The Routledge Handbook of Language and Dialogue

The Routledge Handbook of Language and Dialogue is the first comprehensive overview of the emerging and rapidly growing sub-discipline in linguistics, Language and Dialogue. Edited by one of the top scholars in the field, Edda Weigand, and comprising contributions written by a variety of likewise influential experts, the Handbook aims to describe the history of modern linguistics as reasoned progress leading from de Saussure and the simplicity of artificial terms to the complexity of human action and behaviour, which is based on the integration of human abilities such as speaking, thinking, perceiving, and having emotions.

The book is divided into three sections: the first focuses on the history of modern linguistics and related disciplines; the second part focuses on the core issues and open debates in the field of Language and Dialogue and introduces the arguments pro and contra certain positions; and the third section focuses on the three components that fundamentally affect language use: human nature, institutions, and culture. This handbook is the ideal resource for those interested in the relationship between Language and Dialogue, and will be of use to students and researchers in Linguistics and related fields such as Discourse Analysis, Cognitive Linguistics, and Communication.

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The Routledge Handbook of Language and Dialogue

Edited by Edda Weigand
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Preface

Turning Points in Linguistics: From Language to Language Use and Dialogue

The Routledge Handbook of Language and Dialogue aims to give an overview of the whole history of modern linguistics, starting with de Saussure and arriving at the present state of the art. The goal is not only to describe but also to explain what happened. Explaining presupposes that the historical sequence of schools in modern linguistics not only represents an arbitrary sequence of events but can at least to some extent be justified by internal reasons. The reasons are considered to be turning points of reflection, and evidence that certain schools of thought have come to an end, thus compelling scientists to change direction if they wanted to move forward in their search for progress.

To meet such a goal represents a huge challenge, considering the multiplicity of approaches developed during the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Plurality of models, however, cannot mean giving up reasoning. On the contrary, a plurality of models means we have to reflect, to compare and to ask, for instance, why some models can be called orthodox or outdated from our current point of view, or why others are not well-founded or inconsistent. Such a critical stance constitutes the thread that runs through the whole handbook. I think that progress in science has indeed been made, even if not immediately and clearly visible and often called into doubt. Having experienced the sequencing of different schools in my academic life, from structuralism via generative grammar to pragmatics and dialogue analysis, I personally could observe how underlying questions changed and provoked a paradigm change in theory and analysis. These turning points are the pillars that bear the structure of this handbook.

Obviously these pillars depend on our view of the object ‘language and dialogue’. The whole history of modern linguistics can be seen as a history of attempts to grasp this object which first meant language in abstraction, then proceeded to a concept of language as natural language use and eventually addressed use as dialogic action. These changes in the object are, of course, connected with changes in methodology and the basic question of the correlation between object and methodology. What should the starting point of science be: methodology or the object? Defining the object by abstraction results in an artificial methodology. When we are confronted with a natural object of use, that means that we are confronted with multiple purposes of use and an extreme variability of empirical means. This calls for a change in methodology from reductionism to holism, from constructing patterns to uncovering the ‘architecture of complexity’.

The basic impulse that kept me alive in the scientific struggle between different schools was always the desire and pleasure of finding what constitutes language. In this search for
an adequate answer to this crucial question of linguistics, I met Franz Hundsnurscher, who was my teacher for a long time and a life-long friend. I am very grateful to him for the never-ending discussions we had on fundamental questions even if, at some point, I left his way of thinking in patterns and started my own way in the adventure of the complex.

It goes without saying that I am also grateful to many other colleagues and friends. I will not attempt to list their names as it would of necessity be an open list. I would like to thank the community of scientists who are truly interested in their subject matter, many of them members of the ‘dialogue family’ but also many others from other disciplines who helped me find my way in the stormy sea of competitive approaches. In the end the fundamental question of what constitutes language requires us to go beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries and join genuine like-minded friends, all searching for the unity of knowledge. Our object is not only language but language embedded in human dialogic action and behaviour.

Finally, I want to extend a particular thank you to Kathrene Binag and her colleagues from the Routledge Publishing Company, for their precision, efficiency and kindness in carrying through the formal editorial and printing process.

Edda Weigand
October 2016
Intersubjectivity in Dialogue

Per Linell

Intersubjectivity has [...] to be taken for granted in order to be achieved.
(Rommetveit, 1974: 56)

7.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses the concept of intersubjectivity and its relation to dialogue. I will argue that intersubjectivity is hardly a monolithic notion, but rather a family of related concepts. I shall elaborate on various forms and aspects of intersubjectivity in both wider philosophical contexts and more local empirical contexts.

7.2 Intersubjectivity and Alterity
Intersubjectivity can be defined in many ways. For example, Gillespie and Cornish (2009) provide at least six definitions. In this context, we can start by defining intersubjectivity as the relations in terms of similarities and differences within a constellation (e.g. in a communication situation) or a group/community of people, with regard to their knowledge, opinions, interests, feelings and preferences. Intersubjectivity is often thought of in terms of agreement, commonality and sharedness, but such general assumptions will turn out to be inadequate, except for quite special circumstances. As we will discover soon, intersubjectivities are usually partial, and penetrated by discrepancies and sometimes important differences between the participants involved.

Nonetheless, preliminary accounts of intersubjectivity often home in on shared understandings among participants in the situation or community involved. Many scholars have taken intersubjectivity as a necessary assumption or a definitional point-of-departure for successful communication. For example, Clark (1996) has talked about “common ground” and Schegloff (1991) about “shared social cognition” as the prerequisites and goals of talk-in-interaction. One type of common ground would be general assumptions about the world and proper interpersonal conduct, what one may call “common sense”. In addition, interlocutors must surely enter the conversation with something in common with regard to the topics raised, and their interaction will normally serve to increase the range of sharedness.
Accordingly, Clark talks about the successive establishment of “common ground” as ‘grounding’. Yet, the assumptions of commonality and sharedness must be duly qualified. Several scholars have pointed out that there is almost never any completely shared understandings, simply because people have divergent biographies and sometimes disparate interests. Garfinkel (1967, especially chapter 1) insists that it is meaningful only to talk about “sufficient” understandings for current “practical purposes”. There are no fixed interpretations of situated messages beforehand. Instead, participants need to add some pragmatic specifications ad hoc (Garfinkel, 1967: 21f).

Taylor (1992), in his book *Mutual Misunderstanding*, developed a detailed argumentation for an attitude of profound scepticism towards any assumption of common perspectives or shared understanding among people communicating with each other, and this holds across situation types and different media such as face-to-face interaction and written communication. A language is not a code of fixed signs with static links between expression and content. Rommetveit (1974) too, while arguing that intersubjectivity is a basic notion in dialogue theories and that it “must be taken for granted in order to be achieved”, underscores that intersubjectivities are confined to occasional, only temporarily sustained and partially shared social worlds (Rommetveit, 1974: 29). Bakhtin (1986) proposes that dialogue builds upon “alterity”, that is, the “other” arrives with, or invokes, partly different (“alien”) perspectives, knowledge, experiences, interests and feelings other than those that the speaker entertains beforehand. The speaker can of course (partly) incorporate some of these perspectives, and the parties can get closer to one another’s understandings. However, the reverse can also happen.

Parties to a dialogue normally do not share assumptions and understandings in anything like a complete manner; rather, in successful communication, there must be a substantial, or occasionally nearly “perfect” (Rommetveit, 1974: 29), complementarity between perspectives; people share framings of the situation they are involved in, but they bring different (“complementary”) knowledge and understandings to bear on the exchange, so to speak trading on each other’s truths. The addressee’s perspective is partly exhibited in her verbal or nonverbal responses; these represent the “visible cognitive life of the hearer” (Goodwin, 2017: 00). According to Goodwin, we should think of intersubjectivity as a “contingent achievement of relevant intersubjectivity” (2017: 00). Goodwin argues that intersubjectivity is (a) culturally and locally co-determined (rather than given), (b) contingent on dynamic conditions (that may change from moment to moment), (c) achieved (rather than postulated or assumed), and (d) relevant for current purposes only. To this we may add Rommetveit’s point that it is usually only partially shared among participants.

### 7.3 Alterity, Polyphony, Heteroglossia

Intersubjectivity is not automatic, inevitable or complete (except perhaps in some forms of primary intersubjectivity; see Section 7.5). The other, whoever (s)he is, is not quite like oneself. Hence, as said, dialogical theories are very much about *alterity*, the role of the other as being different from self. Relatedly, communication is not always about striving for mutual understanding or consensus; parties may have different interests, knowledge, intentions, or limited willingness or practical opportunities to disclose all their ideas, thoughts, intentions, feelings, and so forth. Sharedness, commonality, reciprocity and mutuality are therefore partial. Instead of complete understandings, we aim for understandings, and intersubjectivities, that are sufficient for current practical purposes (Garfinkel, 1967).

We can therefore say that intersubjectivities in the social world involve both partially shared premises and some mutually strange ideas. This is the nature of being with one
another (what Heidegger called *Mitsein*). Others are always different from oneself in some respects, and they always come with at least partly different perspectives. As a speaker, self can often anticipate reactions of the other; objections, evaluations and points-of-view of the other, and thus; often he become aware of such differences in and through the interaction. This is a cornerstone of classical Bakhtinian dialogism.

Alterity provides a dialogical counterpoint to dominant monological theories of commonality and sharedness, in which the essence of communication resides in making knowledge and attitudes entirely common (Latin *communicare* literally means ‘making things common’). In addition to alterity, Bakhtin also assumes that there can occur more profound differences, which are hard or even impossible to overcome: “outsideness” (Russian *vnenakhodimost*; Bakhtin, 1986; Emerson, 1997: 207ff).

Alterity is related to at least two other foundational ideas in Bakhtin’s dialogism: *heteroglossia* of linguistic communities, and *polyphony* of discourse. Specific dialogues, discourses and texts contain several “voices”. The concept of *voice* is here intended to invoke several aspects, including, in particular, personal signature and perspective on topic (Bertau, 2007). However, a single utterance or text produced by a single person is also often “multi-voiced”, since the author (speaker, writer) cannot help being influenced by others (in accepting or countering their contributions), and (s)he actively includes explicit or implicit ‘quotes’ (in a broad sense) from others. Accordingly, a person’s thinking can also be regarded as an ‘internal dialogue’ which accommodates others’ ideas or prior utterances (there may be explicit or implicit instances of “reported speech”; Voloshinov, 1973). Thus, the dialogical self houses many partly different voices defining what Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) call different “I-positions”. Such a conception may be compatible with a ‘postmodern’ split self, but dialogism might prefer a notion of a contextually sensitive self with some coherence over time.

If “polyphony” (or “multivoicedness”) primarily applies to specific individuals and their discourses, there is a corresponding mixture of perspectives and tensions between viewpoints at the collective level, in or between groups, professions, communities and societies. This phenomenon is usually referred to as heteroglossia.

We should realise that there is a positive value in alterity and heteroglossia, in the lack of complete intersubjectivity. Without differences, there would often be little point in communicating (e.g. Linell and Luckmann, 1991). Asymmetries of knowledge are a driving force in social interaction (e.g. Heritage, 2012), and we can learn from others and outsiders.

### 7.4 Intersubjectivity and Trust

The points of alterity and polyphony might seem to be difficult to reconcile with Rommetveit’s above-mentioned dictum: “Intersubjectivity has to be taken for granted in order to be achieved”, which seems to build upon striving towards sharedness. Intersubjectivity is depicted as both premise and outcome of dialogue and interaction. But how can something that has not yet been achieved be, at the same time, taken for granted at the very outset? What is at stake here is that participants need some common premises in order to enter into communication (including sufficient trust in each other, see below), and that this is necessary for intersubjectivity at more concrete levels to be developed in and through the interaction.

A reasonable interpretation of Rommetveit’s proposal would involve the notion of *trust* which penetrates all human relations. Trust and its opposite, distrust, come to life—and are made crucially relevant—when we engage in actual interaction. Trust basically means that,
despite the fact that we can never be certain about most circumstances in the world (including those having to do with the other’s intentions, knowledge and competence), we have to act on the premises that the world will turn out to remain normal and that we can rely on the likelihood that others to not do us any harm (of course, only as long as we do not discover evidence to the contrary). That is, we must trust that there is some common ground to begin with, if we want to achieve more reflected types of intersubjectivity, for example, through negotiations or through bringing something into language. As Linell and Marková (2014a, 2014b, and references there) argue, this shows that there is a close relationship of interdependence between intersubjectivity and trust: we need to take a lot for granted, take it as shared (i.e. as, by and large, intersubjectively valid), even though most of it we cannot know for sure. Trust and distrust are therefore phenomena closely linked to dialogicality; they are at the same time elusive and ubiquitous in human existence.

In the subsequent section, it will be pointed out that there are several levels of intersubjectivity, which differ in the degree of awareness and other dimensions. One distinction, with intermediate degrees, concerns taken-for-granted (unreflected) intersubjectivity versus reflected intersubjectivity.

7.5 Forms of Intersubjectivity: A Developmental Theory

Intersubjectivity takes many forms, which can partly be correlated with different stages of development. Trevarthen (1979, 1998) distinguishes between at least three forms: primary, secondary, and tertiary intersubjectivity.

At first, we find primary (immediate, direct, unreflected, authentic, “genuine”) intersubjectivity between an infant and a carer in an ‘I–thou’ relationship. Here, it would not make sense to talk about shared (cognitive) understanding of things; rather, we have prelogical and pre-propositional interactions (Duranti, 2010: 8). This supports the contention that interactivities are more basic than intersubjectivities (see Section 7.9).

Primary intersubjectivity involves little of individual subjectivity on the part of the infant. But the infant–carer interactivities build on several dialogical prerequisites:

(a) the infant has a biologically induced disposition for interaction and mirroring,
(b) the infant arrives in a world that is already inhabited by and meaningful for the adult partners, and
(c) these carers usually treat infants and children as if they understand more than they actually do.

The first levels of intersubjectivity are further theorised by Zlatev (2013). With the advent of shared attention to external objects (a third entity intervening in the interaction: the ‘object’), there will be (what Trevarthen calls) secondary intersubjectivity (‘I–thou–it’).

Still later, there is tertiary intersubjectivity, when participants start to address peripheral others (so-called third parties). The primary participants in the communicative encounters might then work with a “split” attention, with a “sideward glance” (to speak with Bakhtin) to third parties and remote others; not only ‘I, thou/you, and it’ but also ‘we/they’, i.e., “bystanders” and “generalised others”. Once we have interactional language at our disposal, we can have subjectivities enhanced by thinking and supported by written language (which is of course indirectly intersubjectively based). Intersubjectivities will now involve many more forms of partially shared knowledge of the world, and in addition to addressivity and responsivity, also other kinds of contextuality and feelings for genre differences. In the end,
the tertiary stage includes virtually all available cultural forms, civilisations and literacies of late modernity.

The third (tertiary) level—largely also Bråten’s (2007) notion—is complex with many dimensions; indeed, it might be better to talk about several “higher” levels (rather than just one “third” level), provided that “higher” need (must) not be taken to mean “better than the first or second levels”. Intersubjectivity in communicative projects (episodes) or cognitive events (Steffensen et al., 2010: 215) involves internal dialogue (see Section 7.8). Vygotsky (1978) describes internal dialogue as a further and later development of external interaction. He also talks about forms of intersubjectivity in different stages and at different levels of (ontogenetic, socio-historical, micro-interactional) development/genesis. In this context, one might mention our abilities to talk about imaginary objects and happenings, to joke, to cheat and lie, and to use language for various literary purposes. These activities obviously presuppose forms of intersubjectivity, and often literacy.

Despite the fact that forms of intersubjectivity emerge at different developmental stages, they can sometimes live side by side in adult life. Kinds of primary intersubjectivity can be accessed also later in life. Adults can in exceptional cases establish dyadic high-intensity embodied contact. Hodges (2011) refers to exceptional instances of conversational contact involving ‘flow’ or ‘lostness’ (“lost in the moment”): “a fabulous conversation over a great meal with friends illustrates such unselfconscious disclosure. Even the burden of time seems absent. The experience is even like “a taste of heaven”, says Hodges (2011: 152). Such situations can also be exceptionally close and mutually attuning. Another case might be certain intimate erotic situations, with lovers being blind to the outside world. Or two dancers or several people in musicking totally engrossed in their activities. Primary intersubjectivity is usually considered to be more “authentic”, yet it is culturally penetrated too.

Intersubjectivities can be disturbed in more fundamental, and abnormal ways. We can look at aberrations like ADHD and autism as disturbances of dialogicality. Another aberration is extreme egoism and Machiavellianism, which are forms of very monologising attitudes.

7.6 The “Problem of Other Minds”

Intersubjectivities presuppose that the human mind is social (Valsiner and van der Veer, 2000), that is, that human beings are a social species, interacting with others for substantial parts of their time awake and learning to understand the world largely by observing and talking with other persons. An opposite to this assumption can be found in the theory of mind named itself “Theory of Mind” (ToM) (sic!; see e.g. Leslie, 2000), which is based on the assumption that individuals have great problems finding out what others think, feel, intend, want, mean, and so forth. It does not start out from assumptions of intersubjectivity in the human mind (Zlatev et al., 2008a); instead, for ToM theorists it is a (great) problem how individual minds can understand other minds (“the problem of other minds”). The extreme interpretation of such a position is solipsism.

In other words, ToM is an exceptionally clear example of an individualist-monologist theory of a phenomenon (mutual social perception and understanding, primarily through interaction) that is in actual fact eminently “dialogical” in nature. The alternative dialogist theory, or an “embodied ‘Interaction Theory’ of social cognition” (Gallagher and Hutto, 2008: 17), would see the understanding of others’ minds as more or less “direct” and an outgrowth of interactional, embodied practices—practices that are from the innate start “emotional, sensory-motor, perceptual and non-conceptual” (Gallagher and Hutto, 2008: 20). Gallagher (2011) notes that embodiment, in its full sense, is linked to interaction and intersubjectivity.
ToM has been criticised in fundamental ways by many dialogically-minded scholars; see in particular Gallagher and Hutto (2008) and other articles in Zlatev et al. (2008a), Leudar and Costall (2009), De Jaeger et al. (2010), and references there. Some points can be summarised as follows.

ToM constitutes an attempt on the part of cognitivists to tackle social interaction and others’ cognitions. Cognitivism is a theoretical approach within cognitive science which, briefly put, assumes the following:

(a) cognition consists in information processing; representation and modelling are therefore central concepts;
(b) cognition takes place in the brain (it is ‘intracranial’); the mind is ultimately assumed to be entirely reducible to brain functioning;
(c) cognition is an individual (rather than social) activity; there are no collective minds that could process information.

ToM appears in two primary forms (Gallagher and Hutto, 2008: 18). The main variant assumes that understanding the other presupposes a theory of the other: “theory theory of mind” (TToM). Since we cannot directly perceive or understand what the other is up to, one’s self (or rather: mind/brain) has to make indirectly based inferences about what the other may have in mind. If, according to TToM, a person has a ToM, this is localised in a particular module of the brain. TToM has therefore strong similarities with Chomskyan modular theories of language (Language Acquisition Device, Universal Grammar). The other interpretation of ToM is the “simulation theory”. This does not involve a “theory” of the other; rather, one somehow simulates, or empathises with, the other’s situation, doings and thoughts. When I discuss ToM below, I deal primarily with TToM.

ToM treats the mind of the other as something completely concealed, inside the skull, something about which one must develop “theories”—but normal social interaction supplies rich information about the other’s thoughts, reactions, intentions, emotions, doings, and this applies a fortiori to interaction directed to and co-constituted with infants and children. In most social interactions, the mind is thus partly on display; in other words, we live in a common life-world (e.g. Zlatev et al., 2008b: 3) and can “directly” observe a lot of “mental states” (Sharrock and Coulter, 2009: 66). Meanings, trust/distrust and moral stances are “displayed, and made visible and ascribable on the basis of actors’ actions and discourse” (Jayyusi, 1991: 243), thus, participation is more basic than intention. Others’ intentions leak out, that is, intentional behaviour can be observed by second or third persons. Of course, people (except young children) can lie, betray others, have secrets and fake trust and intentions, but this is not the default case, especially not with children.

In addition, as already indicated, we talk about thoughts, feelings, intentions, and so forth (see Taylor, 2013, on these metadiscursive practices), often in the presence of observable evidence. Schegloff (1991) comments on “the socially shared world” and the role of interaction: “our understanding of the world and of one another is posed as a problem and resolved as an achievement, in an inescapably social and interactional context” (1991: 168; compare Trognon and Batt, 2010: 18).

ToM has dealt mainly with children’s developing abilities to find out about other minds. Much research has focused on experiments inducing “false beliefs” in young children. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss these experiments (see contributions to Leudar and Costall, 2009). However, that the mind is concealed, and especially intentionally...
concealed, from others in the real social world mainly applies to specific situations, usually involving adults rather than small children:

(a) somebody is engrossed in solo thinking or silent reading or listening, situations in which little of the content of one’s thoughts is disclosed (or can be disclosed, for practical or cultural reasons);
(b) somebody is involved in wilfully trying to conceal something from the other, cheating or lying; hence, wilful or intended deception is the problem, not normal social interaction.

It seems that ToM takes, in effect, cases like (a) and (b) to be basic in human existence, rather than (as we would argue) exceptional. Thus, contrary to ToM suppositions, the issue is more about concealing (and gradually becoming accustomed to concealing) what we know, believe, feel, and so forth; it is not primarily, as ToM argues, about unobservable mental states. This is of course not to deny that there are aspects of thinking and feeling that are largely inaccessible to others. Some are in fact inaccessible to ourselves as well, pace Freud and others.

Intentions are derived and ascribed on the basis of direct observation of others, and on talk about actions. Monologism, for example, ToM, puts things upside down, deriving meaning from intentions.

7.7 Intersubjectivity as a Property of Interpersonal Interaction

Interactivities can be regarded as the situated occasions in which persons work for and demonstrate their intersubjectivity. Rommetveit (1974) talked about “the architecture of intersubjectivity” with reference particularly to interactions, especially in and through talk. Any study of actual talk-in-interaction will demonstrate that there are plenty of reflections of self–other interdependencies (Linell, 2017). Here I will discuss such aspects of manifest sociodialogues under two headings: Global Units, and Local Reflections.

7.7.1 Self–Other Interdependencies I: Global Units

When people enter a potential communicative exchange, they have to make assumptions about what situation type and communicative active type it represents, and these assumptions must be reasonably congruent. Situations when people meet face-to-face, what we might call ‘social occasions’, can be categorised. Goffman (1971: 13) gives examples like “weddings, family meals, chaired meetings, forced marches, service encounters, queues, crowds, and couples”. People don’t approach situations as if they are entirely novel. Instead, they have expectations of “what might happen here”. Goffman (1974: 8) explains:

I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: “What is it that’s going on here?” Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand.

Goffman goes on to introduce concepts like ‘frames’ and ‘situation definitions’:

[M]uch use will be made of Bateson’s use of the term “frame”. I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern
events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. (Goffman, 1974: 10–11, italics added)

Scheff (2006: 76) comments that “[t]he definition of the situation is the actors’ largest subjective response; frames are part of this subjective structure”. In this context we might prefer the attribute “intersubjective”. Other terms for these structures are activity type (Levinson, 1992) or communicative activity type (Linell, 2010). Levinson (1992: 69) mentions such examples as “teaching, a job interview, a jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party, and so on”.

John Gumperz, pioneer in interactional sociolinguistics, talks in the same vein:

My basic assumption is that all understanding is framed understanding, that it ultimately rests on contingent inferences made with respect to presuppositions concerning the nature of the situation, what is to be accomplished and how to be accomplished. The term activity can be seen as a cover term to suggest what these presuppositions are. (Gumperz, 1992: 43; italics added)

Knowledge of the conversational activity entails expectations about possible goals or outcomes for the interaction, about what information is salient and how it is likely to be signalled, about relevant aspects of interpersonal relations, and about what will count as normal behavior. (Gumperz, 1982: 101)

Accordingly, the gestalt properties of situation types provide a good deal of intersubjectivity to spoken interaction. They are the glue that binds situations together. Scholars have provided a variety of terms for these phenomena: for example, speech genres (Bakhtin, 1986), communicative genres (Luckmann, 1986), joint activities (Clark, 1996), activity types (Gumperz, 1982; Allwood, 2000; Sarangi, 2000) and dialogue games (Weigand, 2010).

7.7.2 Self–Other Interdependencies II: Local Reflections

Bakhtin (1981: 293) suggests that “the word in language is half someone else’s”. This thesis refers both to speakers’ dependences on their prior communicative biographies, and to their relations within specific situated interactions. Irrespective of whether quotes from others’ contributions are due to unreflected routine or are carefully intended, they show that participants are dependent on one another. When we borrow words from our interlocutors, we make them co-authors of our own utterances.

A single example from Du Bois (2009: 11), from a therapy session, will have to suffice in this context (see also updated version in Du Bois 2014):

(1) (Deadly Diseases SBC015)¹
1. Lenore: so your mother’s happy now.
2. (0.2)
4. [my mother wouldn’t be happy if] everything was g-
5. Lenore:  [excuse me hhh ]
6. Joanne:  hrmn everything was **great**, and **everything is** **great**.

In line 1, Joanne and the therapist Lenore use the same words (‘mother’, ‘happy’; possessive pronouns: ‘your/my’) inserted in a predicative construction (with an inflected form of ‘be’) three times in lines 1, 3 and 4. In lines 6 and 7 (and in the interrupted line 4) Joanne repeats her own words ‘everything’ and ‘great’. Du Bois calls such lexical (and other) similarities across contributions ‘affinity’ between adjacent utterances. Such inter-turn links may be used to emphasise agreement and consensus, or difference and competition, depending on co-texts and prosodies, among other things. For example, in line 1 Joanne completely opposes Lenore’s suggestion (line 1), yet recycles the same words. In terms of M. Goodwin’s (1990: 177ff.) related notion of ‘format tying’, the partial repetition of others’ utterances is used mainly for competitive purposes (Goodwin is particularly concerned with ritual insults among young Black girls).

Thus, interactions, whether entirely friendly or slightly competitive, turn out to be co-actions and joint projects (Clark, 1996). A question like “Who came up with that idea?”, intended to refer to a particular topic, can often not be given an individual-based answer. A sociodialogue is not a series of self-sufficient actions by mutually independent, autonomous individuals; rather, it is a sequence of several persons’ contributions to a more or less coherent joint project.

The mutual accommodations between interlocutors do not only concern the choice of words. They can involve the choice of language (when several languages are at the disposal of participants), and the attenuation (or sometimes accentuation) of dialectal differences, as was demonstrated in speech accommodation theory (Giles and Smith, 1979). Under friendly conditions, these may be expressions of mutual alignments, and even consensus and agreement.

At a more detailed syntactic level, we find a lot of structural dependencies that help both speaker and listener in keeping track of an emergent utterance. In uttering some initial words the speaker projects more to come. The choice of a particular construction will anticipate what sorts of things may be upcoming (Auer, 2005). Syntactic and pragmatic projections may lead to units being produced collaboratively by two (or even more) participants. Let us look at an example of such a ‘collaborative completion’ (from Lerner, 2002: 227):

(2)
1. Rich:  if they come en’ pick it up
2. it’ll co[st yah
3. Mike:  [they charge yuh

Here, Rich, starting on an ‘if–then’ construction in line 1, comments on what will happen if a customer commissions a firm to transport something away. Lerner gives no additional context, but even the example stripped of this will allow us as readers (and the participants in situ) to expect an apodosis segment to follow the protasis part issued in line 1. (An explicit ‘then’ item is omitted from the beginning of line 2.) But Rich begins on an apodosis in line 2, but breaks off as his interlocutor contributes an alternative completion (line 3). In this example, the projection is both syntactic (the ‘if–then’ construction is bipartite, consisting of an initial protasis (condition) followed by an apodosis (consequent)) and pragmasemantic (“it’ll cost you” and “they charge you” meaning nearly the same).
In other cases, the completion could be partly competitive. In the following example from Szczepek (2000: 8): “Ken and Joe are telling a third person about a doctor whose diagnosing practices they both strongly disagree with. It is Ken who is directly affected by them as he suffers from a yet undiagnosed disease. Both participants have mutual knowledge of the incident discussed.”

(3) (Transcription slightly modified in relation to Szczepek, 2000: 8)
1. Ken: he just did a blood test.=
2. =and said yeah well your blood’s all shot;=
3. =and you have the liver of a ninety year old, .hh
4. uhm –
5. [and I w- AND I AND I THINK–
6. Joe: [DO YOU DRINK?
7. AND HE DOESN’T [DRINK.
8. Ken: [AND I THINK–
9. and I think uh::--
10. you you picked up some uhm [(.
11. Joe: [ººvirus.ºº
12. Ken: virus,

Ken reports what the doctor said and begins listing the results from his blood test using list intonation (lines 2 and 3), but seems to have problems with retrieving the right words for the third list item (lines 4 and 5 and 8 and 9), which makes it possible for Joe to intervene (lines 6 and 7). However, Joe’s contribution does not seem to be the one Ken wants; unlike in most instances of other-completion there are no signs of concurring. Instead, Ken continues his word search from line 5 in lines 8 and 9, and then starts on an alternative of his own (line 10; note that “you” here refers to Ken, as allegedly talked about by the doctor). In this second phase (lines 8 to 12), Joe also makes a completion (line 11), which is taken up as cooperative and is affirmed by Ken (line 12). Thus, Joe’s ‘deviant’ (competitive) list item (line 6) becomes an isolated piece (the irrelevance of which is stated by Joe himself in line 7). The episode as a whole is clearly cooperative, and this holds for Szczepek’s data in general.2

There are many dependencies in interactional languaging that may generate syntactic projections, not only bipartite constructions (as in ‘if–then’; Günthner, 2011) and lists.

Another kind of example is the peculiar Swedish construction initiated by two initial finite modal verbs, as in the following authentic example3:

(4) Two persons A and B are looking at a rather rough coast-line by the sea:
1. A: kan man bada här? can you swim here?
2. B: kan kan man väl men vill vill man väl inte you can (lit.: can can you) probably but you probably don’t want to (lit.: want want you not)

The Swedish construction DIFA (double initial finite auxiliaries; Linell and Mertzlufft, 2014) is a specific responsive construction in the sense that it can only occur in a response to a prior utterance that contains a particular ingredient (‘source’). In this case, the source is a modal verb (here: kan ‘can’), typically occurring in an interrogative utterance (see line 1),
and DIFA (line 2) starts by duplicated copies of this modal verb. The first copy appears in the front (so-called ‘fundament’ position of assertive main clauses in Swedish grammar), and the second copy follows suit, occupying the second-constituent position, that of the finite verb. The pragmatic function of DIFA is to admit that while the condition for the specific action asked about (“can you do it?”) is fulfilled, this condition (here: of possibility) is irrelevant because there is another precondition (in (4): the willingness to do it) that is negated and more crucial. Often, another modal verb expressing the other precondition is often (but not necessarily) duplicated in a second men-(‘but’) clause following the first clause. DIFA is a member of a family of ‘reactive’ constructions that reacts to or against a claim or suggestion issued by a prior speaker (or, in fact, sometimes the same speaker) (see e.g. Linell and Mertzlufft, 2014).

We note that DIFA is also bipartite, with a first clause uniquely and directly identifying the construction (Linell, 2013: ‘early identifiability’) with its duplicated initial auxiliaries, and then a second ‘but’-clause (see line 2 in (4)). The construction is solidly conventionalised in conversational Swedish, so that it can occur in a truncated form with the second clause omitted; such an instance would immediately be understood as meaning that there is a superordinated condition (here: e.g. unwillingness), although this is not actually said in the truncated version.

With regard to Du Bois’s (2009, 2014) dialogical notion of affinity between adjacent utterances (compare discussion of example 1), we are here, in (4), confronted with both affinities across turns (both A and B use the modal kan) and within-turn affinity (two parallel double-auxiliary segments in line 2, the latter mirroring the first one).

The affinities between utterances and projections followed by fulfillments (or sometimes changes leading to redirections) are local phenomena. Indeed, Schegloff (1992) seems to regard intersubjectivity primarily as manifest local phenomena. In discussing repair phenomena, he presents third-positioned turn (the third position after the source) as “the last structurally provided defense of intersubjectivity in conversation” (Schegloff, 1992: 1295: title of the paper).

An interesting aspect of the affinities and projections within and across adjacent utterances is that they suggest that the predicaments of speaker and listener in sociodialogue are not so fundamentally different as conventional theories of speech production and understanding have usually assumed, that is, with the speaker starting from an intended message and going through various stages of production to an output, a linguistically structured acoustic signal (see Levelt, 1989), and the listener starting (only?) with that acoustic signal and then progressing in the opposite direction, finally arriving at a probable intended message. Instead, Pickering and Garrod (2004, 2003) have argued that speaker’s and listener’s predicaments are partly parallel, with the speaker starting to build the utterance, and the listener following the speaker’s course, anticipating and then hearing projected aspects (Linell, 2015). It would then be more motivating to talk about about them simply as parties to communication or participants in interaction.

7.8 Intersubjectivity, Self and Internal Dialogue

As already noted (Section 7.3), societies and communities are heteroglossic, replete with tensions and partial agreements as well as disagreements. This has its counterpart within individual minds, which are populated by ideas, opinions and loyalties drawn from different parts of society. We learn to cope, or not cope so well, with differences between perspectives, and we know that we have to express ourselves and behave differently in different situations and
social contexts. Thus, selves are partially split, although there are also continuities in individual minds, for example, those due to each individual’s biographical trajectory. Different ideas struggle for influence in thinking and communication. Shakespeare portrayed such internal indecisiveness in the main characters of several of his dramas (such as Richard III and Hamlet).

Tensions and polyphony within the single self have been particularly stressed within dialogical self theory (DST; Hermans, 2002; Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2010), which is distinctly Bakhtinian in orientation, and of special interest for clinical psychology, psychotherapy, and so forth, and for analyses of new media (computer games, etc.). Another field of application is international relations in a world of globalisation. The basic idea is that individuals too have internalised some of the heterogeneities and tensions of the world, and often get engaged in ‘internal dialogues’ (Section 7.3). The self is therefore not a monolithic one, but at least partially split between different ‘I-positions’ (different perspectives, ideas, opinions, feelings, etc.).

7.9 Interactivities Are More Basic Than Intersubjectivities

In the history of the human sciences, the status of knowledge and objective propositions have usually been considered more basic than interactions, in which people have been regarded “merely” as “participating”, and to realise or exchange pieces of belief and knowledge. Cognition and thinking have been seen as more central than communication and information transfer. This conceptualisation underlies monological (i.e. non-dialogical) theories, such as the information processing model of cognition, the transfer theory of communication, and the code theory of language. Phenomenology of the twentieth century has of course on many points been different from this Cartesian meta-theory, but most of its proponents, including the ‘founding father’ Husserl, have continued to support the thinking-and-subjectivity-first approach. Duranti (2010), who in several ways embraces interactionism, follows Husserl and others on this point. By contrast, Linell (2014), in his commentary on Duranti, argues that interactivities (participation in interaction) are more basic than intersubjectivities (partially shared knowledge).

Individuals are not there (in any strict sense) before interaction; they are constituted, in important respects, in and through interaction and the self–other relations that emerge there. Hence it is in interactions with others that our personalities and individualities are chiselled out. An individual self can embody ‘dialogical’ feelings, such as shame, guilt, pride, complacence, complaisance, conscience, consciousness, compassion, empathy, sympathy, morality (ideas about right and wrong), and so forth. These are all phenomena that would be impossible without direct or indirect relations to others, situationally but above all cross-situationally. The distinction between individual freedom (at the expense of others’ subordination) and solidarity (actions in others’ best interest) is also based on dialogicality and interactivity. Searle (2009) discusses these issues, as well as other related notions like the phenomenon of human civilization, and monologisation with the consent of others (e.g. in some democratic organisations).

7.10 Intersubjectivity and Subjectivity

In psychology and related disciplines we find a fundamental distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. Objectivity is about ontology, the ‘objective’ reality of things and
processes ‘out there’ in the physical world (and perhaps, by extension, parts of the human world), as they are ‘in themselves’, independently of human observation and description. Subjectivity concerns, in this theory, the individual (ap)perceptions and understandings of things and processes, as they ‘appear’ to us. Subjectivity is therefore related to epistemology, and it is usually seen as accidental, uncertain and non-reliable. In order to ascertain the objective nature of bodies and environments, we need ‘objectively’ reliable instruments and scientific inference models.

Many scholars have argued that intersubjectivity necessarily presupposes subjectivity as a more basic notion, a position which is associated with classical phenomenology (e.g. Husserl). Yet, intersubjective understandings were central to phenomenology, and Husserl, especially in Cartesien Meditations (1973), struggled to end up with a tenable theory about them. Duranti (2010) relates his reasonings and tries to develop an interactionist account. But it is fair to say that classical phenomenology remained monological in orientation.

A dialogical meta-theory that looks at interactivity as more basic than intersubjectivity (Section 7.9) will also regard intersubjectivity as underlying individual subjectivity. Individuality and subjective ideas and understandings can only emerge when the infants have accumulated sufficient experiences of participating in social interactions. It is in and through interactivities that both individualities and social representations (and society) can come into being. Thus, the dialogical theory will see subjectivities as dependent on intersubjectivity, rather than the other way around.

It is true that infants explore their environment by handling, tasting and smelling objects, manipulating them and observing the consequences visually, haptically and auditively. Thus, this apperception is firmly grounded in action–perception cycles (Noë, 2004). Infants and children learn about their environment by exploring its affordances (Gibson, 1979). But this exploration is often monitored and guided by parents and other elders who tend to continuously comment on their offsprings’ discoveries and name the objects they deal with. In this way a systematic knowledge about the world opens up for the child, and their perceptual, cognitive, emotional and linguistic experiences become intersubjectively scaffolded and consolidated.

In the dialogical interplay with others and with the ecosocial environment the knower, for example, the infant with its evolving sense-making, and the known become differentiated as two sides of the same activities (Dewey and Bentley, 1949). The subject’s perception is mediated by the senses, language and instruments the individual has at his or her disposal. This is also an insight that underlies Bohr’s theory of the acquisition of knowledge of more advanced aspects of the physical world (Barad, 1996).

Even though subjectivity is partly the outcome of intersubjectivity, we cannot deny that once the child has acquired knowledge and language, he or she will gradually become capable of developing sophisticated individual ideas. Yet individuality is a consequence of social interaction too, not in the least when the child gets access to literate resources and artefacts (writing, computers, etc.).

Subjective deliberations are part of many human activities. But intersubjectivity is not necessarily the sum of a bunch of random deviations from systematic observation and theorising. Rather, disciplined intersubjective discussions can be a corrective to subjective derailments. Thus, most sciences have set up rules of behaviour and inferencing, and consultations among practitioners can lead to increased stability and control. For example, this is a rationale behind the common use of data sessions within conversation analysis.
7.11 Intersubjectivity and Objectivity

Accordingly, we have defined the relation of subjectivity within an intersubjectively established world. But what about the role of objectivity in a meta-theory based on intersubjectivity?

Intersubjective apprehensions are filtered through the perceptions and sense-makings of human beings. On this point dialogism follows the lead of phenomenology: we are concerned with the understandings of the world as they appear to sense-making people (‘subjects’), not primarily with the material structure of the outside world as such. So what is then the status of objectivity in such an intersubjective theory?

Let us first note that there are at least two senses involved in terms like ‘object’, ‘objective’ and ‘objectivity’:

1. a reality independent of human observers (or analysts); something which is ‘objectively’ there;
2. delimited, boundaried bodies, things, entities, ‘objects’.

There is often some slippage between these. In addition, ‘object’ can be used in the sense of ‘goal of action, topic of discourse’, etc.

Phenomenology deals with how human beings (and (some) animals?) perceive the world; humans construct the world perceptually and cognitively in terms of objects and bodies, that is, demarcated things that move or can be moved around, sometimes be assigned agency, and so forth; we are not perceiving clouds of molecules, or substances in terms of their chemical constitution. Evolutionary biology makes similar assumptions about (some) animals. Even aspects of nature are apperceived by active perceivers, with the help of their structure-generating senses, perhaps reinforced by instruments of various kinds (see Marková, 2014, on Bohr’s (1999) physics, based on quantum relations rather than on relations among macroscopic objects, as in classical mechanics).

If there is a tendency to constructing ‘things’ (reification, entification) in sensory perception already, and this seems to be reinforced by language. Our shared use of names and content words adds to the perceived objectivity of things talked about as well as of the linguistic devices themselves. Naming things serves to categorise and objectify things, and this is a form of sense-making. Naming is a profoundly human habit (Moscovici, 2000). Naming and talking about ‘reality’ using (proper and common) names is a partially shared, that is, intersubjective, activity, which soon becomes routinised (Majlesi, 2014).

Sociology deals with social realities which are partly human (social) constructions. Sociologists have a tradition of conceiving of social phenomena, such as societies, organisations, power relations, institutions like family, profession, and such like, as factual, existing as ‘social facts’ (Durkheim, etc.) independently of being observed, described and analysed by humans (observers, analysts). In this manner social phenomena (sometimes called ‘social objects’) seem to become nearly as objective as the objects of natural sciences. Yet, social phenomena are created, shaped and continually (re)negotiated in a more constitutive manner by human beings, in and through their sense-making.4

Most phenomenologists and dialogists, and even modern physicists (such as Bohr) would probably hold that objectivity should be understood as interactively (dialogically) accomplished under intersubjective conditions. Intersubjectivity, imbued as it is with linguistic aspects, should be seen as a central dimension of being in the world. The kind of ultimate objectivity often searched for in the philosophy of natural science is, in the opinion of many renowned natural scientists, an unattainable goal.
7.12 Conclusion

Intersubjectivity is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and a multi-ambiguous term. It is not a specific, easily localisable phenomenon, nor a precise descriptive notion. In a truly dialogical approach to human sense-making, interactivities are arguably more basic than intersubjectivities (Linell, 2009, 2014). As regards intersubjectivity, partial rather than complete types are the canonical cases. Both interactivity and intersubjectivity can take many forms.

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Notes

1 SBC (Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English) is available for free download at http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/research/santa-barbara-corpus (Du Bois, 2014: 361, n.1). Boldface in this example and example 4 is used by the analyst simply to draw attention to specific parts of the utterances. It does not refer to a manifest feature in the pronunciation. By contrast, underlying (of a vowel sign, as in “kan” in example 4) signifies focal stress on the syllable in question.

2 The same is true in Bockgård’s (2003) comprehensive study of Swedish completions. I am indebted to Gustav Bockgård for calling my attention to Szczepk’s study.

3 It seems that the construction with two finite verbs at the front is more or less specific for Swedish, although German and several other European languages have a similar construction with largely the same pragmatic functions. This construction, however, starts with infinitive + finite form, i.e. the German counterpart of the Swedish example (4) would start with können kann man … See Linell and Mertzlufft (2014) for discussion of the Swedish and German constructions.

4 ‘Structure’, ‘activity’, ‘power’, ‘rank’, ‘relation’, ‘process’, ‘institution’, ‘family’, etc. are all nouns, but they are hardly ‘things’. Social phenomena need not be ‘things’ (they may actually be activities, relations, linguistic or other symbolic artefacts, etc.), but in combination with sensory and linguistic processes mentioned above, plus the scientific activities of categorising phenomena, they are often seen precisely as (abstract) stable entities.

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