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**Author(s):** D'hondt, Sigurd

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## Chapter 16

# Situated language use in Africa

Sigurd D'hondt

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### 16.1 Introduction

For many years, African sociolinguistics has been characterized by an agenda largely of its own, inspired by the challenge of nation-building and other problems nascent postcolonial states were facing. Thus, a cursory glance at the three chapters on Africa in *The Routledge Handbook of Sociolinguistics around the World* (Ball 2010) demonstrates the predominance of the Sociology of Language and its practically oriented affiliates: the study of language policy, language planning, and the management of multilingualism. Nearly non-existent, on the other hand, is Labovian variationism, for many scholars still the pinnacle of the scientifically grounded study of language in society. For ethnographically inspired research, the situation is slightly more complicated. In 1990, Bokamba lamented the paucity of Africanist scholarship in discourse analysis, the ethnography of communication, and pragmatics. The current chapter briefly reviews the work that has since then been undertaken to fill this lacuna. It focuses specifically on those traditions in African sociolinguistics that deal with situated language use, here defined for all practical purposes as *the empirical study of situated interaction in authentic, real-life settings*.

The requirement that interaction should be analyzed *empirically* means that we will not consider work of a speculative or introspective nature, but only include studies that deliberately aim to stay as close as possible to the lived texture of the settings under investigation. To meet this objective, the interactions that occur in these settings should be carefully documented, either by means of ethnographic observation, electronic registration (audio or video, plus subsequent transcription), or preferably a combination of both. The additional restriction that it should occur in *authentic, real-life settings* implies that only “spontaneous” interaction will be taken in consideration. For sure, this does not mean that only informal encounters are worthy of analytical attention, but rather that elicited encounters should be avoided, and that the language use that we are after should be a natural part of the setting for which it is produced. Finally, although the focus on interactional language use somehow predisposes us towards spoken interaction, the notion of *situatedness* implies that the work under review is by definition not restricted to speech alone. Instead, language use

must always be analyzed in conjunction with the broader complex of interactional practices it is part of, which spans not only the multiple modalities that the interactants draw upon but also the wider social arrangements that sustain the encounter (and which that encounter in turn helps to reproduce). And we should of course not forget that a growing number of encounters tend to take maximal advantage of the new affordances granted by information technologies and social media. Strictly speaking, both co-presence and the vocal-aural modality are thus no longer a prerequisite for interaction as such, as Chapter 19 so lavishly illustrates.

This triple caveat implies that we will be reviewing Africanist scholarship in three distinct traditions, ordered vaguely according to the point in time they made their entry onto the sociolinguistic scene: (1) the Ethnography of Communication, (2) codeswitching research, and (3) interaction-analytic work inspired by Conversation Analysis. One of the questions that we will be looking into is to what extent contributions to these traditions that specifically focus on Africa have been informed by, and have in turn contributed to, the overall development of their respective fields. The fact is that a topic like situated language use in Africa can be approached from different angles. On the one hand, it can be studied to broaden the empirical base on which theoretical generalizations are founded, and thus advance our understanding of interaction and language use in general. Equally legitimate, however, is the question what it can teach us about the respective societies from which it originates. How the different traditions navigate this tensions will be a recurrent subtext in the discussion that follows.

## 16.2 The ethnography of communication in Africa

An intelligent [Murundi] man must measure the character of his interlocutor and select style and content for his speech accordingly. It would be an unforgivable blunder for a peasant-farmer, no matter how wealthy or able, to produce a truly elegant, eloquent, rapid-fire defense before a herder or other superior. However, the same peasant who stammers or shouts or forces a smile from a superior by making a rhetorical fool of himself when his adversary is a prince or herder will, with a change in the situation involving his superiors, or as a judge in a local or family affair, in a council, or in making a funeral oration, show himself an able speaker, a dignified man who speaks as slowly and as intelligently as ever a highborn herder could. (Albert 1964:41/2)

The above is but one of the many insightful descriptions of the situation-specific rules for speech behavior characteristic of traditional Rundi society that can be found in Ethel Albert's classic 1964 text. Her account offers a wide panorama, which demonstrates how these rules are in turn connected to the community's worldview, the cultural values the Barundi assign to eloquence and truth, and their distinctly hierarchical social structure. It also elucidates how these norms come to delineate a field of action, a benchmark against which individual speakers make strategic choices that further their personal interests. Albert's paper was published in the same issue of the *American Anthropologist* in which Dell Hymes proposed

the term *Ethnography of Communication* (EOC) (Hymes 1964),<sup>1</sup> and this early study may be considered exemplary of what this anthropological perspective on the study of language amounts to. In essence, Hymes (1964, 1972 and elsewhere) laid down a program for ethnographically documenting how language use contrast across speech communities. It is founded on the presumption that verbal behavior, and communication in general, is produced neither randomly nor on universally identical grounds, but is instead culturally patterned. For Hymes, language use is organized as a system of interlocking communicative events, which in turn interacts with other aspects of the organization of social life (like the reproduction of caste, gender, and age categories in Albert's case study), and which may therefore be considered constitutive of much of what we consider culture. Needless to say, the analysis of these interlocking communicative events is highly complementary with ethnographic investigations into the social distribution of communicative resources of the sort pursued in Chapter 17, which offer a matching angle on such cultural patterning.

The basic unit for analyzing this cultural patterning of language use is the *speech community*, loosely defined as any human aggregate which communicates on a regular basis and which is "set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage" (Gumperz 1968: 381). Such speech communities may vary in size, ranging from "small bands bounded by face-to-face contact [to ...] modern nations [...] or even occupational associations or neighborhood gangs" (ibid.). Often, they are formulated specifically in relation to the communicative phenomenon under investigation (Hymes 1972). In Albert's study, the speech community subject to analysis is fully coterminous with an ethnically defined cultural unit (the Barundi) which corresponds to a nameable language (Kirundi). Historically, this presumed isomorphy of language and cultural unit played a crucial part in the shaping of clearly delineable, reified ethnolinguistic groups (consider Makoni et al. 2007 for an interesting case study; see also Chapter 15 of this volume). Today, it is still characteristic of a lot of pragmatically oriented work on language use in African settings (of which a lot, admittedly, is not explicitly situated within an EOC framework). It pervades, for example, the analysis of greeting sequences, a field that has proven particularly popular, presumably because it is one of the few linguistic practices found in everyday encounters that, due to their predictable and formulaic character, are easy to collect in large numbers. Thus, Irvine's seminal (1974) paper on status manipulation in Wolof greetings was followed by a steady stream of analyses of greeting rituals in other languages/communities, including Yoruba (Akindele 1990), Swahili (Omar 1992), Igbo (Nwoye 1993), Akan (Agyekum 2008), Setswana (Bagwasi 2012) and Sukuma (Batibo 2015). In time, it was supplemented with work on other speech acts (e.g., Irvine 1980 on requests in Wolof, Obeng 1999a and 1999b on Akan requests and apologies, Agyekum 2010 on expressions of thanks, also in Akan), as well as work on politeness phenomena and the notion of *face* (e.g., Nwoye 1992, Yahya-Othman 1994, Obeng 1994, Agyekum 2004, Ojwang et al. 2010). Ameka and Breedveld (2004) account for the prevalence of specific communicative taboos and the spread of practices like triadic communication in terms of "cultural scripts" that extend over a larger West-African

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<sup>1</sup> Initially Hymes had proposed the term *Ethnography of Speaking* (Hymes 1962), which he subsequently amended to also include nonverbal forms of communication.

“speech area” (Hymes 1972), but their attempt remains inexorably rooted in an isomorphic, community-based approach.

This short survey illustrates that this line of work on communicative practices characteristic of particular ethnolinguistic communities extends well into the current time. There are, however, a number of concurrent developments that initiated a gradual move away from such a strictly community-based approach.

Albert’s paper, originally published in 1964, was reprinted in Gumperz and Hymes’ (1972) *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, a highly influential collection in which ethnographic, qualitative work amicably appeared side by side with quantitative analyses in the variationist tradition by Fishman, Bernstein and Labov. The two approaches were soon to drift apart, however, and the different theoretical and methodological orientations responsible for this rift also spawned conflicting views on the centrality of the speech community (Rampton 2010). While variationist sociolinguistics addresses the sociocultural patterning of speech by quantitatively charting the distribution of speech varieties (or selected variables) across larger communities, EOC prioritizes “the complexity of communicative action, [and] acts and events in their ecology” (ibid.: 276). The larger entities which these actions and events are part of accordingly become redundant, and consequently, ethnographers tend to merely “[postulate] membership of a particular speech community [...] *in the background* as the origin of the social norms that determine the appropriacy of speech” (ibid., emphasis original).

Hence, in subsequent years Albert’s holistic case study was followed by other work that either focused on communication in smaller, more tightly integrated communities (in which the ethnographer may easily immerse him/herself), or on the interactional structures of single *speech events* or *genres*.<sup>2</sup> Irvine’s (1979) discussion of formality in communicative events, for example, drew in large part on a detailed analysis of Wolof political meetings. Other studies exemplary of this trend include Irvine’s work on the *xaxaar*, ritual insult poetry performed at Wolof wedding celebrations (Irvine 1993, 1996), and Yankah’s (1995) *Speaking for the Chief*, a book-length analysis of Akan royal oratory and the art of the *okyeame*, the orators who speak on the king’s behalf. Yankah and Irvine both analyze speech events against the backdrop of a speech community that is coincident with an ethnolinguistic unit, and as such they do not totally debunk the isomorphy between the two. However, at least they offer a more sophisticated, less unequivocal picture of how those speech events fit into such wider cultural units. Irvine, for example, notes that not all Wolof villages practice the *Xaxaar*, and suggests a link with the presence of strong village-based women’s associations (1993:134). Yankah’s study by definition only covers the communicative conduct of very restricted sets of participants. He furthermore indicates that the institution of the *okyeame*, although it originated in Akan territory, has subsequently also been adopted by neighboring societies (1995:25ff).

One of the elements responsible for the distinctive character of a speech event is the question of who participates in what capacity. Each speech event evokes a constellation of

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion of the event-genre nexus would lead us too far, but the relationship between them is essentially one of type and token. Briggs and Bauman, for example, conceptualize genre as “an orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse” (1992: 142/3).

participant roles that together forms its *participation framework* (Goffman 1981; see Sidnell 2009 for a useful overview). The Wolof *xaxaar* aptly illustrates how and why this organization of participation can be socially consequential. The *xaxaar* is held at the yard of the husband's household, on the first morning after the bride's arrival. The sponsors of the event are the brides' new co-spouses and her female in-laws. The latter, however, are not the ones who actually deliver the abusive poems. For this, they hire a female griot. The designated audience consists of female villagers. Male villagers are not officially invited, but often find an excuse to wander by. In these *xaxaar* performances, participation framework, discourse genre, and social structure interact in such a way that responsibility for the verbal abuse to which the bride is subjected can be evaded, and the taboo on defamatory talk is temporarily sidestepped. The griot merely "animates" and "authors" (Goffman 1981) the poems, and therefore she cannot be held responsible for their content. The bride's in-laws provide instructions as to what topics to cover, but members of the audience never know for sure who commanded a particular song. The ritual character of the *xaxaar* and the fact that it is imbued with tradition, in combination with the low position of the griot caste in Wolof society, further add to the griot's relative impunity. Importantly, the insults issued at the *xaxaar* may also target the bride's kin. As a consequence, *xaxaar* sessions frequently turn into a forum for vilifying local notables only remotely connected to the bride's family, and in that capacity the genre represents "an important avenue for female exercise of social control" (Irvine 1993: 134).

Yankah (1995) elucidates a similar interweaving of participant roles with forms of speech, rhetorical strategies, dress, attributes, cultural values and beliefs, and demonstrates how the resulting complex in turn reinforces Akan political order. The royal orators at the court of an Akan king "animate" and embellish (and thus "author") the brief whispered messages they receive from the king when he makes a public appearance. They protect the king from uttering a harsh or improper word, and thereby they avoid a loss of face that might pose a threat to political stability. Event-specific constellations of participant roles may take intricate forms. Askew (2002), for example, describes how members of the audience at a Tanzanian *taarab* performance may appropriate the lyrics of a song for crafting an accusation against another audience member, by ostentatiously tipping the singer and simultaneously casting a sharp look at their victim. Other speech-event based ethnographic analyses drawing attention to the fluidity and malleability of participation frameworks include McIntosh (2005) on sexual obscenities in women's songs at Giriama funerary rites (Kenya), or Vigouroux (2010) on the role of the interpreter in Congolese Pentecostal church services in Cape Town, South Africa.

Another relevant development, one that became increasingly prominent as the turn of the millennium drew closer, is the emergence of a body of work that specifically deals with questions of *agency* and *performance* (cf. Duranti 2003: 332ff) and hence even more drastically challenges conventional understandings of interaction as community-based. It rejects the idea that linguistic variables passively mirror fixed identity categories, geographic locations, or class positions. Instead, it emphasizes the contingent re-articulation of social meaning as language users creatively reconfigure linguistic elements alongside non-linguistic

ones, in an effort to project a particular persona in and through their conduct (e.g., Coupland 2007).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Hirsch (1998) analyzes marital disputes before an Islamic family court in the Kenyan coastal town of Malindi. While Muslim men hold the authority to unilaterally pronounce a divorce, female complainants often manage to secure a favorable legal outcome through their skilled verbal performance, e.g., by enlisting the *kadhi* as a witness of their efforts to persevere in spite of the suffering inflicted upon them by their husbands' behavior. In the accounts they produce before the court, these women draw upon, exploit, and thereby (at least partially) also destabilize circulating images of femininity. Their discursive maneuverings furthermore force us to consider how the legal traditions of coastal Islam have been incorporated into the postcolonial Kenyan legal system, the new discourses that have thereby been introduced (e.g., novel interpretations of Islamic law), and the opportunities it opens up for new alliances (e.g., between otherwise marginalized women and formally trained scholars of Islamic law, against the established *ulamaa*). Provoking and inspiring, Hirsch's book in turn prompted further work on language and the production of femininity in legal contexts (e.g., Stoeltje 2000, Stoeltje et al. 2002, Stiles 2009).

Billings (2013) addresses gendered discourse in a different setting. She brings us the story of young Tanzanian women enrolling in the circuit of local and national beauty pageants, in the hope of securing a modeling career that will buy them access to the outside world. Freely combining elements from global codes of speech, dress, and conduct with elements drawn from local sources, these young women from the global periphery actively negotiate femininity in their staged performance. They do so against the background of local and global sociolinguistic inequalities, as well as prevailing discourses of morality, gender, and education, and notions of ethnicity. Here as well, the "playing field" is thus not confined to a particular speech community in the strict sense, but comprises a distinctly multipolar universe that includes local as well as global epicenters of meaning generation and form-function mapping (Blommaert 2010).

This turn to agency and performance also sparked a renewed interest in community, now respecified in practice-based terms as a concern with how language users negotiate perceptions of we-ness, and/or of community boundaries, in their situated encounters. Provided that we acknowledge the active role of language users in how speech communities come about, Spitulnik (1996) argues, the notion continues to be relevant, also when dealing with entities that are "large, shifting, and somewhat intangible, like those that extend across cities, regions, and nations" (ibid.: 161). Below, a woman tries to draw the attention of a distracted acquaintance. For this, she recycles a turn-taking routine which presenters of a popular Zambian radio show use for checking the channel when a live connection needs to be established with a remote station:

One day I was shopping in a very large and crowded Lusaka store, and I noticed a woman trying to get the attention of a friend standing in the next aisle. She was

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<sup>3</sup> For a parallel account of how this performative turn simultaneously transformed variationist sociolinguistics, and the proposal it implies for surmounting post-*Directions in Sociolinguistics* fissures between quantitative-distributional and speech event-based analyses, consider Eckert (2012).

whispering loudly in the friend's direction, "Hello, hello? Hello?" The friend didn't respond, and the woman, a bit embarrassed over drawing attention to herself while still not able to attract the friend, laughed and shouted, "Hello, Kitwe?" This definitely got the attention of the friend, as well as several other customers, who were clearly amused by this clever allusion to the bungled ZNBC communication link. (168)

The women's creative reworking of this formulaic, and hence easily detachable phrase is an apt illustration of the way in which repetitions and recontextualizations of media discourse can come to mediate community "in a kind of subterranean way, [by establishing] an indirect connectivity or intertextuality across media consumers and across instances of media consumption" (164). Unfortunately, performances of community and we-ness are not always that friendly and inconsequential. Büscher et al. (2013), for example, demonstrate how Kiswahili-speaking inhabitants of the Congolese borderland "indexically appropriate" Lingala for erecting a symbolic boundary that deliberately excludes Kinyarwanda-speakers, casting the latter as intruders (even if their families have been living on DRC territory from precolonial times). Their work offers an at times dramatic account of the verbal practices by which *autochthony*, a concept originally developed in anthropology and political science (e.g., Geschiere 2009), materializes in everyday practice.

Parallel with this rising interest how language users perform community and its boundaries, the notion of speech community itself came to be retooled as a *community of practice* (Lave and Wenger 1991), a move that allows sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists "[to identify] a social grouping not in virtue of shared abstract characteristics (e.g. class, gender) or simple co-presence (e.g. neighborhood, workplace), but in virtue of shared practice" (Eckert 2006: 683). As such, it provides a powerful, practice-based (and non-reifying) alternative for relating shared elements in interactional conduct and situated sense-making to a broader social order.

This brief overview demonstrated that performance-centered work engages in novel, unprecedented ways with adjacent disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences: It addresses the interactional foundations of phenomena (like ethnicity, globalization, the rise of nationalism, etc.) that are traditionally the domain of sociology, history, political science, gender studies, etc. The resulting dialogue, Duranti (2003) points out, opens up new prospects for "fulfilling the goal of a linguistic anthropology as part of anthropology at large", premised upon its "special access to language as the indispensable medium for the transmission and reproduction of culture and society" (333). The turn to agency and performance, and the concomitant rethinking of the language-community interface, also demonstrate how Africanist scholarship in EOC develops in conjunction with global intellectual trends permeating the field, in turn reinforcing these by its persistent effort to chart the various local forcing shaping language use in African societies.

### 16.3 Codeswitching research: Evidence from Africa

It is not hard to see why codeswitching (CS) research attracted so much attention from sociolinguists, for it occupies a pivotal role connecting different strands of the discipline. To get a grasp of what happens when two speakers "[juxtapose] passages of speech belonging to



two different grammatical systems or subsystems [within the same speech exchange]” (Gumperz 1982: 59), the analyst must juggle between different levels of abstraction, traversing the field that separates the functional differentiation of language varieties at speech community level (analyzed by sociologists of language as *diglossia*, Ferguson 1959, or *domains of language use*, Fishman 1972; see also Chapter 14) from the study of discourse organization and the micro-dynamics of situated encounters. The cement holding the two together is provided by *indexicality*, the capacity of linguistic signs to be imbued with meaning on the basis of an association with particular usage contexts (Silverstein 2003), which allows language choice to incrementally redefine the speech situation (and thereby takes CS research directly into the field of metapragmatics, Lucy 1993). At the same time, examinations into the distribution of actual switching patterns may help us to better understand the direction of macro-phenomena like language shift and maintenance (Gafaranga 2007; see also Chapter 15).

One of the leading scholars in the field is Carol Myers-Scotton. On the basis of extensive fieldwork in Uganda (Myers-Scotton 1972) and later Kenya, she laid the basis for what came to be known as the *Markedness Model* (Myers-Scotton 1988, 1993a and elsewhere). The model presents a comprehensive theoretical account of what she considers to be the *Social Motivations for Codeswitching* (the title of her 1993a monograph), which is widely accepted as a point of reference both in Africanist scholarship (e.g., Goyvaerts and Zembele 1992, Kamwangamalu 1996, Herbert 1997, Finlayson and Slabbert 1997, Amuzu 2012) and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

The basic tenet of the model (henceforth MM) is that language users dispose over a *markedness metric*, an underlying framework that enables speakers to infer which code counts as the normative choice given the particular *set of rights and obligations* (RO set) between the participants in force for the encounter. This normative framework serves as the basis for a set of strategic calculations (which are, however, not necessarily conscious). Once the speaker has determined the relevant RO set for the encounter, she might decide to settle for that RO set. If this is the case, she will address her interlocutor in the code normatively associated with that RO set. Alternatively, she might try to negotiate a more advantageous RO set, by opting for a code that deviates from the normative choice. If she opts for this road, the markedness metric guarantees that her interlocutors will be able to infer the new RO set that she wishes to be in force for the encounter, and in this sense the metric is a guarantee for intersubjectivity.

Based on this mechanism, the MM makes it possible to account for multiple forms of CS within a single model. The first type, CS as the *unmarked choice*, ensues when code choice passively mirrors a change in the contextual parameters of the encounter. The change

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<sup>4</sup> Equally influential was its companion volume (1993b), which presented an account for the grammatical orderliness of CS that she calls the *Matrix Language Frame* (MLF). Being a hierarchical (i.e., “dominance” or “insertional”) model, the MLF posits a single matrix language in which speakers insert various embedded language “islands.” A discussion of how the MLF fares in comparison to non-hierarchical approaches (which describe CS grammar mostly in terms of syntactic equivalence between languages) falls outside the scope of the present discussion, but the reader may consult Kamwangamalu (1994), Finlayson et al. (1998), Owens (2005), Amuzu (2014) or Baloji et al. (2014) for relevant applications in African linguistics. Lamidi (e.g., 2008) discusses CS grammar within a generativist framework, while Bokamba has in many publications (e.g., 1989) been utterly critical of the universal constraints posited by equivalence-approaches.

in context may either be triggered by an external intervention (e.g., the arrival of a third party), or it may occur as new information becomes available that transforms the interpersonal balance between the participants. In the example below, for example, the guard switches from Kiswahili to Luyia after he discovers that he and his visitor share the same ethnic background. Kiswahili is the unmarked choice for an encounter between strangers, Luyia for a conversation between those who share Luyia ethnicity. In switching from Kiswahili to Luyia, the guard is thus observing the exigencies of the normative framework.

(Entrance to the IBM Nairobi head office. The visitor, who is a school principal in the Luyia area of Western Kenya, approaches. He speaks English and Swahili fluently in addition to his first language, a Luyia variety.)

Security Guard (Swahili): Unataka kumwona nani?

(Whom do you want to see?)

Visitor (Swahili): Napenda kumwona Solomon Inyama.

(I want to see Solomon Inyama.)

Guard (Swahili): Unamjua kweli? Tunaye Solomon Amuhaya— nadhani ndio yule.

(Do you really know him? We have a Solomon Amuhaya—I think that's the one you mean.)

Visitor (Swahili): Yule anayetoka Tiriki—yaani Mluyia.

(The one who comes from Tiriki—that is, a Luyia person.)

Guard (smiles) (switches to Luyia): Solomon mwenuyu wakhumanya vulahi?

(Does Solomon know you?)

Visitor (Luyia): Yivi mulole umovolere ndi Shem Lusimba yenyanga khukhulola.

(You see him and tell him that Shem Lusimba wants to see you.)

Guard (Luyia): Yikhala yalia ulindi.

(Sit here and wait.) (Myers-Scotton 1988:153/4)

On other occasions, however, the speaker may wish to alter the interpersonal balance and resort to CS for negotiating an alternative RO set, according to the mechanism sketched above. For the MM, such violations of normative expectations constitute instances of CS a *marked choice*. In the example below, a visitor of a bar in western Kenya first switches from Lwidakho to Kiswahili, and then from Kiswahili to English, in an effort to thwart off a request for financial assistance.

Setting: A farmer in rural Western Kenya is asking money of a salaried worker who is in his home area on leave. The conversation takes place in a bar where all speak the same mother tongue, Lwidakho, the unmarked choice for this exchange [...].

Farmer (finishing an oblique request for money) (Lwidakho): ...inzala ya mapesa, kambuli. (Hunger for money. I don't have any.)

Worker (who had been speaking only Lwidakho before the request)

(English): You have got a land.

(Swahili): Una shamba. (You have a farm/land.)

(Lwidakho): Uli mulimi. (You have land.) (Myers-Scotton 1998:170)

The alteration of the interpersonal balance is here only temporary, and after the salaried worker made clear his point he resumes talk in Lwidakho. On other occasions, however, the change in interpersonal balance may be lasting, and the code by which this new RO set was negotiated may in turn become the new unmarked choice for the encounter.

Up to this point, the MM merely reiterated what had before already been covered in Blom and Gumperz' (1972) influential treatment of CS.<sup>5</sup> It is with the third option afforded by the MM, however, that Myers-Scotton's account becomes truly innovative. Consider the following fragment, taken from a conversation among Tanzanian academics recorded at the University of Dar es Salaam:

- 1     A:     Manake / shule hata \*chakula hawapati siku hizi  
          (because the schools don't even get standard  
2            cha/ chakula #standard# hawapatikani kule // Basi  
          (food nowadays, it can't obtained there. So  
3            imebidi \*wa#withdraw# // Wanasema (hi)ooohh nijilimie  
          (it was necessary for them to withdraw. They say Oh!  
4            mwenyewe // na kila mwanafunzi wanacholima hakitoshi  
          (I'll work in the field myself. But with all the students farming,  
          even that isn't good enough  
5            #even for \*two months# // Basi / mambo  
          (even for two months. So things have  
6            yame#deteriorate# // Basi unakuta / ndiyo //  
          (deteriorated. And so there you are, yes.)  
7     B:     Sasa hivi wana / wanaanza kuamini / lakini sasa  
          (right now they they start to believe ... but now  
8            haija#pickup# / haija#pick# / ni hali ambayo kwa kweli  
          (it hasn't picked up yet, it hasn't picked yet; it's a situation  
          which really

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<sup>5</sup> Although, contrary to what Myers-Scotton (1988:160) herself suggests, the categories unmarked/marked do not map unequivocally onto the distinction between "situational" and "metaphorical" CS that Blom and Gumperz propose (Gafaranga 2007:113, cf. Woolard 2004:76).

- 9            #it is \*still deteriorating# // Lakini kwenye  
               (is still deteriorating. But in a
- 10           #situation# kama hiyo hata kama umepata nafasi ya kusoma  
               (situation like this, even if you got the occasion to study
- 11           nafikiri #it's just low // they (lo) can't go on# //  
               (I think it's just low, they can't go on) (Blommaert 1992:61)

In the first two types of CS that we came across, switching largely coincided with syntactic boundaries between sentences (and hence they are considered instances of *intersentential* CS). In the fragment here, however, code alternation no longer follows sentence boundaries but occurs *intrasententially*. This in turn relates to the fact that it is no longer individual switches that are socially meaningful, but the overall pattern of speaking two languages simultaneously. The MM refers to such overall switching as *intrasentential CS as the unmarked choice*. It is normative in situations where the relationship between the participants is characterized by two RO sets at the same time. In the above example, for example, Kiswahili is the unmarked choice for everyday encounters between fellow Tanzanians, while English indexes the participants' shared identity as academics. The resulting form of switching switching has often been described as typical of the speech of African elites (e.g., Nartey 1982, Blommaert 1992, Myers-Scotton 1993c).

The underlying double identity claim is an indispensable part of the MM, as it is the only way to accommodate overall switching within a framework that posits a strict functional allocation of discrete, separate codes as the normative backdrop for code selection. It is also the MM's Achilles' heel, since multilingual realities often escape such rigid compartmentalization and the double identity claim in many situations simply proves untenable. McCormick's (2002) book-length analysis of language use in Cape Town's District Six provides an apt illustration. For the inhabitants of this inner-city colored community, bilingualism and multilingual practices like CS do not so much signal double identity, but to the contrary *set them apart* from speakers of "uncontaminated" varieties of English and Afrikaans situated higher up the social ladder.

Other situations that defy such strict compartmentalization can be found in societies where switching has virtually become the norm for the majority of everyday encounters, to the extent that the use of the "pure" varieties is restricted to a limited number of settings that are perceived as highly formal. According to Swigart (1992), this is the case in urban Dakar, where Wolof-French CS is all-pervasive. Meeuwis and Blommaert (1998) make a similar observation on Lingala-French CS in the DR Congo, and they also document instances of *layered* CS in which speakers alternate between *monolectal* Lingala-French codeswitched discourse and monolectal Kiswahili-French. Gafaranga (2007) cites similar instances of layered CS between Kinyarwanda-French and English. To disentangle the complexities of language choice in such highly plurilingual environments, Gafaranga recommends an emic, CA-based approach (cf. the next section) for sorting out which forms of language alternation are relevant to the participants. The "overall orderliness" of *Talk in Two Languages* (the title of his 2007 book) should be treated as a locally negotiated phenomenon, and he proposes the

notion of “preference for same medium talk” to highlight the independence of what speakers treat as meaningful from what linguists take to be a language.<sup>6</sup>

Gafaranga’s proposal is timely, for the ubiquity of such CS and its seemingly normative character in turn leads to another tricky issue: the fact that awareness of the hybrid nature of the resulting “fused lects” is unevenly distributed. Commenting on the fluidity of Town Bemba, Spitulnik (1998) argues that what is CS for one speaker might be an instance of borrowing for someone less proficient. Inhabitants of Dakar on the whole display little awareness of CS, and seem to regard codeswitched speech as simply another variety of either Wolof or French (Swigart 1992). Instances like these illustrate that “speakers do not [necessarily] inherit knowledge of the history of a language” (Makoni et al. 2007:43). They also demonstrate the need to theorize hybridity without prematurely assuming that speakers are indeed switching between separate codes, and as such, they force sociolinguists to rethink some of the very concepts that are foundational to the discipline (a point also made by the authors of Chapter 18 in their discussion of urban vernaculars). One instance of such rethinking is provided by Hurst’s (2008) discussion of the hybrid linguistic practices that characterize language use among young black male township residents from Cape Town. Her work shows that what is commonly referred to as “Tsotsitaal” in fact emanates from different underlying syntactic frameworks (Xhosa, Zulu, or Afrikaans, depending on the region). These different varieties are held together by the fact that they belong to the same “performed discursive practice” (Coupland 2007:145; cf. supra), and therefore she considers them part of a single *stylect*. In their analysis of language use in the award-winning South-African movie *Tsotsi* (Gavin Hood, 2005), Makoni et al. (2010) propose the term *multilanguage*—“a temporary, fluid configuration of language resources” (148)—to account for the way in which speakers freely combine whatever linguistic forms and varieties are available to them. Other notions that were recently proposed to capture such hybridity and indeterminacy include *translanguaging* (García and Li Wei 2014) and *metrolinguism* (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015; cf. Chapter 18).<sup>7</sup>

That it is difficult for the MM to abandon the double identity claim might well be indicative of a deeper malaise. In spite of the fact that most of Myers-Scotton’s data are drawn from Africa, the resulting model tells us remarkably little about the African societies in which these interactions were collected. This is so, Meeuwis and Blommaert (1994) argue, because the MM assumes that CS is sufficiently explained once the micro-dynamics behind code choice and its role in the management of interpersonal relationships are accounted for, for which the MM resorts to a universalist, presumably innate model. However, in this way the MM also evades the issue of why exactly CS comes to be meaningful in a particular society,

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<sup>6</sup> “Overall orderliness” refers to the fact that for Gafaranga, code alternation is not necessarily negotiated on a turn-by-turn basis (as suggested by his main CA-inspired precursor, Auer 1984), but is rather something that participants attend to as part of the overall organization of the encounter. The notion is meant to accommodate the possibility that speakers might be treating continuous switching as a single medium, whereas Auer’s 1984 turn-by-turn account, which requires each switch to be individually accounted for, starts from clearly separated, discrete codes. In its own way, Amuda (1994) may be considered an early predecessor of such a CA account, as he too insists that the social meanings of Yoruba-English CS are not “based in diglossia,” but should instead be seen as locally negotiated.

<sup>7</sup> But see Chapter 15 for a critique of the contradictions characterizing these attempts.

and fails to explain why it occurs in some multilingual societies but not in others (Gafaranga, 2007:110). Answering these questions requires an in-depth ethnographic understanding of the context-specific ways in which CS emerged, against the background of the historical constitution of group relationships and the corresponding distribution of speech repertoires—the macro-dimension of CS that the MM consistently ignores.<sup>8</sup> Flamenbaum’s (2014) work on Ghanaian talk-radio debates is an interesting example of an analysis that locates the micro-dynamics of CS in a wider linguistic ecology. The station broadcasting the show in question is strongly in favor of a Twi-only broadcast policy, but the participants to the debate nevertheless routinely switch to English. They do so in turn-initial position for expressing a metapragmatic stance, and in clause-final position for lending prominence. CS obviously assists them in framing and defending their arguments, and as such it co-constitutes the speech event in important ways (which leads the author to state that the genre is “simultaneously defined against and through English”, p.358). Like Meeuwis and Blommaert (1998), Gafaranga (2007), and others before her, Flamenbaum thus insists that intrasentential CS also serves discourse-organizational functions, in addition to indexically signaling social meaning. For obvious reasons, this prospect can only be accommodated once the double identity claim is dropped. Interestingly, she raises the possibility that it is not just the contrastive value of the two languages that allows CS to be used in this way. Instead, its appeal as a discourse-functional device also lies in the fact that it allows debaters to display their agility in navigating the tensions that derive from the contradictory values associated with English, in opposition to local languages.

From such a perspective, CS is just one among many resources that speakers may resort instantaneously to in the multilayered processes of producing and managing identity in conversation. Thus, Higgins (2007a) uses the ethnomethodological tradition of membership categorization analysis (cf. the next section) for demonstrating how Tanzanian journalists working for an English-language daily use Kiswahili-English language alternation to establish and maintain locally negotiated boundaries between an in- and an out-group, in doing so contingently reworking other-categorizations such as “Westernized” as well as ethnic labels. Elsewhere (2007b) she analyzes a joke in mixed “Swahinglish.” Here, she shows how the different participants involved, all journalists, are variously positioned towards the historical discourse of African socialism and that of urban modernity/globalization, in a way that renders the link between language mixing and humor very much ambivalent.

#### 16.4 CA, or the analysis of naturally occurring talk in African settings

Conversation Analysis (or CA, as it is routinely referred to) traces its origins not to linguistics or anthropology but to sociology. It draws inspiration from Garfinkel’s (1967) foundational *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, together with the posthumously published lectures of his student Harvey Sacks (1992) and a series of seminal publications the latter co-authored with

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<sup>8</sup> One might add that the MM not only fails to elucidate how CS is the product of local historical circumstances, but that it also misses how CS patterns in turn affect and transform those circumstances. For the MM, society serves solely as the backdrop that generates normative expectations and indexical associations, and therefore the model is unable to acknowledge the essentially dialectical nature (Silverstein 2003) of indexical meaning (cf. Woolard 2004:88ff).

Schegloff and Jefferson in the early 1970s.<sup>9</sup> CA starts from the assumption that naturally occurring interaction is not intrinsically messy and chaotic but produced in an orderly and methodical fashion, and that it is precisely this orderliness that makes talk meaningful to interactants. Its main objective, therefore, is to elucidate the taken-for-granted “methods” for producing orderliness that allow interactants to behave in a way that is recognizable to others, thereby enabling them to coordinate their interactional conduct and to achieve intersubjectivity. Proceeding along these lines, early conversation-analytic work identified the “machinery” by which speakers manage the orderly transition of speakership in spontaneous, unplanned conversation (*turn-taking*). Another recurrent concern is action-formation and the way speakers come to recognize a turn at talk as “doing” something. A crucial insight here is that actions always come in *sequences* (greeting-greeting, question-answer, invitation-acceptance, etc.), which in turn exemplifies the underlying principle that participants always rely on the previous turn for making sense of the current turn (which in turn implies, *mutatis mutandis*, that the current turn also sets limitations on what can meaningfully be done in the next slot). Thirdly, CA is interested in how the participants resolve misunderstandings that might pose a threat to intersubjectivity (*repair organization*). Initially, these issues were investigated in unplanned, spontaneous conversation, but over the years conversation analysts became increasingly engaged with interaction in institutional settings, tracing how the participants to such settings articulate the organization of talk with their understanding of the wider social context. It is also important to keep in mind that up to the late 1980s, conversation-analytic research was very much limited to English-language data.

Typical of CA research is its strong reliance on transcripts. The following excerpt in Kiswahili (from D’hondt 2011:569/70, abbreviated) is a faithful rendition of the opening of an accidental encounter between two acquaintances in a Dar es Salaam suburb. It is a good illustration of what a CA transcript may look like.

- |   |     |  |                       |                      |
|---|-----|--|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | N:  | mbona sikuoni                                    | oni                   | ↑ <u>masjidini</u> . |
|   |     | why  | NEG:1SG.O:2SG.see.PRS | see.PRS mosque=in    |
|   |     | ‘How come I don’t see you around in the mosque?’ |                       |                      |
| 2 | Fe: | °ah° hunioni                                     | ↑ <u>W</u> Api        | bwana.               |
|   |     | NEG:2SG.see.PRS                                  | where                 | mister               |
|   |     | ‘You don’t see me where mister?’                 |                       |                      |
| 3 |     | <u>w</u> [ewe unasalija                          | wapi.]                |                      |
|   |     | you  | 2SG.PRS.pray.FV       | where                |
|   |     | ‘Where do you pray?’                             |                       |                      |
| 4 | N:  | [aa:::rh] naswalija                              | >hapa hapa<           |                      |
|   |     | 1SG:PRS.pray.FV                                  | here here             |                      |

<sup>9</sup> For a full literature review, and an excellent state-of-the-art, see Sidnell and Stivers (2013).

‘I pray right here’

- 5 lakini siku↑o:ni mimi  
but NEG:1SG.O:2SG.see.PRS me  
‘but I don’t see *you* around’
- 6 rafiki [yangu.]  
friend mine  
‘my friend.’
- 7 Fe: [aa] ↑we unaswalia NJE wewe.  
you 2SG.PRS.pray.FV outside you  
‘You pray outside you.’

What immediately catches the eye here is the high level of detail these transcripts provide about timing, overlap, and other delivery characteristics.<sup>10</sup> There is good reason for making transcripts as exhaustive as possible (even though they may never be able to replace the original recording), and this has to do with CA’s *radically emic* perspective. For CA, intersubjectivity is not to be found somewhere “inside the heads” of the participants, but is always located in the publicly available details of the talk. Participants display to each other (and they *inevitably* do so), in their successive turns at talk, how they interpret each other’s

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<sup>10</sup> The excerpt is transcribed according to the transcription system developed by Harvey Sacks’ associate Gail Jefferson, which is generally accepted as the standard for CA transcripts:

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| .           | falling intonation (final)                  |
| ?           | rising intonation (final)                   |
| ,           | continuing intonation (final)               |
| ↑           | sudden mid-turn rise in pitch               |
| ↓           | sudden mid-turn drop in pitch               |
| :           | elongation of a sound                       |
| -           | abrupt interruption of talk                 |
| <u>text</u> | emphasis                                    |
| CAPITALS    | louder than surrounding talk                |
| °text°      | quieter than surrounding talk               |
| >text<      | faster pace of speech than surrounding talk |
| (1.5)       | pause (in seconds and tenths of seconds)    |
| (.)         | micro-pause (shorter than 0.2 seconds)      |
| =           | latching with previous utterance            |
| [text       | start of overlapping talk                   |
| text]       | end of overlapping talk                     |
| ((text))    | description of nonverbal activity           |

For a full overview of the system, see Hepburn and Bolden (2013).



actions (and for us analysts, these public understandings are our main resource for making sense of what is going on in conversation). Hence, the participants are the ones who decide what aspects of behavior are relevant in making sense of conduct, and a priori restrictions on what counts as meaningful therefore run the risk of misrepresenting the actual practices that participants may be utilizing.

This insistence on meticulously capturing the details of speech delivery goes hand in hand with a radical rejection of ethnographic techniques like participant observation and field interviews. The latter are considered an “external”, flawed substitute for what participants actually do when they talk, and hence constitute a violation of the principle that “all is in the talk.” This resolutely emic perspective is also responsible for CA’s at times problematic relationship with EOC. Although initially, EOC was primarily concerned with ritual speech events and CA with spontaneous conversation, both share a commitment to the view that interactional practices actively constitute the social. Linguistic ethnographers also frequently expressed sympathy for CA’s rigorous empiricism and for the new prospects that sequential analysis opened up for rendering intersubjectivity empirically tangible (e.g., Duranti 1997). However, as Lee’s (1991) criticism of the Silversteinian tradition illustrates, this appraisal has not always been reciprocated. Moerman (1988) was the first to utilize CA for an ethnographic inquiry, studying interaction in a society to which he is an outsider (the Lue living in the Northern Thai border area). His work led to an at times acrimonious debate on the extent to which sequential analysis trades on the researcher’s ethnographic familiarity with the data she is analyzing, which “orthodox” conversation analysts purportedly refused to acknowledge (see, e.g., the contributions in Duranti and Goodwin 1992 or the heated exchange between Wetherell 1998, Schegloff 1998, and Billig 1999). Not unexpectedly, the contention that “all is publicly available in the talk” often goes hand in hand with a strong claim concerning the universality and context-independent character of the machinery by which human beings organize their interaction and render it meaningful (e.g., Schegloff 1992).

As the end of the century drew closer, however, this debate gradually subsided. Partially inspired by a growing body of work on interaction on languages other than English (or closely related Indo-European languages) (e.g., Sidnell 2009), and also by studies of interaction mediated by material artefacts (e.g., Nevile et al. 2004), universality became itself a research topic for CA. It is here that the small but steadily growing body of Africanist scholarship on the organization of interaction has its own role to play.

In the first decade of the new millennium, a number of studies appeared that subjected the presumed universality of conversational machinery to empirical scrutiny. Meyer’s (2008, 2010) analysis of videotaped informal conversations at the central square of two Wolof villages in rural Senegal, for example, formulated some interesting amendments to earlier claims about the universality of the turn-taking system. On the one hand, the (male) villagers participating in such village square conversations appear to be continuously monitoring ongoing talk for opportunities to take over the floor, thus apparently respecting the supposedly universal principle of “minimal gap, minimal overlap” (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974). It is customary for these multiparty conversations to split up into parallel sub-threads (which may subsequently reconverge), but in general these schismings and reconvergences are accomplished in a mutually intelligible fashion, on the basis of the

familiar, universally available turn-taking methods that had been described earlier. On the other hand, however, Meyer also documented many occasions where overlap remains unresolved and is left to linger on for an extended period of time. This happens, for example, when two speakers try to take over the floor at the same time (“simultaneous onset overlap”) and both continue to talk rather than one of them giving in. They do so on the assumption that even if the other does not surrender, someone in the wider interactional constellation may be available as a listener. If there is indeed another listener available, such a continued overlap may lead to yet another schisming and the development of a new sub-thread. However, without first ascertaining that this is indeed the case, many overlaps also result in a prolonged soliloquy. According to Meyer, such “deviations” from universal turn-taking machinery can be related to Wolof conceptions of the Self (according to which persistence indicates strength of character), the specific ways in which Wolof speakers use their sensory apparatus for displaying address and reciprocity (e.g., gaze, touch, prosody), as well as the simple fact that so many conversational threads are going on at the same time that one’s status as a participant easily becomes ambiguous.

Other research explores the cultural specifics of action formation. D’hondt (2011) examines the Kiswahili turn-initial particle *ah*, a response cry (Goffman 1978) indexing the speaker’s negative evaluative stance toward something, elucidating the role it plays in the way Kiswahili-speakers format their responses to an action by a prior speaker (so-called “second pair parts”). The object of the stance is recoverable from the sequential environment in which the particle is inserted (and which it helps to constitute in “being recoverable” in this particular way). In lines 2, 4 and 7 of the excerpt above, for example, each speaker in turn uses *ah* for indicating that their respective responses are produced in opposition to the other party’s reprimand (about each other’s alleged failure to live up to religious prescriptions). The analysis of this language-specific interactional object inscribes itself in a wider program for triangulating the local and the universal, which explores how “the generic problems of human interaction [in this case, how to respond to what someone else said in the previous turn] are solved through the mobilization of the eminently local semiotic resources of a particular language in a particular social setting” (Sidnell 2008:479).

Far more ambitious is Dingemanse’s work on how speakers of Siwu initiate other-repair (Dingemanse 2015). Siwu is a small Kwa language spoken in eastern Ghana, and Dingemanse’s analysis of repair is part of a wider cross-linguistic and cross-cultural inquiry into the interactional foundations of language hosted by the Max Planck Institute in Nijmegen (The Netherlands), which involves a comparison of a broad sample of typologically and genetically unrelated languages (e.g., Dingemanse et al. 2014, 2015). Other-repair initiation in Siwu exhibits certain peculiarities relatable to the specifics of the linguistic system, such as the use of restricted repair initiators that exploit the noun class morphology for indicating which item from the previous turn is problematic. However, the direction and overall blueprint of the system, and also the way it is put to use in informal conversation, very much resemble findings for other languages. Observations like these played a crucial role in formulating the *pragmatic universals* hypothesis. The basic idea is that languages may vary in how they organize meaning and grammar, but that this variability is founded on a number of shared systems (e.g., recruiting a response from the next speaker, sorting out communication

problems, etc.) that form “a common infrastructure for social interaction which may be the universal bedrock upon which linguistic diversity rests” (Dingemanse et al 2015:1). Other publications (e.g., Dingemanse 2013) deal with Siwu ideophones and iconicity, and are likewise grounded in the fine details of actual language use.

In addition to such attempts to triangulate what is universal about the way we interact, CA-style analyses of naturally occurring talk can also be used to generate empirical snapshots of how members of a particular society conduct their everyday affairs, and to bring out the lived texture of their day-to-day lives. Conceived in this way, the question is no longer whether or not CA requires ethnography as a necessary complement, CA instead becoming pivotal to the ethnographic enterprise itself (Clemente 2013). D’hondt (2009), for example, brings a CA-informed analysis of informal minibuses in Dar es Salaam, albeit one that draws more on ethnographic observation than audio or video recordings (which were under the circumstances difficult to obtain). It documents the linguistic and embodied practices by which passengers, drivers, and conductors transform a mere material object (a Toyota Hi-Ace minivan) into a fully-fledged *daladala* minibus (e.g., the routines that conductors use for finding out whether the minibus is to drop off passengers at the next stop). As part of this process, *daladala* personnel and passengers concurrently (re)produce multiple understandings of “place” that co-exist side by side. These include, first of all, the sequence of successive stops that serves as the route plan for the journey. On many places, these stops are not physically inscribed in the landscape (as spatial arrangements like bus bays or sign posts are lacking), but are reproduced exclusively through the communicative practices of the participants: passengers announcing their exit within a specifically designated interactional slot (relative to the progression of the journey), prospective passengers queueing at a particular spot along the road, etc. Other relevant understandings of place include the interior of the vehicle (as a site for interaction among passengers and between passengers and personnel), and the “traffic space” which the *daladala* shares with other vehicles on the road. Another example of a distinctly multimodal analysis is Ivanova’s (2013) discussion of Kiswahili directives construed as “quotations” from an imaginary dialogue between the speaker and a non-present hypothetical addressee, for which she uses footage from a Kenyan television broadcast in which an expert panel is asked to comment on the demeanor and performance of participants in a reality show. Through a range of subtle linguistic (speech) and embodied practices (gesture), the panel members doing these imaginary quotes manage a momentary shift, away from the panel interview participation framework, to a projected hypothetical dialogue with a non-present interlocutor (which is hence “quoted” in the television studio). In these hypothetical dialogues, imperatives baldly addressing the imaginary recipient and not prefaced by a reporting verb, come to be imbued with the force of a societal moral norm and hence allow the speaker to display epistemic authority.

In addition to such multimodal research, other researchers set out to examine the participants’ management of sequential organization in conjunction with how they attribute identity categories to one another, which is a valid alternative strategy for bringing out the local in interaction. In CA, the analysis of such situated categorization practices is referred to as *membership categorization analysis* (Sacks 1992). Higgins’ (1997a) account of language alternation among Tanzanian journalists (cf. supra) is a good example of what such an

“integrated” form of CA might look like. Another illustration is D’hondt (1998, 2012), who revisits the same data set that provided the input for his 2011 paper on ah-prefacing for examining how adolescent Islamic revivalists in Dar es Salaam negotiate inconsistencies in their identity repertoire. In the excerpt above, for example, N and Fe treat the activity “being present/not present at prayer” (or arriving late and hence being forced to “pray outside”) as reflexively instantiating the identity category “Muslim.” Their successive assertions that they “failed to notice the other” therefore at once assert their own incumbency of the identity category and dispute their interlocutor’s membership. That data may be reused for different purposes illustrates another advantage of working with recordings and transcripts: It facilitates asking new questions from materials one has been working one before, and it makes it possible to consecutively flesh out parallel layers of interactional organization (in addition to making one’s analyses publicly accessible and allowing others to replicate them). In this case, it also demonstrates the complementarity of explorations into the universality of interactional machinery and CA attempts to bring out the local in human conduct.

As far as the context issue is concerned, most researchers whose work is referenced here would agree that such studies of interaction across cultural contexts should be ethnographically enriched, and that “[r]ecords of interaction are artifacts that for most purposes can only be analyzed with reference to knowledge based on long-term experience in the society” (Dingemanse and Floyd 2014: 457). The second line of work (on minibus interaction, quoted directives, etc.) moreover illustrates that interaction analysis is not solely “dependent” on ethnographic knowledge, but can itself come to constitute a new form of ethnography in its own right. One remaining complication, however, pertains to “the issue of connecting interactional routines to the relevant “communities-of-practice” reflexively enacted through these routines” (D’hondt 2011:566). Talking of “Kiswahili requests,” “repair in Siwu” or “Wolof turn-taking” runs the risk of resuscitating outdated language-culture essentialisms, and fails to take into account the high levels of multilingualism characteristic of many African societies.<sup>11</sup> Dingemanse and Floyd try to avoid this by arguing that their comparative approach is founded on the assumption that “samples [of interaction] recorded in particular communities and particular times [are...] representable *at some tractable level* of a larger social group” (2014: 450, emphasis original). However, without specifying at which level exactly this hardly resolves the issue.

### 16.5 Where do we go from here?

Ideally, studying situated language use in Africa should serve a double purpose. On the one hand, it can provide a window onto the foundations of human communication in general and broaden the empirical base upon which generalizations are founded. On the other, it might also teach us something about the various settings and societies in which the speech events and other instances of discourse under investigation originated. How the three traditions reviewed here manage this tension has been a recurrent thread throughout this chapter. The issue surfaced probably most outspokenly in our discussion of CS, when we talked about the

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<sup>11</sup> Although it may be warranted in the context of research that “involves linking the practices of talk-in-interaction to particular, distinctive aspects of the language being spoken” (Sidnell 2009b: 10).

failure of the MM to account for the emergence of switching and its inability to relate it to specific socio-historical circumstances.

A major “universal” lesson to be drawn here, with all due respect to CA attempts to uncover the presumably universal foundations of human sociality, has to do with the all-pervasive structuring force of the local in shaping situated language use (which is why we did not try to formulate a “comprehensive theory” about the forces that shape situated language use in Africa, let alone trying to identify “distinctly African” forms of communication). Most of the authors whose work is referenced here would somehow subscribe to a view of the social as articulated in the local specifics of situated practice. Nevertheless, there remain some unresolved issues in getting a grasp of the local. For one thing, there is the problem of determining the relevant communities within which a practice “thrives” once one attempts to move beyond the safe territory of established language names, which remains a common challenge that all three traditions reviewed here are facing. In spite of its continued efforts to capture the “raw interactional practice” on which subsequent reifications of language and social life are founded and, related to that, its commitment to a “non-artefactualized” (Blommaert 2008) view of language, the analysis of situated language use nevertheless appears to be still struggling with the inheritance of such artefactualization. The conclusion is that determining how exactly the local relates to a broader social order remains to be decided ethnographically on each specific occasion. The notion of community of practice certainly comes in handy here, as it is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the indeterminacy and scale shifts associated with such openness. There is little to be added at this point, except that the only way forward is to produce more empirical studies exploring the sensitivity of interaction and language use to its local socio-historical circumstances, expanding the range of societies and languages from which empirical materials and ethnographic observations are drawn. It is my sincere hope, then, that others may find in this chapter an invitation to proceed in this direction.

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