Book Review


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The degree and ownership of knowledge distributed among conversationalists can become a driving force for both speaker and recipient to shape the trajectory of the talk. For participants in interaction, 'knowledge' does not reside as a definite property within an individual's brain but rather is embodied in the social interactions. Just as interaction is a "primary, fundamental embodiment of sociality" (p. 70, Schegloff, 2006), this edited volume scrutinizes the understanding, display, and treatment of relative knowledge in naturally occurring human interactions and furnishes evidence-based analyses of how we are proven to be cooperative.

As the title of the book, "The Morality of Knowledge in Conversation," suggests, the contributors not only show how one's knowledge is displayed or referred to, and claimed to be owned relative to the co-conversationalists. In addition, the contributors show how such claims or displays of knowledge with respect to one another are a manifestation of our cooperative nature which can be embodied through a sequence of turns. In doing so, they demonstrate how one's knowledge becomes a target of negotiation in establishing social relationships. Moreover, regardless of the different grammatical resources available in each language, by the time one reaches the end of the book, one gains the sense that there is a remarkable commonality across languages regarding our affiliative nature in our action conducts concerning asymmetries in knowledge.

In Chapter 1, by introducing the focus of the book as "epistemic asymmetry in social interaction" in both ordinary and institutional contexts, the editors orient us to three important dimensions of knowledge in conversation across languages, that is, epistemic access (i.e., whether conversationalists know something or not, how they know it, and how much they know), epistemic primacy (i.e., relative rights and authority to know and claim), and epistemic responsibility (i.e., types of coming to know, recipient design of turns and actions). These notions, not yet conclusively discussed in other disciplines, are not merely descriptive terms used by researchers. They are important aspects of interaction normatively governed by conversationalists' cooperative nature, which consists of an important domain of human sociality. In other words, when epistemic asymmetry arises in conversation, conversationalists show a normative orientation to these dimensions because knowledge is conceived and employed as a resource for human morality. Studies in talk-in-interaction have proven such fundamental characteristics of how we are to be pro-social when interacting with others.

The introductory chapter further distinguishes two important levels for cooperation by citing Stivers (2008): affiliation and alignment; the editors argue that cooperation with another is usually conceived of in terms of these two forms. Alignment refers to the structural and formal aspects of a responding action, while affiliation refers to the emotional level of one's response. In most responding actions, compliance with or granting of the first action embodies alignment and affiliation. On the other hand, there can be a cross-cutting preference for a negatively formed request that sets up a disaligning response as an affiliative response (e.g., "You don't have his number I don't suppose," p. 21; which structurally prefers a negative answer but prefers an affirmative answer for an outcome). The rest of the book successfully shows how these two distinctive forms of cooperation can be seen in interaction in relation to par-
participants’ treatment of the asymmetrical status of what each one knows.

The book is divided into four main parts. The introductory chapter, Part I, first summarizes the domain of the research. In Part II, the contributors examine how affiliation/disaffiliation becomes an outcome of interaction by attributing epistemic responsibility to the other and/or claiming epistemic primacy. In Part III, examining participants’ treatment of asymmetrical epistemic status, the chapters discuss how grammatical, lexical, prosodic, and embodied resources are used to deal with the asymmetries by orienting to a pro-social corollary and morality between speaker and recipient. Part IV, the last chapter, draws some theoretical conclusions entailed by the previous chapters. The authors from various areas of social science, thus, collectively demonstrate how knowledge is regarded by the members as a social phenomenon and used as a resource for communicating to build relationship. In what will follow, I summarize the gist of each chapter and discuss some of the points raised in these chapters at the end.

By showing how different verbal expressions are used to differentiate the speaker’s status of not knowing, Mondada demonstrates how each participant's relative knowledge becomes a resource for the development of interaction. A case analysis of a triadic call for dispatching a road service in France reveals how the assumed knowledge distribution among the participants is used to attribute responsibility. In assuming who knows what, they also blame other(s) as an account for showing an uncooperative stance towards the action initiated by a more knowledgeable co-participant during the establishment of mutual understanding about a location.

Perhaps of most interest to the readers of this journal is Chapter 3, whose basic claim is that as a basis of epistemic primacy the upgrade of yo-marked assessment in Japanese is a means for the speaker to display incompatibility with the co-participant in terms of both epistemic stance and evaluative stance. The trajectory of the interactions i.e., "incongruence" in epistemic stance unfolds similarly to the organization of disagreement in evaluative stance, which yields sequence expansion. In an analysis which specifically focuses on the interactional job of yo-marked turns, which establishes epistemic primacy, in assessment sequences, Hayano demonstrates how Japanese conversationalists show their orientation to their relative epistemic statuses and design their turns according to their desired epistemic stance, which is proffered along with lexical intensifiers. Interestingly, the variations of yo-marked turns' sequential environments and turn designs in claiming epistemic primacy suggest that such a claim may not always work against social solidarity. Instead, it may work to mark distinctive characteristics of the speaker where it is appropriate. In this regard, the function of a yo-marked assessment turn is the realization of a participant’s sensitivity towards prosocial appropriate. The manipulation of asymmetry in epistemic incongruence thus, becomes a vehicle for the participants to conduct rather preferred action.

By focusing on the way in which a question recipient answers a request for confirmation, Stivers explores how the question recipient can resist and challenge the question's ashability by answering with "Of course." The sequential environments of this practice are identified, when the question presupposes something morally problematic—i.e. asking whether the answerer has introduced her boyfriend to her friend’s mother when they met—and when the questioned matter is in the questioner’s epistemic domain as a general knowledge or from previous interactions—i.e. asking whether the answerer has visited a famous touristic place, a part of a larger area which the answerer just mentioned that she went to. The different methods towards affirmative answers to questions thus suggest that the design of both questions and responses reflects a transparent social relationship between the questioner and the recipient. As the author argues, the “Of course” answer is a way for the question answerer to bring up the interlocutor’s moral responsibility, which should be based on his or her epistemic access towards the questioned matter rather than on simply accepting the insinuation. Such treatment of the question can be either affiliative or disaffiliative depending on the interactional context. The issue of affiliation becomes especially problematic and takes morality into account in

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dealing with the question’s basic epistemic configuration.

Heinemann, Lindström, and Steensig take up this issue by analyzing two semantically related clausal adverbs, jo in Danish and ju in Swedish used in responses to questions, both of which index “shared and self-evident knowledge.” The authors show that these adverbs function to suggest that the questioner failed to consider shared knowledge with the recipient; they thus claim epistemic incongruence. Such a response can be affiliative if the turn including jo/ju works as a reminder; it becomes disaffiliative when the speaker declines to answer because of no knowledge. In the latter case, the token is used in a subsequent account for why the speaker cannot answer, implying that the epistemic incongruence should be known to the questioner or by claiming that the question was ill-fitted. The authors show that the subtle nuances in epistemic stance can be affiliative/disaffiliative in the deployment of question and answer sequences.

The last chapter of Part II examines how epistemic rights and responsibilities work in children’s imaginative worlds as well. In an analysis of children’s “make-believe” activity, Sidnell points out that children deploy two distinct initiating methods for make-believe: stipulations and proposals. Each method assumes and uses different kinds of epistemic rights to accomplish these actions. Basically, stipulations are done through the action of showing an object and take the format of assertions (e.g., “They are invisible,” regarding some figure that the children who are speaking are playing with), which assume the speaker’s epistemic primacy. On the other hand, proposals (e.g., “Let’s pretend we were all friends and we all had connected houses.”) are made for the other co-players and are negotiated for affiliative consequences. In doing so, the children problematize some aspect of those assertions if based on the epistemic negotiations, a basic moral rule in recognizing the object in a certain way is violated. Thus, the children are also managing the overlapping territories of their knowledge and those of the others playing, which will lead to creating epistemic communities in which shared and agreed pretend “facts” are used.

Part III deals with the use of epistemic resources to manage affiliation and alignment. Heritage expands the scope of research on epistemics to include empathy in interaction, that is, recipients’ affirmative and affective responses based on one’s understanding of the other person’s feelings in response to speakers’ descriptions of personal experience, that are akin to the speaker’s expected states. According to Heritage, there are many dilemmas regarding empathic communion for both speakers and recipients. Differing from knowledge which can belong to one’s territory, the experience through which empathic moments are created is regarded as “owned by” individuals, but nonetheless when displayed to a recipient, the recipient feels obliged to show an affiliative stance towards the presented experience. Then, difficulty to empathically respond may arise because of lack of similar experiences or epistemic access. This may become ‘visible’ through the interactional resources that participants use to avoid committing to morally sanctionable acts. On one hand, the differential rights and responsibilities regarding what they accountably know are conceived as more discrete orderly matters. On the other hand, human experience cannot be considered as simply the distribution of knowledge because some experience is conceived as belonging to singular personhood by having “primary, sole, and definitive epistemic access.” Heritage demonstrates some of the ways in which people empathically respond, while dealing with these obstacles.

Dealing with a practice of claiming “no knowledge” in mostly Estonian interaction, Kevallik explores the sequential environments for those claims. According to Sacks (cited in Heritage, 2007), claiming knowledge is more often seen than demonstrating it. Claiming “no knowledge” is a distinctive practice which occurs in particular sequential contexts. One of the contexts is after a request for information in which the question recipient’s responsibility to give an answer is assumed. Another context does not follow a request to provide knowledge but rather follows more socially obligatory initiated actions (e.g., invitations, offers, etc.). In the first environment, a “no knowledge” response is regarded as a disaffiliative and uncooperative move because it rejects the terms.
or presuppositions which the questioner imposes on the recipient. As evidence for the dispreferred nature of this response, the author notes that evidentiality, or an account often follows the claim of unknowing, is a way of mitigating its dispreferred nature. In the non-epistemic usage of not knowing, the usage resists the project that is launched by the initiated action. It thereby avoids sequential pressure to provide the relevant second. In this way, the same turn composition can have different interactional outcomes depending on its position.

Asmuß examines how Dutch speakers invoke shared knowledge to establish affiliative outcomes with the phrase “you know.” The main claim of the chapter is that the invoking of shared knowledge is a negotiated matter between speaker and recipient and is dealt with through the morality of one’s epistemic responsibility and primacy. These aspects of epistemics, already discussed in the introductory chapter, become a resource for negotiation to reach agreeable outcomes. The author further identifies three different positions for a “you know” phrase to occur within a TCU. Use of the phrase as a preface or in turn medial position is a way to prospectively induce shared knowledge where disagreement is sequentially implicated. On the other hand, a post-positioned “you know” can show the speaker’s backward look towards already disagreed-upon matters.

By analyzing ways of responding to negative stance taking by a first speaker in Finnish (i.e., negative auxiliary repetition; repetition of a negative verb containing an adverb; a combination of a negative auxiliary and a non-finite verb), Hakulinen and Sorjonen explore the different degrees to which, in agreeing with a first speaker’s statement and affiliating with the co-participant’s perspective, a second speaker claims epistemic access to the statement. Based on the trajectory of sequences after the response turn with different types of epistemic access (i.e., equal, independent, or no access to the matter in question) as a basis for their account of the practice of agreeing with the statement made by the first speaker, the authors show how agreement and epistemic stance are “intertwined” in varying degrees in the design of a response turn.

Finally, in Chapter 11, through the investigation of the problem inquiry sequence initiated by a caregiver to a child, Kidwell demonstrates how participants’ differential epistemic access to the focal ‘accident’ about which a child victim is crying is used as a resource for both caregiver and child participants to take a next action to pursue their respective projects. That is, while children can accountably know what someone sees and knows in relation to the other person’s access to the focal event, caregivers initiate problem inquiries by gathering information which they can access and use inferential processes to figure out a reasonable account for the child to cry. Such actions of an adult invoke the moral obligation of child-caregiver interaction, i.e., a caregiver is responsible for looking after children and finding remedies for a problem. With the problem inquiry initiation by a caregiver, children are entitled to epistemic responsibility about the event happened; are given an opportunity to experience practical logic and the epistemic morality of who consequently knows; learn the inferential process for what one can know by filling in what one missed; and know that there is epistemic order according to which moral order is organized for who is a “victim” and who is a “culprit,” as well as what kind of remedy or sanction will follow. Through its scrutiny of the target sequence, this chapter shows the intricate processes and practices through which very young children, by interacting with other children and adults, might come to know the moral order contained in the world.

The last chapter in Part IV, by Enfield, re-captures the overall notions about epistemics and morality in social interaction. Taking the discussions made in other chapters as a point of departure, Enfield takes us one step further to discuss conversation analytic concepts from a broader and more general perspective. The important dimensions of “the negotiation of knowledge, responsibility and affiliation in interaction” discussed are: (1) Enchrony—i.e., the driving force between two communicative acts and the ground of relevance from which accountability in a sequence is derived. Because of appropriateness and effectiveness based on one’s “expectation,” interactional moves are regarded as “moral” acts. (2) Status—i.e., categories of human relationship defined by
cultural and interactional contexts, (3) Knowledge—i.e., the focus of the book, epistemic responsibility and entitlements encoded via language, and (4) Agency—i.e., the distinction between the source of knowledge and the proposition which determines whether a speaker is an animator, author, or a principal.

Needless to say, this book makes a great contribution to the field of conversation analysis. That is, although conversation analysis has successfully demonstrated that what we know about referents or propositional contents emerges out of interaction and influences interaction with others (cf. Pomerantz, 1980; Sacks, 1992; Terasaki, 2004), it was not until the recent burgeoning of research particularly focusing on the participant's knowledge status and its qualification (e.g., the featured issue of *Research on Language and Social Interactions* on epistemics in conversation) that issues of what the participants know and how much they claim to know became a target of scrutiny. The findings of the chapters in the current volume, along with other collected volumes on epistemics in interaction, are a new addition to the inventory of research on human sociality in interaction in various languages and with participants from very young children to adults.

It is important to note that the claims and lines of argument should be data-driven and empirical, that is, locatable within the transcript rather than from one's stipulation of the account. When it comes to epistemics relative to the various participants, it needs to be shown, without relying on cognitive discussions, how they are encoded in the construction of a turn as well as the ways in which the account or the recipient's reaction to such epistemic display is given, and the trajectory of a talk unfolds (i.e., how the sequence develops). In other words, we need to examine the practices participants implement, which become a ground for claims regarding participants' knowledge as an interactional resource. This book successfully illustrate this point and collectively proved how we are cooperative by nature in dealing with the morality of knowledge.

Having looked into the relationship between knowledge conceived as "owned" by a particular member (Sharrock, 1974) and participants' action and its intricate interactional processes throughout the book, we have come to understand that there is a strong connection between one's social identity and epistemic status (cf. Raymond & Heritage, 2006). That is, for participants to claim what they know in relation to others is a practical method for claiming or can be a resource to demonstrate who they are. Such motivations become more visible especially when the participants are aligning with one another but also claiming to have independent epistemic access or epistemic primacy, which will amount to incongruent epistemic status (Hayano, Heinemann, Lindström and Steensig, Hakulinen and Sorjonen's chapters). This conduct seems to strongly resonate with what Heritage in this volume observes in differentiating between "knowing something" and "having experienced it," namely, participants may have a genuine interest in displaying their own particular experience of having come to know something. The important distinction might thereby involve the participants' treatment of the relationship between one's epistemic status and one's experience of gaining relevant knowledge, which remains to be explored.

Of course, there is further more one can explore in epistemics in interaction. For example, most of the chapters deal with mundane ordinary interactions in which one's relative epistemic status and responsibility are a negotiable matter and epistemic access is used as a resource for such negotiation. However, in a setting in which institutionally relevant identities are more or less static as a basis of one's epistemic negotiation due to institutional role obligations and orientations, conversational practices can unfold differently (e.g., Drew, 1992; Heritage, 2002, 2006; Koshik, 2003; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). There are yet uncovered issues in the role of epistemics as to various institutional settings.

The book discloses the complexity of human actions with the new approach to epistemics in conversation. How epistemic access, primacy, and responsibilities are used as a resource for alignment and affiliation has been well demonstrated and documented in this book. These descriptions underscore the basic claim of conversation analysis that interaction is organized and managed in
relation to the characteristics of human sociality.

References


Language in Society, 35, 677–705.


