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<doi>doi: 10.1558/rcsi.30588

<cat>RESEARCH ARTICLE

<pt>Participation and engagement

<ps>Some possible challenges for research on early social interaction

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<ab>The study of caregiver–child social interaction during infancy and the early years has expanded considerably over the last 30–40 years as a result of technological advances and associated methods of analysis. Through a consideration of recent research on the emergence of participation in social interaction, this paper considers whether sufficient attention is paid to the background presuppositions and assumptions underscoring contemporary approaches in the field. Following introductory comments on different aspects of three perspectives – child-focused conversation analysis; developmental social interaction; and psychosocial formulations – a number of issues, challenges and puzzles are highlighted through an examination of examples from recently presented research. Concluding comments focus on the value of seeking to ensure that the interdependencies between background theory, and data analysis and interpretation, remain a central focus for work on children and social interaction.

<ab>Keywords: participation; engagement; early social interaction

<ha>Introduction

<p1>At a recent conference on language and bodies in interaction (Mondada, 2015) I was invited to contribute a discussant paper summarizing and responding to a series of presentations under the panel title ‘The emergence of participation: A developmental perspective’ (Nomikou & Demuth, 2015). The five papers that were presented covered a range of topics from turn-taking in early mother–infant interaction to the emergence of dialogic meaning in infancy, alongside considerations of affective synchrony and maternal intrusiveness in early turn-taking, cross-cultural analyses of the emergence of musicality and the significance of singing and dancing in caregiver–child interaction among the !Xan (from central Namibia). The task of summarizing the various papers seemed at first relatively straightforward and I spent some weeks reading and reflecting on early drafts of their work. Providing a considered appraisal of the research and the ideas that underpinned the papers become more difficult as I read because of the diverse nature of the approaches. In other words, although all the presenters were focused on participatory aspects of infants’ and young children’s early experiences the background presuppositions informing the theoretical lenses exhibited subtle differences and distinctions. This paper builds on the opportunity my summary task provided by making a number of comments and observations that arose from my deliberations. These I hope will engender reflections on challenges that the emerging field of research on children and social interaction faces, and particularly on our attempts at understanding children’s early social life.

At some risk of overgeneralization, in the study of early interaction as represented in the contemporary work presented at conferences and in related journal publications, there are at least three general approaches or orientations that one can identify, with various sub-themes or genres within each. The first we can call ethnomethodologically informed conversation analysis (EMCA), a second developmental interaction research found in developmental psychology, and a third reflecting psychosocial interaction research, subsuming approaches found in psychoanalytic developmental psychology, infant mental health and related fields in clinical psychology. In order to provide a

background to my reflections and observation some brief comments about these approaches seems appropriate.

<ha>EMCA and the study of caregiver interaction during the early years

<p1>Since the early work by Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) on what constitutes membership (of a culture), child-focused conversational analytic work, of both the sequence-oriented or membership categorization varieties, has worked on illuminating what is involved as children gradually acquire those skills and abilities such that their status as ‘person’ or ‘member’ becomes assured. Becoming a participant and engaging in social interaction is only fully evident when children, to paraphrase Goodwin (2015) demonstrate their understanding to each other. This is achieved through the appropriate display of members’ methods (methodic practices that exhibit reflexive accountability). However membership status is crucially related to mastery of language which itself exhibits a duality—such that a child needs to know what it is to make meanings possible, and at the same time, be in a position to exercise the ability to produce it (meaning). Members of any culture are said to be particularly knowledgeable in orienting to the production, and recognition of doing formulating (i.e. doing the fact that our conversational activities are accountably rational). From a methodological point of view, there is for conversation analysis, as Watson notes,

<ext>the commitment to the inspection of any given single social setting in its distinctively identifying detail and in terms of the specific ‘methods’ through which participants themselves produce a given setting as a sensible phenomenon – sensible, that is, to themselves in the first place. (Watson, 2015, p. 44)

<p1>Given the evidence that it is not until around 3 years that children begin to indicate their recognition of ‘doing formulating’ as an accountable methodic practice when required (Wootton, 1997; Forrester & Reason, 2006), we might wonder what is involved in producing an analytically defensible account of very early caregiver–infant or caregiver–child interaction – from a child-focused conversational analysis (CA) perspective. Occasionally when seeking to document the asymmetric nature of interaction, the term ‘half-membership’ has been used (e.g. Shakespeare, 1998), but not in service of methodological perspicacity, more as a construct to document how children are positioned as ‘children’ during interaction by those around them. Shakespeare (ibid.) pointed out that ethnomethodologists see the concepts of ‘adult’ and ‘child’ not so much as things with an independent existence but as ‘collections of conventions which are used to establish and reinforce non-symmetrical relations between grown-ups and children’ (ibid., p. 56). Outlining what she initially termed half or ‘less-than-full’ membership, Shakespeare argues that because children are not effectively full members, their role in interaction is constructed in terms of them building towards becoming competent individuals where much of their experience is replete with examples from adults concerning how to achieve full membership. Similarly, Hutchby and O’Reilly (2010), when commenting on certain practices during adult–child therapy sessions, note that depending on how whether they are being referred to in the third person or addressed directly, ‘children move from being third party referents in parents’ talk to first-person respondents to that talk, shifting out of their half-membership status in the process’ (ibid., p. 62). Again, consider Watson’s injunction that for conversation analysis:

<ext>The terms, the coherence of the analyst’s approach are set by the fine organization of the object of study as apperceived by participants themselves, not by the organization of an analyst-driven idealization of a set of components composing a mechanical ‘one-size-fits-all’ research method. It is members *in situ* use of methods, not those of the analyst, that counts. (Watson, 2015, p. 44)

However, one important aspect of the work of Hutchby and O'Reilly (2010) and O'Reilly et al. (2016) is that even if you possess the conversational skills indicative of having the ability to produce and recognize reflexively accountable social practices, these may only be part of the competencies and abilities required. In other words, a child participant may possess adult-equivalent performance skills (and display an orientation to the production and recognition of such skills), but nevertheless still not be considered a 'full-member'.

This is the rub then – what does it mean to ground analysis on a participant-oriented perspective when one of the co-participants is not a fully fledged member or participant? One solution is to focus on the interdependence between the ongoing sequentially evident methods and practices of the primary caregiver alongside categories and category-relevant devices that coalesce around the 'omnirelevant' category 'caregiver–child' (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015). The latter are said to permeate the interaction at different levels – but importantly, can remain relevant throughout the whole interaction. This kind of reading of the significance of omnirelevant categorization practices (i.e. a set of background presuppositions, inclinations and assumptions that infuse caregiver–infant interaction) has some affinity with the conception of discourses or discursive practices articulated by Foucauldian discourse analysts. The question remains whether child CA is somehow less convincing if the participant-oriented evidential base is focused initially on one party only. In one sense it is akin to a kind of 'asymmetric' participant-oriented analysis.

For the moment, it is worth noting one additional aspect of the CA work on infancy/early childhood/children and that is the elision of any concern with notions of identification or selfhood, a concept that underpins all other approaches to the study of early social interaction. For conversation analysis the whole idea of a 'developing self' is neither here nor there – that is apart from an interest on understanding the gradual emergence of practices relevant to culturally relevant displays and positionings of personhood during talk-in-interaction. We should also keep in mind that the child-focused conversation analytic approach has taken to task many of the cognitive and social-cognitive presuppositions of early interaction research particularly those that emphasize individuated causality, for example, notions of the significance of intentionality, 'theory of mind' abilities informing and driving interaction scenarios (e.g. Kidwell, 2011; Lerner & Zimmerman, 2003; Keel, 2015).

Developmental interaction research (developmental psychology)

As is well known, in developmental psychology there is a tradition of work that focused on early caregiver–child interaction (primarily mother–child interaction). Historically this emerged out of initial dissatisfactions with the then dominant areas of developmental psychology focusing on infants and children as autonomous entities (i.e. studying the child's development with minimal reference to the interdependence of that development with primary caregivers; e.g. Collis & Schaffer, 1975; Schaffer, 1984). This mother–child interaction research began to incorporate many of the techniques and methods found in observational work from primatology/comparative psychology giving rise to detailed focus on descriptive forms of analysis (amenable to subsequent statistical and formal-analytic analyses). One influential example was the work of Trevarthen and Hubley (1978) who initiated a series of video-informed studies of early mother–infant interaction documenting the previously unrecognized subtle nature of parent–child interaction. The internal psychological development of the infant was conceptualized in terms of emergent neuronal and neuro-psychological system processes, coupled with the evolutionary significance of the infant's predispositions to recognize and respond to human signals.

Certainly what was particularly striking in the early descriptions of what was termed 'primary intersubjectivity' was the synchronous interweaving of contingent-response interactivity between parent and infant. Using delayed-time-frame alteration video-technology it was possible to show that

very brief disruptions to action–response sequences elicited noticeable (and usually disturbing) reactions by infants and their parents. The suggestion was that intersubjective processes are not only important but essential for cognitive processes. For Trevarthen and Aitken (2001), infant survival and development depend on communication with a caregiver to service the baby’s needs for an emotional attachment, ‘but also to maintain and develop an intimate emotionally expressed companionship in changing purposes and conscious experiences’ (ibid., p. 7).

One aspect of social interaction research in developmental psychology, is that unlike child-focused CA approaches, attempts are made at providing specific models or accounts of the infants affective or emotional experience. Reddy (2008) for example formulates what she terms a ‘second-person’ approach to interaction, one that predicates the significance of ‘direct emotional engagement’ within social interaction. In other words, in contrast to traditional ‘first-person’ individuation oriented approaches found in cognitive and social-cognitive developmental psychology Reddy (ibid.) emphasizes the significance of the emotional experience for the infant of a reciprocal response to the other’s acts. The development or emergence of intersubjective awareness (on the part of the infant) is said to involve direct emotional engagement from the start, and that:

<ext>Feeling other minds is itself an emotional process ... Engaging with other minds and becoming aware of them is an emotional process from start to finish. The awareness of attention or intentions or amusement or belief has to involve awareness of emotion. (Reddy, 2008, p. 41)

<p1>Developmental psychology gradually became more convinced of the significance of early interaction for development; that is, for the development of the child’s mind. At the same time it was cognitive development that remained the priority or end goal not social interaction or social relationships *per se*.

<ha>Psychosocial interaction research

<p1>Somewhat in contrast to the two approaches above, psychosocial perspectives on parent–child interaction configure the significance of interaction with respect to the question ‘how does identity emerge at all?’ and/or ‘how is separation accomplished?’ Furthermore, such accounts presuppose the central importance of the realm of (the infants) internal emotional experience from the earliest days. A good example of this approach is represented with Winnicott (1971) who proposed that the infant is not a ‘being’ in any individuated sense of the term during the initial post-natal phase of life. Instead what we have is a mother–infant unit and it is within this postponement environment that the parent gradually makes possible the conditions within which the infant’s ‘separateness’ emerges. Winnicott (ibid.) describes the mother (mother–infant unit) as effectively a containing environment. This isn’t a straightforward social (inter)action perspective, but rather an account of how the infant’s earliest encounters make the formation of a separate identity even possible.

The prevailing idea in this perspective is that the infants’ needs are met and there is (for the child) no awareness of self (or in fact no awareness *per se*). Then through the mother’s gradual introduction of frustration or tension (e.g. making the meeting of the infant’s needs not quite as invisible as they were at the beginning) the infant’s awareness of being an individual being or entity begins to emerge at the limits of what the individual infant can reasonably tolerate (i.e. not too much, not too little). The whole process takes place in the immediacy of mother–infant interaction that is interdependent with symbolization phenomena, understood as encompassing and presupposing all available cultural discourses of the self, and suffused throughout with affect/emotion.

This is not to suggest that the Winnicottian account remains the most important or dominant perspective within infant mental health research or psychoanalytic developmental psychology. However, it does serve as a good exemplar of the underlying theorizing regarding the role and

significance of early social interaction for clinicians and the kind of social-theoretic models associated with ideas of attachment and early affective development. These turn out to be very different from the background assumptions underpinning child-focused CA or developmental social interaction research.

<ha>Reflections and considerations: challenges for the field

<p1>This short detour highlighting aspects of these different approaches should help situate the background to the ideas underpinning the papers in the symposium that initiated this commentary. The aim here is not to provide a detailed description of the various research studies but instead, by looking at a snapshot of contemporary work, draw out certain challenges for research on children and social interaction. Turning briefly to the five presentations, two addressed cross-cultural issues either through direct comparison (Demuth, 2015), or description and observation of children in a rural context (Takada, 2015); one critically reflected on the dynamics of mother–infant interaction in the still-face paradigm through a CA informed analyses of turn-taking sequences (Fantasia, Galbusera & Fasulo, 2015a); another considered how parents engage in action-focused ‘structuration’ turn-taking procedures and creatively interpret infants actions such that dialogic ‘meaning-making’ begins to be exhibited (Nomikou, Rohlffing & Raczaszek-Leonardi, 2015), and a fifth examined the changing nature of the specific time-gaps/overlaps in mother–infant turn-taking during the first few months of the child’s life (Gratier, Guellai & Devouche, 2015b). Commentary here should not be seen as a critique of these presentations and the associated research they draw upon, but instead highlight some of the puzzles, challenges and yet to be addressed issues surrounding the study of early parent-infant interaction. Some of these challenges may be due to our not recognizing the background theoretical position of different research themes.

Beginning with the last paper listed above, Gratier et al.’s work is a good example of contemporary developmental interaction work. Gratier et al. (ibid.) examined the turn-taking sequence of mother–infant pairs between the ages of 3 and 7 months old, looking in particular at latching (i.e. the specific time gaps between turns across participants). The most significant findings reported were that infants as young as 3–4 months infants have an influence on their mother’s vocalization patterns, alongside the observation that boy–mother and girl–mother pairs exhibited distinctly different sequences of interactional synchronicity (mothers vocalizations being longer with boys than with girls which they report as indicating the gender-based representational impact of infant-directed speech, i.e. the mother’s implicit models of gender-appropriate talk). Gratier et al. (2015a, 2015b) note that in contrast to their expectations, they found no evidence that turn-taking ability increases with age between 2 and 5 months, but rather, ‘that infants are active participants in turn-taking from the earliest age and that mothers adjust turn-taking formats to infants’ (Gratier et al., 2015b, p. 12).

Consider how participation and engagement in interaction are configured here. The proposal is that in order to truly engage in co-regulated turn-taking, infants must have ability to perceive contingent relations between their own behaviour and their partner, and that ‘These contingent relations hinge on the perception of timing in social interaction’ (ibid., p. 12). Leaving aside the problems associated with what exactly we mean by being ‘truly engaged’ in turn-taking, what is presupposed here is the significance (or not) of latching itself (i.e. what it may or may not mean to respond immediately to somebody, or instead, if there is a noticeable gap). Within CA for example, the issue ultimately rests on whether or not there are indications that such distinctions are oriented to in a methodic fashion by participants. What strikes me about using latching as an indicator of interactional synchronicity is that time-focused conceptions of turn-taking practices are likely to be related to context specific cultural practices. Gratier et al. (ibid.) themselves draw attention to a previous study they carried out where the duration of switching pauses was found to vary cross-culturally in relation with parenting styles and cultural representations (Gratier, 2003).

In work related to their presentation, and looking at the same mother–infant pairs, Gratier et al.

(2015a) suggest that the slowing down of turn-taking (after 7 months) ‘can be associated with important qualitative changes in social interaction and communicative skills such as joint attention’ (ibid., p. 18). Participation and engagement seems to be intimately linked to criteria for what it is to attend during talk-in-interaction. Latching and attending become interdependent in an important way, and the suggestion is made that the experience of a seamless transition between self-expression and other-expression may reinforce an emerging sense of agency during the first months of life, with latched turns seen as a kind of joint action, ‘where each individual’s actions are coordinated so as to achieve a joint outcome and where each individual’s action cannot be understood in isolation from the others’ (ibid., p. 19).

One question that arises from research of this kind is how we are to understand what it is to experience ‘sensitive or insensitive’ latching. This must depend on how we interpret the question of separation and individuation in the first place. If one assumes that infant individuation or ‘separateness’ exist in some primitive form from the outset then we might envisage or imagine that procedures involving imitation and ‘immediate latching’ initiate for the infant an experience akin to, ‘Oh, you are like me?’. And mirroring experience in an ‘immediate’ way might serve to reduce the infant’s sense of isolation or separateness. Alternatively, if one assumes that the infant has no awareness of ‘being separate’ at all, then one might ask is it the gradual lengthening of the ‘latching’ experience that serves to positioning the infant’s actions as ‘separate’ and intentional? We might notice that as adult speakers immediately latching another’s talk continuously and repetitively could be viewed as a distinctly annoying thing to do. Alternately, the CA literature is redolent with subtle demonstrations of people’s methodic practices when orienting to pause-length across speaker turns (Schegloff, 2007). At the very least it is likely that child-focused CA researchers and developmental psychologists will interpret data on latching in social interaction in quite different ways.

Moving to another opportunity for reflection, in a second presentation, Nomikou and colleagues examined German-speaking mother–infant interaction during everyday childcare tasks (Nomikou et al., 2015). They reported the subtle practices involved whereby the parent ‘produces’ the infant as an engaged participant, particularly through the manner in which they take up the infant’s actions (e.g. changes in eye-gaze or making noises) thus enabling the infant to actively affect the development of the interaction sequence. Here, what was being emphasized was the gradual ‘shaping’ of the interactive episodes such that ‘dialogic’ meaning is created. The prevailing metaphor is of mother–infant social interaction as a ‘system’, and how within this dialogical system, the infant is said to experience their own behaviour as meaningful in some way. Through such experiences they learn to detect the ‘social affordances’ of the potentiating ‘meaning-making actions’ being made available to them.

The proposition is that through consistent repetition, the infant is enculturated into sequentially embedded procedures such that they gradually become participating beings through constant (consistent and sensitively turned) repetition of ‘intention-simulated’ patterns of dialogic-saturated sequential patterns. Nomikou et al. (2015) sought to demonstrate through their example recordings, that the infant is learning how their own actions become interdependent with the actions of co-participants through the mother acting as if the infant’s random actions were in fact intentionally produced affordances for her own actions (responses). The suggestion is that by doing so the mother not only ascribes intentionality to the infant, but in addition, this (initially imaginary) intentionality also constrains her own actions. The infant’s actions are gradually embedded within parent-infant interaction sequences or in other words, culturally shared episodes – re-enacting and reproducing the relevant specific discursive actions, scenarios, forms of talk-in-interaction that exist within, and in fact constitute, the social affordances for any particular culture. It is these discursive practices that children have to learn to orient to, appropriate and ultimately learn to produce such that they make them available to others during social interaction.

Reflecting on this line of research raises interesting questions about participation and interaction. First, we might note the ways in which the minutiae of mother–infant interaction sequences are discursively saturated with culturally-specific models and metaphors of participation and engagement, (e.g. the presupposing and ascription of the infant’s intentionality). It becomes clear that the structuration endemic to these interactions is cultural specific. The child can only gradually become a participant who acquires the skills necessary for displaying ‘intentionality’ in talk-in-interaction by being exposed to those practices which locate, embed and signify what it is to presuppose the existence of intentional action in another (through the mother’s actions). Second, the importance of repetition and consistency implicated in what is required for the child to learn what constitutes an available sequence-embedded social affordance. It would seem that the child’s earliest experiences of the sequential patterning, the affordance-like ‘structuration’ of talk-in-interaction and the exposure to discourse genres permeated with culturally specific narratives of childhood. Third, the correspondence between this systemic-dialogic account of the laying doing of meaning-making and the psychoanalytically informed idea that it is the parent’s desire (for the infant to obtain ‘subjecthood’) which bootstraps the emergence of ego-identity in the infant (Klein, [1936] 1952; Winnicott, 1971). At this point it remains challenging to know how to incorporate the potential significance of the culturally saturated discourses the infant initially experiences without consideration of the role of omnirelevant categorization practices, and understanding the latter as being more informative for child-focused CA research than *in situ* participant-oriented methodological criteria. It isn’t just half-membership that we seem to be dealing with here but the infant as something of a ‘micro-member’. Conceptualizing membership as something more akin to a continuum could be helpful here.

Similar considerations and reflections arose from another paper in the symposium by Fantasia et al. (2015a), who summarized on-going work looking at sequences of interaction between mothers and infants categorized or diagnosed as suffering from postpartum depression. This research re-examined the methods employed in clinical developmental psychology to evaluate mother–infant sequences where the interaction is said to be intrusive or negative and somehow potentially damaging to the infant in both the short and long term (Murray & Cooper, 1997; Moehler et al., 2006). Of considerable importance in the background to infant mental health research was the initial demonstration of the ‘still-face’ paradigm and the associated ideas of Tronick and others (Tronick et al., 1978; Tronick, 2007) known as mutual regulation theory. Deriving initially from psychoanalytic developmental psychology and attachment theory the ‘still-face’ paradigm documented the disruption and discomfort infant’s exhibit when the normal pattern of engagement is interrupted (typically the mother is asked to stop interacting and simply stare at their infant, and the sequence recorded and then coded). Fantasia et al. (2015a) and adopting a CA perspective, presented a methodological critique of the coding scheme – the monadic phase paradigm. This is a standardized system of coding utilized when examining what are termed infant and caregiver engagement phases (ICEP), and categorizing the mother’s behaviour on a dimension ranging from intrusiveness to affective engagement. Fantasia et al. note that mutual regulation theory views mother–infant social interaction as:

<ext>constituted by patterns of reciprocal behaviours ranging from high affective coordination to affective disengagement. Under this account, interaction is a structured system of mutually regulated units of behaviour, as each partner’s behaviour is influenced and coordinated through the behaviour of the other. Tronick and Weinberg (1997) later hypothesized that early difficulties in the experience of sharing and negotiating affects may disrupt the mutual regulatory process. (Fantasia et al., 2015a, p. 13)

<p1>Fantasia et al.’s analysis of example sequences of the talk-in-interaction of these mother–infant

pairs indicates that the concept of intrusiveness remains difficult to substantiate unambiguously (ibid.). They point out that most of the earlier studies have described and measured intrusiveness through single maternal actions (such as for example touching, pulling, tickling) regardless of the ongoing interaction and of the infant's behaviour, and that 'the sequential character of the interaction went missing; namely, there is no record of whether the action of the infant or the caregiver is an initiative or a response, or how the two participants' actions might be otherwise sequentially linked' (ibid., p. 22).

Essentially their aim is to explore whether there are better approaches for examining what might restrict or enhance an infant's participation in interaction (see also Fantasia et al., 2015b). Looking at sequences between mother–infant pairs where mothers were diagnosed as suffering from depression or not, their sequence focused CA informed analysis highlights the fact that while maternal actions might look similar on the surface they differed when more subtle dimensions of behaviour were considered. Through their detailed examination of examples Fantasia et al. highlight the importance for the infant of being exposed to recognisable sequences boundaries, and conversely, potentially problematic scenarios where the infant 'has no affordances for moves in the same activity of the mother, and thus no chance to actively influence the caregiver's actions' (ibid., p. 23). We might note again the metaphor of affordances – here understood as structural patterns of dynamic action recognisable in part because of regularity, repetition and consistency.

What was particularly interesting about this presentation was that on the one hand the analysis provided an important methodological critique of the coding scheme used in this area of child clinical psychology yet at the same time highlighted certain aspects of mother–infant sequences which appeared potentially problematic. This itself is somewhat difficult and, certainly from a strictly participant-oriented child-focused CA point of view, more difficult to substantiate. It might be useful to draw out some of the earlier contrasting theoretical orientations and consider how psychoanalytically oriented developmental psychologists view the mutual regulation model, and the 'still-face' paradigm. Understandably the initial demonstration of the considerable discomfort exhibited by infants (and mothers) during this scenario served as important evidence of the importance of synchronicity and the fine-tuned nature of mother–infant interaction patterns, and in line with notions of primary intersubjectivity. However, from a psychoanalytic developmental perspective, particularly in the work of Melanie Klein, what is going on would be viewed somewhat differently, and the reason why the infant might be so upset is linked to the fact that their unconscious negative fantasies projected towards the mother have for the first time been realized (they have succeeded in destroying her – her stillness equals death). The link between an observed phenomena and how it might be taken up and interpreted is very marked. Note, for example, how Apter (2015), a psychoanalytically informed clinician, describes the significance of the mutual regulation model for mother–infant interaction,² and in doing so articulating what their idea of mutuality might mean:

<ext>Identifying with the infant is a complex process for the therapist because it involves more than infant observation and empathy; it is accomplished in a coregulating process with the mother. The therapist's task is to trigger a bidirectional multidimensional regulating process. To this end, she takes the maternal and infant self and interactive regulation into account, and uses her own self-reflective capacity to elaborate and then enact through both play and verbalization what he or she understands to be happening in the session. One way of doing this is to support the infant in the interaction, while explaining and enacting with the mother what the therapist imagines about the meaning the infant makes of what is happening here and now. In this manner, by simply clarifying what is developmentally and emotionally happening for the infant, the therapist draws maternal attention to the infant and enhances her awareness of her infant's needs. The therapist then links the mother's perception of her baby to what is being felt by the mother here and now, during the interaction being

observed by the participating therapist. (Apter, 2015, p. 421)

Thinking, feeling and being able to imagine what it might be like to experience the infant's 'meaning making' are all part and parcel of how mutuality and mutual regulation is understood here. The positioning and significance of the self is also of central importance in this discourse. By way of contrast again, Fantasia et al. (2015b) suggest that a conversation analytic approach is better able to identify or locate potentially positive or negative aspects of mother–infant sequences because it is a methodology that brings mutuality into the analysis more consistently (than the original coding scheme). Their approach is certainly a more considered and subtle development of the initial coding scheme but we need to be cautious regarding what we understand as consistency, and our assumptions surrounding the significance of mutuality.

The opportunity for considered reflection was also afforded by two final papers in the symposium, given by Demuth (2015) and Takada (2015). In different ways, they addressed the interdependence of musicality and talk-in-interaction by comparing or examining cultural contexts where mother–infant or child–child interaction patterns are somewhat different to those typically reported in the literature. Comparing the everyday interaction between mothers and infant pairs in Germany (Muenster) and Cameroon (the Nso), Demuth (2015) highlights the fact that while in Germany mothers appear to be oriented to the content of what is being said, the Nso mothers were instead much more focused on establishing and monitoring their communication through what is described as a synchronous rhythmic patterning. Employing a CA approach, Demuth (ibid.) reports other striking differences, such that Muenster parents typically follow the lead of the child's activities; orient to and re-produce narration eliciting strategies within dyadic turn-taking sequences; and adopt an interactive style of alternating rhythm. In contrast the Nso mothers are much more focused on actively structuring activities for (and then with) their infants; exhibit turn-taking described as much more 'chorus' like (highly rhythmic and vocally repetitive); and exhibiting very marked synchronous rhythmic movements.

Demuth (ibid.) suggests that repetition (for the Nso mother–infant pairs) serves to establish rapport, and enables the mother to carry on conversation with relatively little effort while at the same time maintaining an ongoing rhythm in the interaction. Furthermore, by socializing children into the habit of rhythmic repetition, Nso mothers prepare their infants for a more general communicative strategy of their society. Demuth notes:

Frequent repetition of the child's name may be related to the child's integration in the community since for the Nso, a name is what gives the child the social integrity and recognition as a community member ... [and while] discursive patterns in the Nso interactions may be semantically less dense, they nevertheless show a dense discourse texture conveying a rich discursive metamessage. (Demuth, 2015, p. 24)

In a related study of infant crying (again highlighting comparisons across these mother–infant pairs in Germany and Cameroon), Demuth, Keller & Yovsi (2012) document very different ways mothers deal with infant displaying of crying – such that very early on in their lives infants and young children of the Nso don't employ crying as a methodic practice (an infant crying is responded to very markedly by Nso mothers who view such behaviour as exceptionally disrespectful and inappropriate – i.e. treating the infant who cries as one who is making something akin to a moral comment – on the mother's skills as a parent!). Demuth et al. (2012) point out that that these diverse discursive strategies 'construct alternative versions of the child's experience of self and self-in-relation-to-others. In each case (Germany and Cameroon) mothers draw on discursive practices that convey cultural norms and values that fit the relevant cultural context' (ibid., p. 1).

In the concluding presentation, and again highlighting the significance of musicality during early social interaction, Takada (2015) documented early caregiver–child interaction among the !Xun from north-central Namibia. Notwithstanding the observation that as infants become young children they spend increasingly less time with their mothers, child–child interaction constituted the most important context for the young infants exposure to the prevailing cultural discourses (similarly documented by Ochs & Schieffelin, 1979). Takada (2015) notes that due to their earlier weaning, !Xun toddlers aged 1–2 years often participate in multi-aged child groups where older children habitually take care of these youngsters. These primary caregivers are typically females in their mid-teens who reside with the youngster (in many cases, an elder sister, older cousin, or mother’s younger sister). When the primary caregiver is unavailable, the next eligible caregiver assumes the role of caregiver (e.g. older children enlist the participation of younger children in multi-aged child groups). Takada’s detailed analysis of the pragmatics of the children’s game activities indicates that singing, dancing and associated drama-narratives are saturated with sound and song (ibid.). In fact singing and dancing activities provide the foundational dynamics for the young child’s learning – and the active imitation observed in the children’s culture is central to the regeneration and creation of their social organization.

What is striking about both research studies like these is the recognition that distinctions between ‘talk’ and ‘song’ or between ‘talk-in-interaction’ and ‘singing and performance’ in early parent-infant interaction require further clarification. We might imagine that from an infant’s perspective one of the earliest social-affordance distinctions they are being asked to pay attention to is that between sound as ‘song’ and sound as ‘talk’. Developmental psychology has long documented the particular sing-song like nature of infant-directed speech (e.g. Papoušek & Papoušek, 1981), and other song-implicated associations, such the manner in which lullabies are often linked with the communication of affect (Rock et al., 1999). More recently developmental social interaction research has started to emphasize the significance of what has been coined communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Communicative musicality is formulated with regards to three sequence-related parameters—pulse, quality, and narrative. To paraphrase their description, pulse is the regular succession of discrete behavioural events through time, vocal or gestural, where the production and perception of these behaviours is the process through which two or more people may coordinate their communications, spend time together; quality is defined as the modulated contours of expression through time, where these contours are said to consist of psychoacoustic attributes of vocalizations – timbre, pitch, volume; and narrative is understood as the bringing together of pulse and quality as ‘narratives’ of expression and intention, where said ‘musical’ narratives, ‘allow adult and infant, and adult and adult, to share a sense of sympathy and situated meaning in a shared sense of passing time’ (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009,10).

Reflecting on these ideas it seems that for developmental psychology underpinning both song and conversation is a predisposition towards communicative musicality, whereas for child-focused CA both song and talk-in-interaction are reflexively accountable members’ methods whose differentiation ultimately rests on the degree to which they are viewed as distinct (or not) in different cultural contexts. Once again we can see the importance of recognizing the distance between contrasting background theoretical accounts to caregiver–child social interaction.

<h4>Concluding comments

<p1>There are specific challenges surrounding the study of social interaction involving children. Drawing out what particular version or account of ‘development’ informing the often descriptively focused research data is both necessary and required, not least so that we are clear about what is being presupposed about developmental indices of emerging skills. At this point, and with the now growing number of CA focused studies of child–child and adult–child interaction we need clarity regarding the

status of ‘participant-oriented’ evidence given the problematic nature of studying those who are only gradually acquiring those skills necessary for the display and recognition of reflexively accountable action. Are we compelled to rest much of our evidence of a kind of ‘asymmetric’ participant orientation (in the very early months of infancy)? Further thought about the correspondence between omnirelevant membership categorization activities during sequences of caregiver–child interaction and culture-specific discourses surrounding childhood would be helpful here.

Being clear about what we mean when we use terms such as mutuality, synchronicity, engagement, participation, becomes increasingly necessary when we turn a conversational analytic lens on the everyday activities of parents and children, caregivers and infants. It does not take a leap of imagination to recognize that were one to adopt a mutual regulation theory perspective when examining everyday sequences of the Cameroonian Nso mothers with their infants, then they too might be classified as ‘intrusive’ parents. Likewise, although it might seem that the construct of a ‘latching-turn’ serves as the basis for indicative measures of the development of turn-taking, we again run into the danger of failing to recognize that such constructs presuppose what we understand as a ‘normal’ turn during talk-in-interaction.

It is also interesting to recognize some unlikely yet evident parallels across apparently distinct perspectives. The micro-examination of what might constitute ‘social affordances’ and how they are brought into existence through the parent’s initial actions seems to accord with psychoanalytic developmental psychology formulation of the significance of desire (the parent’s – for the ‘yet to be’ infant to attain personhood), understood as finding expression through processes of projective identification. What does seem to matter is recognizing how we model the assumed ‘existential/experiential’ status of the infant from the beginning. We might assume separateness and then institute a discourse of how communication between ‘mind-entities’ gradually emerges, or instead take the view that separateness is brought into place by the exigencies of the circumstances – and adopt the notion that the mother/parent helps initiate the process whereby ‘out of one comes two’ or ‘how two emerge out of one’. Being clear about the manner in which particular background presuppositions and assumptions inform our attempts at understanding early social interaction remains a significant challenge for research on children’s social interaction.

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<ha>Notes

1 During a plenary talk at the conference Chuck Goodwin noted that one criterion for defining participation is that it involves participants ‘demonstrating their understanding to each other’.

2 When seeking to teach depressed mothers how to interact more positively with their infant children.

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