On (Not) Observing Behavior Internationally

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†HERE is AN ONGOING DIALECTIC between "speech act theorists" and those concerned with the study of natural

discourse —particularly, though not exclusively, "conversation analysts" (cf. Searle, 1987; Schegloff,

1988, forthcoming; Streek, 1980).

Searle (1987) rejects the viability of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (1974) model of turn-taking, because 1) "nobody does or could follow" the turn-taking "rule set" they propose (p. 12); 2) rules for the organization of paired actions are more accurately depicted by speech act explanations than turn-taking formulations; 3) two of the three "speaker transition" rules proposed by Sacks et al. "[don't] even have the appearance of being a rule because [they do not] specify the relevant sort of *intentional content* that plays a causal role in the production of behavior." (p. 14) (emphasis added); and 4) there exists a need to study "shared intentionality" and individuals' "background" understandings so as to resolve the kinds of issues raised above. Conversation analysts respond to Searle's position 1) that he fails to "include the *explication of the resources* which the rule-set deploys—such as 'turn-constructional unit,' 'transition-relevance place,' 'current speaker selects next technique,' and the like, without which it is difficult to grasp exactly what this statement of the rule-set is proposing." (Schegloff, forthcoming, pp. 2-3) (emphasis added); 2) that marked differences exist between *conceptual/philosophical* (speech-act-theoretic) and *empirical* (conversation analytic) inquiries, because the former rely on introspective, contrived, and/or casual observations whose systematics fail to uncover the most salient features of conversational interaction, while the latter are grounded upon direct observations of naturalistic, "repeatedly inspectable" materials, (i.e., recordings and transcriptions), the *temporal* and *sequential* details of which reveal participants' methods for organizing, shaping, displaying, and detecting exactly what is oriented-to as relevant and consequential in routine, everyday conversational settings (cf. Schegloff, forthcoming, pp. 21-22); and 3) there are inherent difficulties

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that emerge when "accounting for conversational *structure* in and through *mentalistic* constructions of social order." (Beach, 1987, p. 372). Not the least of these difficulties involves an essentially theoretical "glossing" of structuring/assembling activities in natural conversation, which proves "insufficient to the task. . . reveal[ing] a gap between the theory and reality of discourse." (Streek, 1980, p. 133).

I was most recently reminded of this speech act theory/conversation analysis dialectic upon reading Motley's (1990) re-inspection and presup-positional examination of the "one cannot not communicate," axiom from Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson's (1967; hereafter, WBJ's) "pragmatic perspective." This was a curious reaction on my part, or so it initially appeared, since neither "speech act theory" nor "conversation analysis" constituted the focus of Motley's concerns. In fact, no references were made, directly or indirectly, to either "school" of thought throughout Motley's analysis.

So what were the connections, and how did such a comparison get occasioned? This question can best be answered by first providing an overview of Motley's (1990) article, and then explicitly making the connections. This will provide a substantive basis upon which Motley's treatment of WBJ's axiom, and the "pragmatic perspective" might be evaluated.

AN OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON

In characteristic fashion, Motley (1990) offers a systematic, carefully articulated analysis. He is generally concerned most about potential ambiguities and problems inherent in a conceptualization "making *communication* synonymous, or nearly synonymous, with *behavior."* (p. 1), and wants to warn "against blind acceptance of it [the axiom] by those who assume contradictory postulates." (p. 13). Of secondary importance is "whether it is true that one cannot not communicate" (p. 2). He opera-tionalizes these concerns by turning to four traditional and more or less popularized "postulates" (evident especially, though by no means exclusively, in undergraduate textbooks)—that communication is interactive, involves encoding, consists of an exchange of symbols, and possesses a fidelity dimension-and arguing that the assumptions and claims of each postulate contradict WBJ's axiom.

This analytic exercise, as Motley suggests, provides scholars with rationales for accepting and/or rejecting the axiom and/or postulates in question. Such rationales help fill an apparent need for *definitional clarity* and *conceptual parsimony* in ongoing *theoretical* attempts designed to "capture," and by so doing unequivocally come to grips with, the complexities of human communicative phenomena. These are decidedly useful goals in certain phases of social scientific inquiry, and the case study provided by Motley is a worthwhile reminder and stocktaking of important definitional/conceptual/theoretical issues.

The task of contending with definitional/conceptual issues, however, may turn out to be altogether different from working with actual, empirical materials. Motley (1990) notes some of these differences:

> Debates about definitions are often inconclusive, since definitions of communication (or anything else) are semantic prerogatives, so I will generally abandon that approach here. Rather than trying to agree on a definition of communication, perhaps we should see if we can at least agree on certain characteristics and components of communication, (p. 2)

It is at precisely this juncture that the speech act/conversation analysis dialectic may inform the discussion: The contradictions raised in Motley's article have precedent in the social sciences; discussions have centered on surprisingly (or, reflexively speaking, predictably) similar issues. Relationships between the conceptual *and* the empirical, cognitions *and* behaviors, hypothetical *and* naturalistic, individual *and* collaborative structures are inherently problematic whenever contrasting (and at times, unequivocally incommensurate) perspectives are juxtaposed. Thus, it may be possible to "agree on certain characteristics and components of communication," while at the same time disagreeing on even more basic grounds. In all cases, however, a researcher's commitments are eventually revealed in the course of analysis; such commitments ultimately "drive" one's research machinery.

These issues may be further elaborated by considering what *counts* as a communicative phenomenon, a concern of primary importance to Motley (1990) and communication researchers alike:

> Ultimately, of course, the question should not be so much the simple one of whether one cannot not communicate, but rather the more complex question of what indeed are our fundamental assumptions about communication, and in what ways, if any, do they make communication an exclusive phenomenon, (p. 14)

This essay is similarly concerned with "fundamental assumptions" in the study of communication, not only the question "What *counts* as a communicative phenomenon?" but also "By what *evidence* might a communicative phenomenon be justified?" (cf. Beach, 1990). An examination of the presuppositions Motley relied upon (and made evident) in constructing his analysis, however, reveals an orientation to answering these questions that contradicts the "pragmatic view."

To begin, Motley displays a recurrent tendency to construct *cognitive* explanations for inherently *behavioral/interactional* activities. He does this by arguing that conscious or unconscious cognitive decisions necessarily precede *acting* in social situations by preparing, transmitting, and/or withholding messages. Stated somewhat differently, readers may find (in considerably more detail than can be exemplified here) that the consideration of the axiom and each postulate is *subsumed* under requirements of cognitive processing.[1] These requirements include ways in which an individual interprets, perceives, and/or attributes meanings/thoughts/feelings to another. This is not surprising, given Motley's programmatic research efforts on experimentally induced "verbal slips" (cf. Motley, Baars, and Camden, 1983) and his concern with such issues

as consciousness, intentionality, and cognitive goals (cf. Motley, 1986). But "pragmatically" speaking, WBJ were explicitly not interested in these and related phenomena *until (and only if) they find their way into ongoing streams of behavior.* When they do the question then becomes, What might such

phenomena "look like," and how might they be examined *on their own merits* as achievements displaying "how speakers and hearers fashion, shape, and make available to one another their understandings of the local environment of which they are an integral part" (Beach, 1990, p. 218)?[2]

A SKETCH OF BEHAVIORAL ROOTS

Importantly, research programs which empirically examine "behavioral streams" are deeply rooted theoretically and stem from a breadth of practical experience in the observation and analysis of communicative events. For example, some researchers focusing upon psychiatric and psychotherapeutic processes have come to be associated with the "pragmatic" and/or "behavioral systems" perspective (e.g., Scheflen, 1965; 1973; Jackson, 1969). This perspective includes a set of "system-theoretic" commitments relied upon by a host of communication scholars.[3] These rationales and research programs are not touched upon in Motley's analysis, even though they are useful resources for the consideration of concerns he raises about the origination of the axiom(s) and about treating behavior and communication synonymously.

Problems created by attempting to treat "unobservable phenomena" as communicative data have been repeatedly specified by researchers concerned with the study of interpersonal, thus inherently *interactional* activities and situations. Due to problems WBJ specify with the "inapplicability of many traditional psychiatric notions" (p. 48) to communication analysis, there is a basic disregard for "subject-reported data" involving individuals' introspections, experiences, feelings, perceptions, motivations, intentions, consciousness, and the like. As Scheflen (1975, p. 224) plainly states, the task is to "discover and identify naturally occurring structural units, rather than relying on abstracted qualities such as the usual variables of personality."

Scheflen (1973, Ch. 1) traces the history of this disregard for "internal" data through an informative historical sketch of the emergence of research methods for studying communicative behavior as social processes of organization. Scheflen (1973) describes how "classical problems of psychological research" (p. 2) led to the collection and observational analysis of actual recordings of interactional events (e.g., psychotherapeutic interviews with schizophrenic patients, family counseling sessions). These efforts clarified, for example, how researchers had over-relied on indirect measurements (rating scales and questionnaires); had treated individuals as units of analysis in the search for *communication* patterns; had attempted to generalize contrived and laboratory

situations to real world events; and had determined statistical significance among "raters" attempting to achieve consensus, despite the resulting misdirection of coding validations.[4]

In short, the move toward recordings and direct observations was explicitly designed to achieve understandings of *social-level phenomena*. As Scheflen (1973) noted nearly two decades ago:

Similarly, communication is not made up of people or even of individual expressions but of patterned relations among the behaviors of multiple people. If we were to study communication, then, we had to retrace our steps from the high-level inferences of the psychological and social sciences and get back to the study of behavior itself. We had to examine action, describe it, analyze its form, and try to *define meaning behaviorally*. The psychodynamicist had to delay his inferences about personality and describe the behaviors on which he had based these inferences. He had to describe what others in a transaction could see. And the sociologist had to describe the relations of behavior which brought and held people together. He could not merely classify groups and abstract qualities of relationships. . . Behavior has come to be observed in its own right; that is, we study its structure and do not merely make inferences about neurophysiological or cognitive processes, (p. 7) (emphasis added)[5]

PROBLEMS WITH HYPOTHETICAL INSTANCES, INTENTIONALITY, AND "SENDERS"

It is problematic, therefore, to rely merely upon *inferences* regarding hypothetical behaviors in an attempt to understand *how* interactants organize behavior collaboratively and naturalistically. This problem was identified in the 1950's and it exists today. It surfaces in the dialectic between speech act theorists and conversation analysts and in what we might now call the "cognitive-experimental/pragmatic perspective" addressed in Motley's article. In the former case, for example, it is altogether routine for participants of seminars, data workshops, and panels to describe how "ordinary language philosophers" gloss the contingencies and details of "real" interaction by contriving examples to support the claims they are attempting to validate. This is not to say that hypothetical examples cannot prove useful in making points. But the transformation from hypothetical to naturalistic is, in all cases, inherently problematic (cf. Heritage, 1984, pp. 234-238).

For these and related reasons, the following behavioral examples employed by Motley to "make a

point" function more as reinforcers of a cognitive model of "other-directed intentionality" (e.g., wants, wishes, and consciousness) than actual substantiations of the occasioned work of co-interactants:

For example, we may wish to acknowledge another's presence, and thus encode and say "Good Morning"; want to have the salt shaker, and thus say "Please pass the salt"; or want another to share our experience, and thus encode and transmit related thoughts and feelings. . .E.g., my actions to season the food may or may not include behaviors designed to enlist the assistance of someone else. . . For example, if we have to wait a long time for our "turn" before transmitting a message, we may become conscious of our intention or decision to say something, (pp. 4-5)

Without exception, Motley's concerns rest not with social action itself, but rather with *decisions to act,* "to play in slow motion the cognitive processing of other-directed intentions in certain obviously communicative situations." (p. 4) His explanatory model is grounded unequivocally in constructions of message senders/encoders.

But what of "recipiency" and collaborative productions in interaction? A final example from Motley may be useful here:

For example, I may not be conscious of having a goal when I pass you in the hall and say "Hi." But if I get no acknowledgment from you, I am likely to become aware that I just tried to accomplish something, i.e., a goal (even though I may not be able to articulate precisely what it was), and apparently failed, (p. 4)

In this hypothetical example Motley attributes *lack* of response to his failure as a speaker. The "you in the hall," apparently the intended recipient, is consequentially deleted from the action-sequence.

Though only a ritualistic greeting is invoked here, it nevertheless is sufficient to raise the overwhelming importance of what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) termed "sequential implicativeness": The ways in which a current turn-at-talk projects the relevance of a next, or range of appropriate and expected, next activities. Notice here that greeting rituals are themselves "paired actions," adjacently ordered so that first actions (e.g., "Hi'Vinitial greeting) routinely project next, recognizably fitted second actions (e.g., "How ya doin?"/return greeting). Clearly, Motley's example of first speaker's noticing of recipient's failure to respond is significant. But this significance is predicated on its status as a *deviant case,* particularly the *noticeable absence* of recipient's response. Recipient's general failure to engage in a greeting activity, one initially projected by first speaker, is thus consequential for ensuing action in that a second action is *conditionally relevant* upon a first action (cf. Schegloff, 1968) and thus "accountably 'due'" (Heritage, 1984, p. 247). In discussing the mass of evidence confirming how "adjacency pairs" work, Heritage (1984) observes:

However, the status of this evidence is threatened by a range of instances in talk, which are not infrequent, where, for example, greetings are not returned immediately or at all and questions are not answered promptly or at all. Paradoxically, it is consideration of these 'deviant' cases, in which the adjacency pair structure is not implemented fully or unproblematically, which provides the strongest evidence for the normative character of the adjacency pair structure. . .this finding [noticeable absence] accountably permits speakers to engage in further activities to solicit the looked-for-event, to report its absence to third parties, and to use its absence as the basis for inferences of various kinds, (pp. 248-249)

Motley's lack of attention to recipiency is thus noticeable and problematic, because he overlooks *how* recipients orient-to prior talk as having proposed "a here-and-now definition of the situation" (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, p. 5). (Readers are reminded of Motley's (p. 10) preference here when "receivers" and "perceivers," in whatever context, are equated.) By choosing not to examine recipients' work, Motley makes it impossible to understand a vast array of irreplaceable features of

everyday conduct. Space does not permit me to integrate the mass of evidence that could be drawn upon to support this assertion. But I am referring here to such diverse activities as how recipients delay response and thereby withhold displays of agreement (Pomerantz, 1984), mark the receipt of news and a change-of-state in knowledge and/or orientation by the use of "Oh" (Heritage, 1984a), construct justifications and excuses in response to lawyers' prior (accusatory) questions (Atkinson and Drew, 1979), and synchronize vocal/nonvocal actions in ongoing constructions of turns-at-talk (cf. Goodwin, 1981) including specific involvements such as doctor-patient/professional-client interactions (cf. Heath, 1984).

CONCLUSION

This discussion should not be taken as an effort to debunk the legitimacy of cognitive-experimental

research activities. It is dysfunctional to limit approaches to knowing when we now and always will know far too little about the complexities of human communication processes. Motley (1986) and his colleagues (e.g., 1983) have contributed significantly to an understanding of language and encoding by analyzing meaningful, and otherwise inaccessible, operations of the speech-production system (e.g., prearticulatory evaluations of impending speech segments). Moreover, there are possibilities for collaboration and integration of contrasting methodologies and orientations to such topics as "speech errors."[6]

But I do mean to examine how Motley's assumptions and arguments lead to a set of theoretical positions on the interactional organization of human behavior. For the reasons specified, I argue that it is problematic to impose an encoding model (with attending cognitive concerns) onto the detailed contingencies of naturally occurring interaction. Importantly, WBJ also rely throughout their analyses on "relatively isolated examples" and such constructs as a "hypothetical calculus" (p. 118). As *a* result, their analysis remains primarily theoretical and speculative. Instances provided of relationship struggles and marital problems, for example, are accounted for by speech-act functions such as withdraws/ nags and asserts/denies. And these case studies are void of interactional segments (i.e., transcriptions) for readers' critical inspection. Also, as noted, concepts like "punctuation" are not readily and directly applicable to "hands on" workings with recordings and transcriptions. Yet perhaps the unarticulated "achilles heel" of the axiom Motley draws our attention to is the first word: *One* Cannot Not Communicate. I have never fully understood why so much emphasis was placed on a single individual's behavior, situated in a framework emphasizing the importance of activity streams and sequences.

This essay juxtaposes a perspective to Motley's, just as Motley's article differs significantly from WBJ's pragmatic axiom/perspective.

Each attempt at dialectic offers a limited, rather ordinarily positioned and justified set of concerns for readers' consideration. This is to say no more or less than each has its own set of relevancies and trajectories, i.e. its own "distinctive problematics." Or perhaps Schegloff (forthcoming, p. 22) puts it best: "The questions and the answers resonate to a different wavelength, and are disciplined by different responsibilities."

ENDNOTES

1. Two brief and parallel examples may prove useful here. First, from a review (Beach 1987) of Ellis and Donahue's *Contemporary Issues in Language and Discourse Processes:* In Burleson's examination of a "motive-seeking" conversational segment we find some rarely specified possible connections between attribution theory and conversation, an important contribution that simultaneously brings to the surface numerous contrasts between cognitive and language researchers while highlighting issues of mutual concern. Here it is seen, for example, the extent to which a goodness-of-fit exists within mentalistic accounts of conversational structures. Though the jury is out, this analysis tends to force-fit action back into the mind in ways that give preference to sorting conversational topics into predominant concepts and themes of attribution theory, rather than accounting for the practices through which motive-seeking is collaboratively produced turn-by-turn, (p. 372)

   Second, from the foreword to *WJSC's* special issue on "Sequential Organization of Conversational Activities" (Beach 1989), in reference to the "call for papers" and editorial commission "To examine actual instances and episodes of what communicators do. . . ": Studies based upon individuals' perceptions, interpretations, attitudes, and related self-report data were thus not suited to the special issue, unless participants themselves were found to display these phenomena as practical reasoning in the course of ordinary interaction. This position by no means denies the existence of mental processes, but rather gives priority to the examination of what speakers and hearers noticeably provide and make available to one another conversationally, (p. 85)

2. No attempt can be made here to directly contrast the "pragmatic perspective" with "conversation analysis." Yet a contrast of this sort might prove useful in its own right by tracing how notions like "sequence," "pattern," and "punctuation" emerged in parallel fashion; how these notions were taken up by communication researchers studying interaction; and how alternative approaches to the study of interaction reveal similar yet marked differences. As the analysis proceeds, however, it is inevitable that several similarities and differences will become apparent.

3. For an overview of systems research in speech communication and related disciplines, see Fisher, 1978 and Fisher, Glover, and Ellis (1977).

4. Discussions of "coding as problematic" are available in Hopper (1989) and Beach (1990).

5. These basic concerns were expressed by Fisher and Hawes (1971) in comparing the Human System Model (HSM) and Interact System Model (ISM), (see also Beach and Fisher (1977)):

   The HSM generates small group research aimed at discovering relationships among people—cognitive and affective constructs such as cohesiveness and commitment, power and influence, leadership and authority. Such constructs not only characterize the relationships among components but also affect system operation. The ISM is not directly concerned with individuals nor with their responses to measures of cognitive and affective variables. Rather, the ISM is directly concerned with observable verbal and nonverbal behavior. Components of the ISM are codable units of verbal and nonverbal communication. Thus, the relationships among components are defined by formal consistency of recurring patterns of communication units, (p. 448)

6. I am referring here to a recent SCA panel proposal (1990) on "Speech Errors as Conversational Poetics," co-authored by Motley, Hopper, and myself.

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