situational interpretative variable as "fram-ing," it can become a part of the communicated message. It can serve to tie together not only linguistic but socio-cultural knowledge available in interactive exchange, so taking on part of the previous communicative territory inhabited by many notions of context and contextualization. These newly dynamic, contextualized frames are linguistically realized through the grammatical and pragmatic features that participants recognize as cues to a range of socio-cultural understandings that make their interactional exchanges work satisfactorily. In short they provide a glimpse of a possible micro-macro link.

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