

**Review of: Tanya Stivers / Lorenza Mondada / Jakob Steensig (eds.):  
The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation. Cambridge (UK):  
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Me: "Wes, what do you think about CA?"

Wes: "It's a good discipline".

This personal communication is not without interest coming from Wes Sharrock, who has argued that in 1974 conversation analysis (CA) came to a close, as an heuristic project, with the publication of Sacks and his colleagues' seminal article on turn-taking (Sacks et al. 1974). The "heuristic project", in a nutshell, resided in the investigative work required to exhibit, explicate and establish – for the first time and in audio recorded detail – turn-taking in conversation as a thoroughly systematic, participant managed, normatively organized phenomenon (cf. Sharrock 2000:534). Granted that "all the essential elements for a solution to the 'turn-taking problem'" (ibid.) were assembled and granted that, in this restricted and yet crucial sense, the heuristic project had indeed been completed, there remains at least one follow-up question to Wes' laconic answer above, namely: if CA today remains a "good discipline", *what is it good for?*

The book recently co-edited by Tanya Stivers, Lorenza Mondada and Jakob Steensig provides a contemporary, straightforward and stimulating answer to this question. The book title hints at the answer as it points out the "morality of knowledge in conversation" as a current theme of conversation analytic interest. In the following, I will chart how that interest has been pursued in the book. To begin with, the book's leading theme – "epistemic asymmetry in conversation" – is briefly presented as it is outlined in the editors' introduction (1.).

Secondly, the two main research directions in which the leading theme is explored are considered; an overview of the book's main contents will therefore be offered (2.).

Thirdly, selected contributions are re-examined more closely, especially with respect to how participants' relevancies *in situ* fare under the elected theme of conversation analytic interest (3.).

Finally, a critical appraisal is outlined (4.). The appraisal takes up the question how, and in what sense, conversation – that is, ordinary courses of plain talk – can be said and shown to express, require or otherwise involve a "morality of knowledge". The reviewed book, indeed, offers an apt opportunity to have this question reflected upon, as well as the alternatives in conversation analysis and epistemic sociology in terms of which it might be examined and (re-)discussed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion seems especially apposite against the background of the increasing interest in "knowledge asymmetries", a topical interest that represents "one of the, if not the, largest growth areas in conversation analysis in recent years" (23). Dausendschön-Gay et al. (2010) and Streeck et al. (2010) offer recently published volumes of related interest, as they investigate the "interactive generation of knowledge" in institutional contexts and "embodied interaction" in materially embedded epistemologies, respectively. Andrew P. Carlin and Sara Keel are to be acknowledged for their perceptive comments on this essay, Arnulf Deppermann and Steffi Schürz for their final remarks and encouragement to have it published "as it stands". Any remaining shortcoming, unintended irony or all-too-quick criticism is mine.

## 1. Leading theme and normative framework

Part I of the book, the editors' introduction, is titled *Knowledge, morality and affiliation in social interaction*. Tanya Stivers and her colleagues introduce the book's *leading theme* – "epistemic asymmetry in conversation" (9) – by asking how this asymmetry is usually oriented to and managed by interlocutors, via which "range of interactional practices [manifestly] involved across a variety of languages" (ibid.). Particular forms of institutional interaction are acknowledged to display its participants' orientations towards "epistemic asymmetry" – whether in the courtroom, doctor-patient interaction, police interrogation, news or job interviews (e.g., Drew/Heritage 1992a). Yet, as the editors point out, the epistemic asymmetry lodged at the heart of mundane conversation in everyday life (i.e., regardless of its participants' institutional identification) should not be forgotten. Linell and Luckmann (1991) are cited for having formulated this "warning" (cf. 8), as they take "asymmetry to be an *intrinsic feature of dialogue*" (1991:7), be it an asymmetry of "knowledge" or "participant status" (1991:5-6).<sup>2</sup>

For introductory purposes, Tanya Stivers and her colleagues seem to adopt this general claim, at least partly, as their introduction focuses upon the asymmetric distribution of *knowledge* as a (potentially) sharable resource, rather than differences in participant status. Accordingly, their review of previous work in conversation analysis (7-19) identifies "three primary dimensions of knowledge that interactants treat as salient in and for conversation, particularly with respect to asymmetries" (ibid.). That is:

- *Epistemic access* glosses a first dimension, relating to how interlocutors establish each other's (differing) *access to some piece of knowledge*, as well as the procedures, presuppositions and norms drawn upon to do so (e.g., "speakers should not inform already knowing recipients about some state of affairs", 10).
- *Epistemic primacy*, in turn, concerns participants' orientation to their "*relative rights to know* about some state of affairs (access) as well as their *relative rights to tell*, inform or assert something [...]" (13, emphasis added). Again, distinct norms seem to be associated with the considered dimension (regarding, e.g., the right to know, depending on "relational closeness", 13).
- *Epistemic responsibilities*, finally, have been shown to be variously taken into account, by participants in conversation, as they orient towards their respective responsibilities and obligations to be knowledgeable about X or Y, to what degree, when and how (e.g., by virtue of their direct implication or indirect access, 17).

Taken together, these dimensions, as normatively oriented to by interlocutors, define the "*morality of knowledge in conversation* [...]" with important implications for managing social relationships" (19; emphasis added). Put simply, the outlined

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<sup>2</sup> For Linell/Luckmann (1991:8), "a reasonable point of departure [is] that *all dialogues* (and, of course, multi-party conversations) involve asymmetries (inequalities, inequivalences, etc.) at different levels. This can be stated as a general claim, *even if*, in some contexts, actors jointly orient to ideal norms or equal rights to speaking turns [...], *or if*, indeed, such properties are taken to be empirically true of some types of (weakly institutionalized) talk exchange, sometimes loosely referred to as 'informal' or 'ordinary conversation'".

dimensions constitute the *normative framework* in terms of which, as the editors highlight, interlocutors themselves make "morally accountable choices that have not only informational consequences but also relational ones" (19-22). The review of the literature in conversation analysis supports this particular claim, and does so against the background of previous work in cognitive science, sociology, and discursive psychology (4-7). The literature review, more specifically, introduces the editors' thematic focus on the "intersection between knowledge and morality in interaction" (4). This thematic focus, then, is cast as part of a longstanding, concerted "attempt [in conversation analysis] [...] to join sociology's interest in knowledge as a norm-governed domain and the intricate practices of language use" (8). This attempt, in other words, contributes to an "interactional approach to the sociology of knowledge" (Sidnell 2005:41), where

what conversation analysis brings out most clearly, then, is participants' practical understanding of knowledge as a distribution of rights and obligations to know and the consequences of such an understanding for the way people talk to one another.

Thereby, as Stivers and her colleagues emphasize, participants engage in "interactional cooperation" and establish, or challenge, "social relationships" (19-22). This sociological accentuation is surely to be welcomed, as it reminds readers of conversation analysis being a sociological enterprise in the first place (e.g., Schegloff 1996; Schegloff/Sacks 1973), whatever its linguistic implications or anthropological underpinnings (more of which below). Yet the sociological accent of the suggested approach also constitutes a tricky challenge, especially as this concerns participants' vernacularly available relevancies, *in situ* and *in vivo*.

## 2. Research directions and main contents

As all of its contributors explain in their joint preface, the co-edited book eventuated from a longstanding collaboration and elaborates its key insight that *affiliation in social interaction is closely related to how knowledge is displayed, managed and/or negotiated by its participants* – in short, "the turn to epistemics was a natural extension of the prior interest in affiliation" (XI). This "natural extension", then, is formulated in terms of an initial claim, according to which (XI; emphasis added):

[...] to understand *affiliation* – and indeed cooperation more generally – we must understand how interactants manage the domain of *knowledge*.

A prior expression of this interest is to be found in Heritage and Raymond's interactional studies on the "conversational patrol and defense of information preserves" in assessment sequences (cf. Heritage/Raymond 2005:34). The book co-edited by Stivers et al., however, aims not solely at charting the "displays of and negotiations concerning participants' epistemic status relative to one another [e.g., regarding their 'legitimate level of information']" (XII). Rather, it suggests engaging a broadly "bidirectional" analysis, examining "how epistemic practices influence, and are influenced by, affiliation and alignment" (*ibid.*). The initial sugges-

tion of this mutual influence affords the book with its sociological outlook, two main *research directions* and its overall organization.<sup>3</sup>

A first set of chapters (Part II) focuses on how various kinds of unequal access to knowledge (i.e., "epistemic asymmetries") are dealt with in conversational interaction and with what consequences on social relationships among the parties (i.e., "affiliational consequences"). A second set of chapters (Part III), in turn, examines how social relationships are established, maintained or modified in interaction (i.e., by "managing affiliation and alignment") and how different types of knowledge are mobilized for the purpose (i.e., as "epistemic resources"). The editors' introduction (Part I) outlines some of the key notions – and key claims, as I have suggested – in and for the "study of knowledge in social interaction" (8-19), as well as the central implications of the "morality of knowledge [...] for interactional cooperation" (19-22). The final chapter (Part IV) affords readers with a "theoretical foundation" of the presented studies. Let us consider these studies first, the book's main contents (Part II & III).

Part II gathers studies that pursue the first research direction, the one concerned with how epistemic asymmetries are dealt with in conversation and the relational (or "affiliational") consequences of their local turn-by-turn management. Each study, as the editors point out (23), addresses one of the three knowledge-related and participant-relevant dimensions highlighted by them: *access*, *primacy*, and *responsibility*. Yet each study also goes beyond their separate (and sometimes joint) investigation to pursue its own analytic interests.

*Lorenza Mondada's* contribution, to begin with, examines how a discrepancy in "epistemic access" is dealt with, and eventually resolved, in the course of a conference call, bringing together a Spanish car driver and his wife, stuck with their car in a small village near Bordeaux, the call-taker in the contacted French call center, and the car mechanic dispatched to help out (31). Mondada's contribution offers a subtle analysis of how ordinary conversational resources (e.g., French knowledge verbs, such as *savoir*, *connaître*, and *voir*) are used to express and deal with a distinctive knowledge discrepancy (i.e., the mechanic's problem of locating the broken car, despite seemingly clear indications) and how the "epistemic positions" taken by the participants evolve in the process (e.g., from expecting geographical knowledge to be held by the car mechanic to excusing his locational problems).

*Kaoru Hayano's* contribution, in turn, focuses on claiming "epistemic primacy" as a conversational phenomenon (58 onwards). That is, he examines *yo*-marked assessments in Japanese, where this particle is "typically used when the speaker knows the referent better [than]" – and, as Hayano, following Raymond and Heritage (2006), argues – "*claims* 'epistemic primacy'" over his or her interlocutor (60) – that is, a prerogative to be more knowledgeable or better informed. Yet, by closely examining *yo*-marked assessments, both in first and second position, Hayano's analysis demonstrates a preference for epistemic congruence which ap-

<sup>3</sup> As its contributors point out, their book is dedicated to Gail Jefferson and her legacy in conversation analysis. Not only is her interest in "normativity and cooperation" (XII) flagged as the leitmotiv of the book but, moreover, is its analytic project engaged under the auspices of her transcription system (XIV-XIX). That said, the "bidirectional" framing of analysis reproduces, at least for presentational purposes, the conventional dualism of classic sociology of knowledge between social moorings and epistemic matters (e.g., Kaiser 1998) – a critical point I shall return to (see appraisal below).

pears to be similar to the established preference for agreement (77-78; 81). The two following contributions by Tanya Stivers and Trine Heinemann, Anna Lindström and Jakob Steensig address the issue of *epistemic responsibility* in question design and adverb use, respectively.

*Tanya Stivers*, on the one hand, demonstrates just how the marked interjection *of course*, placed after a request for confirmation or information, may indicate its morally problematic assumptions and, thereby, challenges the stated question's very "askability" (86).

*Trine Heinemann et al.*, on the other hand, focus on how the adverbs *jo* (Danish) and *ju* (Swedish) are used in responses to indicate that the prior question in some way failed to build upon common background knowledge (or, in other words, that the questioner didn't live up to his or her expected "epistemic responsibility"). Both contributions, again, specify the relational consequences of the observed, knowledge-sensitive conversational practices.

*Jack Sidnell's* contribution, finally, examines how "epistemic rights" by children to engage in "make-believe", as when they imaginatively transform an ordinary object into a fictional character, hinge upon their participation in joint or independent playing activities (132). "Proposals" and "stipulations" made during play are described for how they contribute to "epistemic communities" (cf. 151 onwards). As Sidnell explains (153),

stipulations and other practices of (imaginative) transformation can [...] be seen as tools for establishing ['cultural'] facts – for creating them *de novo*. This is no less true of the children's stipulations than it is of wedding 'pronouncements' or priest's blessings. These differ not in *kind* but in their degree of permanence/duration, and this is a function of the degree to which the epistemic community within which they are lodged is institutionalized and enduring. In the case of children's stipulations, that community may exist for only a few seconds, being embodied in the aligning verbal and visible responses of the co-participants.

Part III shifts the direction of analytic interest as its contributions set out with examining how distinctive relationships are established and/or dealt with, with respect to "alignment and affiliation problems" (23), and how, therefore, different epistemic resources are mobilized.

*John Heritage's* contribution, for a start, elaborates an analytic intuition by Harvey Sacks, according to which "experiences" are difficult to be shared in interaction (in contrast to "knowledge"). An interactional analysis of "emphatic moments" is then offered, focusing on the participants' resources to facilitate their respective involvement in such moments (e.g., the resources at the disposal of a teller to facilitate a recipient's "capacity for emphatic response", 161). Heritage's analysis reexamines the "distance-involvement dilemma", presenting itself in "acts of affiliation" (181-182), where "persons must manage the twin risks of appearing disengaged from the affairs of the other, or over-involved and even appropriating them" (Raymond/Heritage 2006:701, quoted on 182).

The three following contributions by Leelo Keevallik, Birte Asmuß and Auli Hakulinen and Marja-Leena Sorjonen, respectively, all address how distinctive conversational uses of epistemic expressions may contribute to building (or ques-

tioning) social relationships, by displaying (or challenging) various kinds of affiliation and/or alignment.<sup>4</sup>

*Leelo Keevalik's* contribution is based upon a large corpus of principally Estonian telephone conversations and focuses on "no knowledge" responses, their sequential environments and typical relational consequences (184 onwards).

*Birte Asmuß'* object of analysis is summed up in the title of her contribution: *proposing shared knowledge as a means of pursuing agreement* (207). The contribution examines the use of *du vet* ("you know" in Danish) in disaffiliating contexts of "emerging disagreement [...] as a move to locally establish agreement" (233).

*Auli Hakulinen* and *Marja-Leena Sorjonen's* contribution, in turn, offers a comparative analysis of agreeing responses in Finish (e.g., "*E:::i*" "*e:::i*") to grammatically negative statements (*Ei niitä aikoi tarviis tul la.*, engl. "Those times should never return", 235). Their analysis demonstrates not only how "epistemic access and alignment are graded phenomena" (256), but also how, and with increasing subtlety, this grading is sequentially achieved, occasionally modified and variously implicative (setting out with "*ei* response[s] display[ing] unconditional agreement [...] and affiliation [...]", 242).

The final contribution to Part III by *Mardi Kidwell* returns to interactions involving children. Her video-based analysis examines how, upon the occurrence of a problem in a daycare center (e.g., indicated by a crying child), caregivers typically launch "problem inquiry" sequences (i.e., to find out the problem's cause) and how, in return, the 'targeted' children respond to such inquiries (e.g., by appearing as a "victim" or avoiding to appear as a "culprit"). Given the tender age of the filmed children (12-30 months), their responses appear more readily bodily than verbally expressed. Those responses, as made available on video, afford Kidwell with a "perspicuous setting" (e.g., Garfinkel 2002:199-202) to examine actual conduct in relation to "moral notions of proper behavior in the daycare setting" (268). Kidwell demonstrates indeed, and effectively, how ordinary methods of talking are constitutive of, and involved in, a "specific daycare culture" (282).<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Common analytic interest and distinctive practical relevancies

As the preceding overview makes clear, the studies collected in the reviewed book amply demonstrate the possibility of inspecting conversational episodes in the light of one leading theme and common analytic interest (the "interactional management of epistemic asymmetry"). The studies also demonstrate how the involved participants, when devising their turns at talk, take into account their entitlements, rights and obligations as interlocutors (as to their *epistemic access*, *epistemic primacy* and/or *epistemic responsibility*) among other circumstantial particulars. The jointly sustained investigation of this "morality of knowledge in conversation", then, offers a remarkably stringent, thoroughly interactional approach to the "social distribution of knowledge" (cf. Schutz 1973) and its "normative accountability" (Heritage 1984:115-120), a twin topic of (classically) socio-

<sup>4</sup> For the distinction between *alignment* and *affiliation* in storytelling contexts, see Stivers (2008).

<sup>5</sup> For a classic, ethnomethodological analysis in the same vein, see Wieder (1974; 1978).

logical and ethnomethodological interest. Yet, since Schutz and Garfinkel at least, one should also continue to wonder how any single analytic interest (e.g., the "morality of knowledge in conversation"), as presented against the background of an academic literature and its current investigations (e.g., note 1), relates to the distinctively practical relevancies, as pursued *in situ* and intelligible in participants' own terms (to "have one's car repaired", to "comfort a crying child", to "order a ham sandwich", etc.). As Lynch (2006:97) put it in a related discussion,

if we were to say that all of these practices involve ['knowledge'], it is not clear what that word tells us about the contingencies of their singular performance.

This chronic concern, both from an ethnomethodological and a conversation analytic stance (e.g., Schegloff 2010:42; 46), may be instructively readdressed in the light of distinctive contributions to the reviewed book.<sup>6</sup>

*Mondada's* contribution, as its title indicates, analyzes "the management of knowledge discrepancies and of epistemic changes in institutional interactions" (27). Her analysis, alluded to above, examines a particular "professional setting – a call center – where epistemic discrepancies are closely related to issues of professional trust, competence and authority" (*ibid.*). Yet, her subtle analysis also constitutes the opening chapter of Part II, the first ensemble of studies examining the "affiliational consequences of managing epistemic asymmetries" (24), thus pursuing a common analytic interest. How is the possible tension between this shared analytic interest and the discoverable situated practicalities dealt with? There might be an opportunity cost in doing so, and be it (or even particularly) for the descriptive analysis of a single task. Consider the following excerpt (42):

(9) (cf. Extract 5, lines 34-37)

34 MEC: *ouais mai::s la place general de gaulle,*  
yeah bu::t the square of general de gaulle,

35 *j'sais pas où elle est moi.*  
I know NEG where it is me.  
Yeah but:: I don't know where the square general de gaulle is

36 (0.7)

37 MEC: *je connais pa:s la::: cette ville là,*  
I know NEG the::: that town there,  
I don't know the::: that town there,

As Mondada explains, the excerpt is taken from a conference call for which the call-taker had brought together a driver whose car needs to be towed away and the car mechanic who has been dispatched to do so, as there might have been a mis-

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<sup>6</sup> In response to Lynch (2000), Sharrock downplays the raised concern as a possibly "nominal" one (Sharrock 2000:538). At present, we shall approach this concern in terms of the delicate relationship between professional analysts' approach to "tape-recorded instances of conversation" and "[participants'] 'analysis' that is intrinsic to the production of the talk" (cf. Lynch 2001: 132).

understanding concerning the driver's location. Yet the car mechanic, as he repeats after several attempts at clarification, still cannot find the place, thus making it difficult, if not impossible for him to meet his duty. In the excerpt above, the car mechanic (MEC) appears indeed to (re-)formulate the unsatisfied "locational" precondition for the particular task he has been charged with. Mondada's analysis, however, examines the excerpt as an instructive instance of a presumably more general phenomenon: "dealing with reality disjunctures" (42-45). With the knowledge verbs in first person singular, *j's pas* and *je connais pa:s* ("I don't know", lines 35&37), the "participant" is suggested "not only [to] resist [...] the terms of the description, but also the *object* of the description itself" (43). How is this manifest resistance, and the "reality disjuncture" it indexes, related to the pending task of the car mechanic *qua* car mechanic? In particular, one may ask "why that now[?]" (Schegloff/Sacks 1973:299): why does the car mechanic, in the excerpt above, "resist" in the way he seems to do, by modifying and extending his statement of ignorance, from "not knowing the square" (... *la place... j'sais pas où elle est moi.*) to "ignoring the town" (*je connais pa:s... cette ville là.*)? A plausible answer to this question concerning participants' relevancies, then and there, lays in the 0.7s silence (line 36). This silence, indeed, can be heard and, as far as the car mechanic is concerned, seems to have been heard as expressing lacking agreement by the other participants, regarding his claimed lack of geographical knowledge (35). Conversely, in restating and emphasizing his ignorance (37), the car mechanic appears to be challenging a possible questioning of his professional competence (to "locate the broken car, have it towed away, then repaired, etc.").<sup>7</sup>

*Sidnell's* contribution examines "make-believe" and "pretend-play" among children between three and five (131). Therefore, as Sidnell explains, "[c]hildren were taken from their classes during regular school hours to a special room in which a camera was already set up. There, they were presented with various play things [...] [and] told only that they should 'play together'. No further instruction was given [...]" (133, note 3). In tune with the reviewed book's general analytic orientation, Sidnell's study sets out to "show that epistemic rights to talk about make-believe characters and events flow from participation in the activity [of playing]" (132), and his analysis demonstrates this consequential relation to be variously observable, indeed (133-146). At times, however, participants appeared to be orienting to the particular setting in which they were to interact (140):

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<sup>7</sup> Mondada notes the relation between "denial of knowledge" and "denial of responsibility" (47; also see Jayyusi 1984:151-152), as well as the fact that "the mechanic's recognition of place descriptions is expected by the call-taker and by Jordi [the driver] and systematically disclaimed by using the verbs *je ne sais pas* and *je ne connais pas*" (45). Yet the general(ized) analytic interest in "reality disjunctures" (and their "affiliational consequences") leads the actual description away from examining, in particular, just how participants' categorizations of each other (e.g., as "client", "call taker" and "car mechanic") may be relevantly implicated and expressed, *in situ* and *in vivo*, in and through the sequential ordering of their talk (e.g., when an expected task, despite several attempts at clarification, still cannot be initiated). For further analysis along these lines, see Watson (1997), as well as Mondada (2007).



- (9)  
 11 GRACE: [uhh: (.) m- ]  
 12 KARA: → [I think (.) I th]ink I've been here before  
 13 with s[omebody els]e.  
 14 ANNA: [have you? ca]n you sit on (the) seat [um Kara?  
 15 GRACE: [I have too:

As Sidnell continues his explanatory note, "[...] the children generally played with minimal intervention by the one adult in the room" (133, note 3). This note, as the author's presentation of the excerpt (140), allows us to identify GRACE and KARA as the "children", and ANNA as the "adult" involved (at least after having read out line 14). Sidnell's analysis, too, draws upon this categorial identification to examine a further "context in which children routinely use 'I think' to downgrade their assertions" – that is, "in talk with adults" (ibid.) – and, secondly, to contrast this "epistemic downgrade" with the "stipulations" observed in the course of play (ibid.). The offered description, then, is less concerned with specifying a manifest participants' relevancy (i.e., the occasionally shared setting) than with locating its general analytic interest (e.g., "playing children's epistemics"). Were the former to be specified, one might in turn usefully examine how participants themselves attempt to establish an activity-relevant "context" first, and how their attempts imply particular sets of mutual identification. Reconsider, for instance, KARA's initial formulation of the setting (lines 12-13). It may be heard not only as a first comment on the "special room" to which she and her classmate have been brought but also as a tacit inquiry into the setting-relevant identities, then and there. This type of inquiry, if not explicitly answered, appears at least to be addressed, as ANNA asks her to *sit on (the) seat* (14). In doing so, she positions herself and plausibly self-identifies as the "instructor" (consistently, perhaps, with her predecessor). "Instructed play", as Sidnell's explanatory note suggests, may thus follow suit, once again, and the general pair of categories "adult/children" may be reenacted, re-ascribed and reanalyzed. Paradoxically, the possibility of this general categorization and its analytic interest hinges upon particular tasks of locally performed and largely tacit, yet highly consequential "intervention", indeed.<sup>8</sup>

As Schegloff (1991:54) pointed out, the occurrence of a conversational exchange or practical activity in a "laboratory setting" or, indeed, any other setting does not, by itself, establish its relevance for the observed course of interaction (also see Heritage 1984:280 onwards). The onus is on the analyst to demonstrate its relevance to participants. The preceding exercises in reanalysis, whilst they may service such a demonstration, remind us of the "irremediably situated" character of the observed activities (e.g., Garfinkel/Livingston 2003:22). For those activities

<sup>8</sup> Its tacit character might be an *ad hoc* reason for KARA to produce a "fishing" assertion (at lines 12-13), where the "telling of [her] experience serves as a possible elicitor of information" (Pomerantz 1980:187) and/or an "account" (ibid.:195-196). The expression "I think" would then preface, and be part of, intelligently "indirect soliciting" (ibid.:186), rather than obediently "epistemic downgrading" (as conventionally attributable to a "child" in conversation with an "adult"; Speier 1976). In the excerpt, GRACE, the other "child", expresses a similar experience to KARA's (at line 15), thus implying that KARA's initial inquiry remains both pertinent and unanswered (also see Pomerantz 1980:196). For related analysis of socialization practices, see Keel (2012).

to prove intelligible, participants typically do – and presumably must – devise their tasks in accountable accordance with the unfolding situation and/or setting they are to be part of (e.g., a "conference call clarifying the 'locational problem' of a car mechanic", an "unsuspected occasion of 'playing together' at school"). Consider the following excerpt (286):

(1)

[i] A: Do you have coffee to go?  
B: Cream and sugar? *starts to pour coffee*

[ii] A: What'll you have girls?  
B: What's the soup of the day?

[iii] A: Do you sell key chains?  
B: What?

The final contribution by N. J. Enfield (Part IV) begins with reexamining the "service encounters" documented in the above excerpt (see 286 onwards). This reexamination differs from the other contributions in conversation analysis, including those by Mondada and Sidnell, insofar as it serves to introduce a "theoretical foundation" for them (285). This foundation, as Enfield explains, provides "a framework that will license and constrain the observed structures of social interaction" (ibid.). More specifically, four "sources of asymmetry in human interaction: enchrony, status, knowledge and agency" are identified, each of which "plays a role in defining a possibility space in the morality of knowledge in conversation" (ibid.). "Enchrony", the first "source", is characterized as a "primal driving force for the ever-forward progressivity of social interaction" (ibid.) – that is, in short, a "fundamental dynamic semiotic process" (287) and, thus, a "potentially unbounded sequence of [...] pivoting sign-response relations" (ibid.). The above excerpt, accordingly, is reexamined to suggest how this pervasive process may actually operate (286):

The B turns do not directly address the ostensive content of the questions that precede them, though each is a response in the intended sense here. In different ways, each is directly relevant to, and occasioned by, what [i.e., the 'sign' that] came just before it.

This is not the place to expand upon semiotics or its possible imputation to "service encounters" (285-291). Suffice it to note how any such imputation may lead the theoretically minded analyst, as in the present case, to overlook participants' relevancies *in situ* (i.e., the practical intelligibility and interactional particulars of their mundane encounter). Do the "B turns", as Enfield's reexamination suggests, "not directly address the ostensive content of the questions that precede them" (286; emphasis added)? On the basis of the transcribed excerpt, there are at least two possible responses. Firstly, the "B turns" may be understood, as they seem to have been by the participants themselves, as part of the "service encounters" that they constitute. Understood that way, the "B turns" do easily appear as familiar responses to a prior *order* (rather than a question) of a "coffee to go" [i], to a pending order, possibly including the "soup of the day" [ii], or, in the last example, to an improbable, inaudible or otherwise unintelligible order of a set of "key chains"

[iii]. Secondly, those turns at talk may also be interpreted as similar instances of "ducking the question" (as Enfield's approach suggests). Yet, for this interpretation of "B turns" to recover participants' practicalities *in situ*, it should preferably include a transcript of the third turn, the response turn by speaker A, too (who might be expected to complain about B's inattention, his or her unwillingness to answer, or simply restate the question in that third-turn position). In both cases, it is not the syntactic form of the considered turns at talk (i.e., as possibly incongruous, second questions), but their sequential positioning (e.g., after the placement of an order and/or an initial question), that defines their manifest intelligibility, as analyzable in and through participants' conduct (e.g., in and as their "service encounter"). This, of course, was a first key lesson in conversation analysis (e.g., Schegloff 1968). It seems somewhat ironic, then, that a sophisticated attempt at its theoretical foundation begins with overlooking just that opening lesson.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Discussion: alternatives in conversation analysis and epistemic sociology

Just how might conversation be said and shown to express, require or otherwise involve a "morality of knowledge"? The principal aim of the reviewed book, as outlined in the editors' introduction, was to give a coherent answer to this question in conversation analytic terms, as well as to demonstrate the sociological interest of that answer, by focusing on "knowledge asymmetries" as they appear to be dealt with in conversation (23). The contributions gathered in the book, all of which are authored by leading scholars in (or for) current CA, met this double aim by probing the interplay between "epistemics" and "sociality", participants' "juggle [of] informational and affiliational imperatives" in conversation (*ibid.*, Enfield 2006:309). Yet, as the prior section suggested, the twin concern for analytic coherence and sociological interest, now and then, runs counter to the sustained description of situational orientations and practical relevancies. Why? Rather than to dismiss this occasional discrepancy as a (pedantic) "reviewer's artifact", we may discuss it as a natural expression of alternative orientations in conversation analysis and epistemic sociology.<sup>10</sup>

As we have seen, the book thoroughly edited by Tanya Stivers and her colleagues draws upon prior findings and key techniques of CA as an established research methodology (its transcription system, to begin with) to contribute to the original, systematic and mostly subtle investigation of a substantive topic of disciplinary interest: "sociology's interest in knowledge as a norm-governed domain" (8), identified as part of the "intellectual heritage of th[e] volume" (8) and investi-

<sup>9</sup> Conversely, if the lesson is taken, the analysis may be further refined (e.g., in "multimodal" perspective). Enfield's theoretical account, however, goes on to elaborate "status, knowledge and agency [...] [as] source[s] of asymmetry in human interaction" and the respective "possibility space in the morality of knowledge in communication" (285) that those dimensions open up. The contribution thus resonates with the opening chapter by Stivers et al. (Part I); it roots their sociological rationale in an anthropological basis, whilst elaborating an additional, yet arguable conceptualization for the empirical studies in-between (Parts II&III). Weren't those studies indeed already intelligible and justifiable in their own terms?

<sup>10</sup> The expression *epistemic sociology*, coined by J. Coulter, alludes to sociology's evolving interest in various forms of knowledge, including both their interactional exchange and practical enactment (cf. Coulter 1989).

gated as "the morality of knowledge in conversation" (8-19). In that sense, the book offers highly instructive demonstrations of "applied CA" in an *instrumental* mode, where its methods appear as flexibly usable, if not independent "tools" whose investigative purpose is not (pre-)defined in their own terms. As Heritage emphasized, "there is [...] no fixed agenda intrinsic to conversation analysis" (Heritage 1984:291). The adoption of an instrumental stance, in turn, invites the conversation analyst to find a topical agenda for her (or his) investigative pursuits. This agenda may be derived from those self-same pursuits, as the contributors to the book cast its "turn to epistemics" as a "natural extension of [their] prior interest in affiliation" (XI). In any case, it remains the analyst's prerogative to determine, from within her technical inquiries, the topical agenda for those inquiries (and be it, principally, to "make generalizations about the organization of talk-in-interaction", Sidnell 2005:15). Upon this reading, the question remains: doesn't the outlined procedure, granted that it is not the mere fruit of the reviewer's imagination, compound the risk of disjunction between analytically identifiable topics and practically enacted relevancies?<sup>11</sup>

To assess the disjunctive risk that the restated question belabors, it might be useful to take a closer look at the sociological interest that is (or was to be) served by the reviewed book. In the light of the editors' introduction and its overall organization, the book's *epistemic sociology* may be understood and spelled out as follows:

- First, *conversation involves an exchange of knowledge*: "each time we take a turn in conversation we indicate what we know and what we think others know" (I). This assumption resonates with Linell and Luckmann's conjecture: "if communicatively relevant inequalities of knowledge were non-existing, there would be little or no need for most kinds of communication!" (Linell/Luckmann 1991:4).
- Second, *knowledge exchange in conversation serves relationship management through conversation* (and vice-versa). This assumption, as we have seen, was formulated and investigated in terms of the "affiliational consequences" of "epistemic asymmetries" in conversation (Part II) and, conversely, of how "alignment and affiliation problems" would be dealt with by drawing upon different "epistemic resources" (Part III).
- Third, *knowledge exchange in conversation is subject to a "moral code of conduct"* (106). Interlocutors, in other words, are "policing knowledge" (Sidnell 2005:171, in Stivers et al. 2011:18), as they "hold each other accountable [as interlocutors] for the responsibilities associated with epistemic access,

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<sup>11</sup> A recent, affirmative and thus critical answer reads as follows: "What we [risk] [...] is a situation where the emergent properties of collections, as derived by professional analysts, tend to come to stand on behalf of lay speakers' own *in vivo*, *in situ* orientations to each case. [...] the natural accountability of a phenomenon is subsumed under, even supplanted by, an increasingly aprioristic technicised characterization based on a corpus of precedents, i.e. prior findings that are part of the working culture of CA [...]" (Watson 2009:26). For variously related discussions of "applied CA", see Clayman/Gill (2003); Hester/Francis (2001); Sharrock (2000); ten Have (2001).

primacy and responsibility" (19). Their trifold pattern of "policing knowledge" makes up its "morality in conversation".<sup>12</sup>

All of these assumptions prove quite questionable, and insofar as they are (or, at least, appear to be) *jointly* implied by the overall organization of the book, do indeed increase the stated risk of analytic disjunction from participants' mundane and *distinctively* practical relevancies (though I have to leave it to readers to further assess this contention, case by case, in the light of the gathered contributions).

Firstly, the pursuit of conversation may well *occasionally* involve an "exchange of knowledge" where, through "*expressive messages* 'given' and 'given off' [in interaction][,] information about [e.g.] the individual [...] is conveyed to others" (Smith 2006:35). Yet the highlighted feature should hardly be (mis-)taken for a ubiquitously relevant practical orientation, unless a Goffmanian generalization and/or residual cognitivism is to be nurtured (cf. Watson/Coulter 2008). Secondly, a relationship may *occasionally* be formed – or suspended – through the exchange of knowledge and/or information, though hardly always or exclusively so. To intimate "epistemic socializing" as the prime function of conversation (rather than, say, of "gossiping", Bergmann 1993) means to pass over the variety of tasks that turns at talk may relevantly serve. This function or task, furthermore, might be considered derivative, as it depends on the interactive achievement of mutual understanding (e.g., Moerman/Sacks 1988; Schegloff/Sacks 1973:297-298). Consequently, the third assumption of a single, coherent and consistent "moral code of conduct", virtually regardless of its participants' mutual identifications, may be warranted *occasionally* – for some very special kinds of conversation (reminiscent of J. Rawls' "veil of ignorance") and the types of knowledge they set in circulation or tend to withhold – but hardly for any and every conversation, type or turn thereof, as a general, if not generic feature of intelligible talk (which, at any rate, would have to be relevantly instantiated with respect to any unfolding, vernacular task at hand).<sup>13</sup>

The outlined criticism, in turn, begs the question of an (if not the) alternative orientation in conversation analysis, more in tune with its "ethnomethodological foundations" (Lynch 2000). That is, instead of drawing upon CA for a determinate purpose of sociology (probing the "interactional management of knowledge asymmetries"), this alternative would chart how participants themselves draw upon conversational means to pursue their worldly affairs and practical tasks, whatever those should turn out to be, and here's the crux, *in their terms* (e.g., "observing an optical pulsar for the first time", Lynch 2006:97). "Applied CA", then, becomes

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<sup>12</sup> For the sake of discussion, the gloss "exchange of knowledge" has been used; other, perhaps more appropriate glosses include mutual "indication of knowledge" or "exchange of information". For a recent, ethnomethodological study of "in situ uses of 'information'", see Watson/Carlin (2012).

<sup>13</sup> Stivers et al. explain that "cooperation at the micro-level in social interaction has *at least* the facets [they] have discussed" (22; emphasis added). This "minimalist" understanding, as we have seen, is arrived at through reviewing the literature in CA and, thereby, recovering "participants' relevancies". One critical feature of Stivers et al.'s literature review (potentiated by their restrictive reading of Linell/Luckmann 1991) is that it tends to leave out – in contrast to participants, so it seems – the particular occasions (e.g., Schegloff 2010:46) and relevantly setting-specific identifications and/or task orientations on which conversation analysis was predicated (e.g., Watson 1997). The issue, then, is not generalization but how it is arrived at and, one might add, for what purpose(s).

the *topic* or phenomenon, rather than the instrument or task, of descriptive inquiry. To subvert John Heritage's dictum, as there is no fixed agenda to conversation, there should be none intrinsic to its analysis, except (presumably) a dedicated focus on the "matrix activity within which language use takes place" (Levinson 1992:67). This move, if plainly engaged in, proves consequential, both in terms of epistemic sociology and conversational morality, as it homes in on the reflexive interplay between practical actions and members' formulations (cf. Garfinkel/Sacks 1970). In analogy to Pickering's (1992) discussion of the sociology of scientific knowledge, the move may be summarized as a shift in conversation analytic emphasis: from "knowledge in conversation" back to "practices of conversation" and, more specifically, "practices of knowing" through conversation (or, more broadly, through any other means or method, formulated or not). The suggested move, then, brings me to the "curious incongruity" (Garfinkel 2002) at the heart of the reviewed book: it seems to have missed or, at least, left unmentioned just this move – that is, the recently most prominent shift in, if not beyond the sociology of knowledge: its so-called "practice turn" (e.g., Lynch 1993; Pickering 1992; Schatzki 2001). The incongruity, so it seems, is that contemporary CA is used (or, at least, presented to be used) in the service of a conventional, possibly anachronistic, certainly all too abstract sociology of knowledge, as the dualist framing of the book in terms of a "bidirectional" analysis already suggested (cf. note 3). Upon a second look, this incongruity is not necessarily curious or surprising, however. Had the mentioned "practice turn" been taken into account, it might indeed have had a awkward consequence, namely: to displace the *core phenomenon* of sociological interest, if not – I am afraid to add – to dissolve it altogether!<sup>14</sup>

An ethnographic anecdote may be in order to finish on a heuristic note. In the course of his ethnography, D. Lawrence Wieder attempted to bring his informant, a former drug addict, into a "conversational mood" (by offering him a couple of beers) to have a key question answered; yet, once the question was stated two hours into the conversation, his informant refused to answer it, hinting at Wieder's "institutional identity" (e.g., as a sociologist, affiliated with staff): "I don't know but you would be the last person to whom I would tell, if I knew" (Wieder 1978:359). Larry's lesson, if I may, seems to have been this: not only does the conversational exchange of propositional knowledge (or its observed withholding) appear to be based in already *familiar procedures* of taking turns and categorizing persons but, furthermore, the very ways in which these procedures are drawn upon, and instantiate *this* or *that* "morality of knowledge in conversation", appear

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<sup>14</sup> The core phenomenon, presumably, would have been *displaced*, insofar as the multiplicity of vernacularly available practices and their associated ways of speaking would have been brought into focus (e.g., Levinson 1992; Lynch 1993, chap. 7; Watson 2009) – that is, their distinctively enacted, partly tacit, partly formulated "know how" (Ryle 1949). Yet the core phenomenon might also have been *dissolved*. The "practice turn" (as Sharrock's assessment in 2000) might have reminded readers of ordinary conversation as a social practice itself whose pursuit and procedures have *already* been shown to embody, not a single "morality of knowledge", but several orders of normatively accountable organization – that is, a turn-taking organization, a logic of membership categorization, a range of institutional expectancies, various ways of "sharing" and "owning" knowledge (cf. Sacks et al. 1974; Eglin/Hester 1997; Drew/Heritage 1992a; Schegloff 2010:45; Sharrock 1974). On the more general "crisis of sociological explanation" in the sociology of (scientific) knowledge, see Zammito (2004:165-168).

as a locally contingent matter (including the open question of its generality or "institutional" specificity; see also Drew/Heritage 1992b:33). The principled distinction of ordinary conversation and institutional talk, with which the reviewed book was introduced, might or should thus be turned into an investigable phenomenon, too. To the present reader at least, this remains an ethnographically warranted, analytically exciting and yet perhaps unintended upshot of the reviewed collection – in addition to the many insights of its individual contributions. Further analysis and further discussion will do justice to those contributions and the fine book that brings them together: Tanya Stivers' and her colleagues' *Morality of Knowledge in Conversation*.

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