

Making an Inference on Emotions: Practice of Being on One's Side in the Group Meeting

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1. Aim

This paper examines the ways in which members of a non-profit organization make an inference on and interpret the other's emotions and thoughts in their weekly meeting. The NPO's mission is to help a small town in Fukushima reconstruct their lives after the long period of evacuation in a distant area. In their weekly meeting where they discuss issues or make decisions on their activities, they normally display affiliative stances towards residents. In doing so they sometimes present inferences on the resident's emotions by making logical connections between what they know and what they observed/heard about the person in order to achieve a certain social action. Sacks (1992) has shown how categories are 'inference-rich' and there is knowledge stored by reference to the category. The inference-rich aspect of categories is used for accounting for what happened and the recipients of the account would normally have enough knowledge to grasp the event. By extracting an essence from Sacks' discussion, this paper will address the issues of inference making on other's feeling and thinking and what the participants can achieve by so being engaged in the inferential work.

2. Data & Methods

The data corpus used for this study is video-recordings of a weekly meeting at a non-profit organization in a certain area of Fukushima Prefecture. The recordings were made on a monthly basis during the fiscal year of 2015. The paper adopts the methodological framework and analytic stance of Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis (EMCA).

3. Results

In particular, the resident's feelings and thoughts are presented as a result of some kind of reasoning by using common sensical knowledge as a premise for their inference. For instance, in accounting for a proposal to help a particular resident A, the speaker says: "In any case, she would not say 'I would visit XXX next time' or 'I would visit YYY' and so on, so let's not do X". This utterance uses the resident A's feeling as a ground for his proposal of not doing X. The proposal is hearable and presented as a reasonable conclusion, instead of as a directly quoted speech made by the resident A to him. The speaker can be said to have used a type of general knowledge stored in our society, thereby successfully conveying the resident's feeling as inferential and understandable to others, which would make the proposal reasonable and beneficial for this particular resident A.

4. Conclusion

The practical task of being on the resident's side is accomplished by inferring how the others would feel and think in relation to a proposed idea. Hence, this way of inference making is reflexive by nature as the supporters use their direct experience from their close relationship with the residents in making an inference.

5. Reference

Sacks, Harvey (1992). *Lectures on Conversation Vol. I & II*. Blackwell.