Taking a stance on emotion: affect, sequence, and intersubjectivity in dialogic interaction*

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Abstract

This paper explores the domain of affect and emotion as they arise in interaction, from the perspective of stance, sequence, and dialogicality. We seek to frame the issue of affective display as part of a larger concern with how co-participants in interaction construct the socioaffective and sociocognitive relations that organize their intersubjectivity, via collaborative practices of stance taking. We draw mainly on two research traditions, conversation analysis and the dialogic turn in sociocultural linguistics, focusing on their treatments of affect, emotion, and intersubjectivity. Key ideas from the respective approaches are the role of sequence in shaping the realized and interpretation of stance, and dialogic resonance as a process of alignment between subsequent stances. We present a view of stance as a triplex act, achieved through overt communicative means, in which participants evaluate something, and thereby position themselves, and thereby align with co-participants in interaction. Alignment is argued to operate as a continuous variable rather than a dichotomy, as participants subtly monitor and modulate the “stance differential” between them, while often maintaining a strategic ambiguity. Finally, we comment on the rich contributions to the study of stance, affect, and intersubjectivity in interaction made by the collaborators in this special issue.

Keywords: emotion; affect; display; expression; sequence; stance; stance triangle; resonance; dialogicality; alignment; intersubjectivity; interaction.

1. Introduction

Emotion, or at least the potential for emotion, is everywhere in social life; it is just hard to talk about it. Some would elevate this difficulty to the level of an obstacle or even a proscription: one must not talk about feelings, affect,
emotions, it is all just so hard. This could be the plea of a private individual, or the intellectual positioning of a scholar imposing limits on permissible inquiry. The problem is: when something of consequence happens in social life, emotion is never very far away. The awareness that conversational co-participants share—that the way events unfold in the sequence of interaction can give rise to emotion—can influence the choice of actions, words, and bodily comportment even in moments that appear devoid of remarkable expressive display. Emotion makes its presence felt, whether strongly or subtly, directly or indirectly, on multiple levels in social life. Emotion can be a motivator of goals and projects of social actors; a trigger of social action; a factor in framing the interactional agenda for as long as the emotion persists; and a determinant of consequences that remain when all has been said and done. This observation does not make it any easier to capture what emotion is, or how it works, or why it matters. It just acknowledges the reality that emotion is in principle present in interaction, at least as a potentiality via its projectable consequences on many levels. We might hope that demurring to “affect” instead of emotion, or even to just the “display” of affect, would make things easier. But the challenges of this fraught domain remain. The display of emotion—or affect—can vary from blatant to subtle to unspoken, or anything in between. We find ourselves back to the initial problem: Emotion, affect, and their displays are all hard to talk about, albeit in different ways. The question is: what are we going to do about it?

For more and more scholars, silence is no longer an option. The position that one can never know what another is feeling makes for a fine display of philosophical skepticism, but by the test of pragmatic action it bears little relation to how people actually live their personal lives, how they react to their own lived experience. Even less does it do justice to our empathic response to the visible, audible, tangible feelings of others. If someone cries out in pain before us, we do not have to ask whether we believe in emotion: we know it when we see it; indeed we feel it bodily. Any lingering intellectual doubts are belied by how we react, and how fast. Affect is measurable, not only by machines but by the most sensitive detector of all for emotion, affect, and other embodied realizations of subjectivity: a human being (Thompson 2001, 2007; Hobson 2006; J. A. Hobson et al. 2009; R. P. Hobson et al. 2012). Affective skepticism may one day be recognized as akin to the philosophical stance of epistemic skepticism which purports to doubt the possibility of knowing the reality of anything at all, even the perceived existence of a world in which we ourselves think, feel, and act—a conceit long since consigned by Moore (1925) and Wittgenstein (1969) to the dustbin of once-potent preoccupations of philosophical speculation. Emotion is difficult, to be sure, but its surrogates and kin—affect, feeling, and their expression and display—can be no less challenging. If we want to understand the powerful engines of social life (Enfield and Levinson 2006),
then emotion, affect, and the rest must be in the mix. At the initial stages of inquiry, we may feel more comfortable to speak of the seemingly more manageable proxies known as affect displays. This is a reasonable starting position, and one that is methodologically more accessible to students of naturally occurring interaction. But there is no evading the suspicion that we have already entered the territory of emotion.

How then are we to navigate the domain of affect, emotion, and intersubjectivity in interaction? There are many possible ways to proceed; ours is to try to combine the insights of two research traditions that have concerned themselves with naturally occurring face-to-face interaction, but are only recently finding themselves increasingly concerned with questions of emotion and affect. In the discussion below, we will draw on the sequential perspective of conversation analysis (Schegloff 2007) and the dialogic perspective of Bakhtin (1981 [1934]) and Voloshinov (1973 [1929]); see also Linell (2009) and Du Bois (forthcoming). From both traditions we will draw on their treatment of stance to forge a unifying framework well suited to the task at hand (Bucholtz 2009; Clift 2000, 2006; Du Bois 2007, 2009, 2011; Goodwin and Goodwin 1992; M. H. Goodwin 2006a, 2006b; C. Goodwin 2007; Haddo and Raymond 2005; Johnstone 2007; Kärkkäinen 2003, 2006, 2007; Lempert 2008; Local and Walker 2008).

2. Displaying affect in interaction

According to one popular formulation, affect can be seen as involving the overt expression of emotion in communicative context. While emotion has in the past sometimes been thought of as belonging to an essentially private domain of subjectivity originating deep within the psyche of the individual (for critique, see Goffman 1978, Du Bois 2009), the present approach treats affect as crucially involving public display to others within a context of social interaction. According to the perspective of the “expressive function” of language, indexical cues represent a significant part of the overt realization of affect (Jakobson 1990 [1957]; Silverstein 1976; Gumperz 1992; Ochs 1996; Ochs and Schieffelin 1989; Jürgens et al. 2011). Indexical cues for affect may include multimodal features such as intonation, prosody, voice quality, facial expression, body posture, and other signs (Banse and Scherer 1996; Besnier 1993; Selting 1996; Haddo 2006; Maynard 1993; Günthner 1997; Shoaps 1999; Wichmann 2000; Rampton 2006). Combining indexicality with stance theory yields a more dynamic understanding of the practices through which social actors constitute sociocultural constructs, such as identity and epistemic authority (Bucholtz 2009; Clift 2000, 2006; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Lempert 2008; Johnstone 2007; Haviland 1991).
One scholar who has not shied away from frankly acknowledging a role for emotional expression—albeit a circumscribed one—is Golato (2012). Based on a collection of 73 tokens of the German response particle oh in conversation, Golato argues that

[. . . ] German speakers use oh not only as a marker of surprise, as argued in prior research, but as a change-of-state token that signals an emotional change-of-state in general. The emotions that are expressed can either be positive or negative and can occur in all positions [. . . ]. (Golato 2012)

Golato makes the important observation that the use of German oh differs from that of English oh in a striking way. Where English speakers (as documented by Heritage 1984, 2002) mark a “change of state” with oh, German speakers distinguish between affective and epistemic states, expressing a change of affective state with oh, and a change of epistemic state (e.g., upon receipt of news) with ach. Though Golato does not pursue this, one could say that from the perspective of German, English collapses the two functions of change in epistemic and change in affective self-positioning, subsuming both under a single generalized rubric. Golato goes on to link the expression of emotion to the idea of stance, articulating a concept of emotional stance:

In all instances in the collection, an oh-prefaced turn communicates an emotional stance of the speaker, such as joy, pleasure, physical pain, unhappiness, disgust, etc. I argue that in German, oh serves as a vehicle for embodying and expressing the emotion felt by the speaker. This emotion is not reported on, but instead is portrayed as being experienced at the moment when the oh is uttered. (Golato 2012)

Especially noteworthy here are two related observations: the timing of the expressed emotion is said to be coterminal with the utterance of the particle; and the particle does not report or describe, but is said to portray. Putting the two together, we might surmise that the verbalization of the oh particle is somehow linked more closely to the lived experience. (Golato cautiously frames this relation as a “portrayal,” but also speaks of oh as a “vehicle for embodying” the expressed emotion.) It must be said that the idea of stance is presented without comment, and is not developed further. This leaves room to contemplate what might be gained by adopting a more developed framework for the analysis of stance, a topic we will return to below.

Conversation analytic approaches often situate affect within an interactional and even a quasi-theatrical perspective, where agents are said to perform displays of affect. Here, emphasis is laid on the facultative actions of social actors, who strategically manage a repertoire of available emotional or affective displays. This view was argued strongly by Goffman in an influential paper (1978), and has since become a staple of the analysis of affect by students of interaction (Jefferson 1988; Selting 1996; Günthner 1997; Fiehler 2002; Sand-
I have argued that there is a certain performative element to [German] *oh* in that with the production of an *oh*, the emotion is presented as “experienced at that moment.” The phrasing “presented as experienced at that moment” is vital here as no claims are being made that the producer of an *oh* actually felt this emotion at the time of production. Instead, an *oh* is a response cry with a social function (Goffman 1978) that serves to *display* emotion. (Golato 2012; emphasis in original)

It is not clear how the interpretation of mere “display” here is to be reconciled with the apparent depth of embodiment, as reflected in Golato’s insight that German *oh* is a “vehicle for embodying” emotion. As noted above, the agnostic stance begs the question of how deeply the emotion may be embodied and indeed observably *felt*, and whether observable consequences may flow from the felt experience of embodied emotion that might override one’s imagined choice of whether or not to display a certain kind of affect. Interesting as it is, we must leave this problem unresolved, as we are not now in a position to address it effectively. For the present we must take the path of Goffman and later authors, to speak of emotion or affect in terms of display. In treating affect as a display that can be mobilized by participants, we set aside the question of whether or not such display is to be taken as revealing “authentic” emotion.

One major trend in conversation analytic research is the recent upsurge of interactional studies of stance (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992; C. Goodwin 2000; Golato 2012; Reber 2012; see Wu [2004: Ch. 1] and Keisanen [2006: Ch. 4] for good summaries). Viewing the design of the current turn as an interactional achievement, we can identify four areas of special interest within the turn construction process: (i) sequential positioning, (ii) syntactic design, (iii) lexical choice, and (iv) prosodic manifestation. As Wu observes, this body of work does not primarily aim at identifying (or classifying) linguistic markers of stance, nor does it treat stance as the product of a single individual speaker, but instead approaches stance “as an emergent product which is shaped by, and itself shapes, the unfolding development of interaction” (Wu 2004: 3).

Since evaluation is tied to affect, stance taking in the here-and-now of interaction serves to link affect to aspects of ideological systems and their expressions, including language, gesture, body practices, rhetoric, socialization, prior text, arts, aesthetic artifacts, and more (Ochs 1996; Ochs and Schieffelin 1989; Clancy 1999; Shoaps 1999; Sarangi 2003; Goodwin 2006a; Du Bois 2009, 2011). A number of recent studies of stance include as an essential component the visuo-spatial modality (gestures, facial expressions, gaze, body posture, etc.) and increasingly also the objects and artifacts which participate in practical actions, taking their place alongside the environment of talk. Goodwin and
Goodwin (2000: 37) propose that “affect is lodged within embodied sequences of action.” The sense of situated embodiment here implies the coming together of multiple aspects of action, as made explicit by Wu:

Like all other human actions, the displaying of a stance commonly requires the simultaneous deployment of a multiplicity of linguistic (and non-linguistic) resources, such as the lexical, syntactic, prosodic and sequential aspects of a turn design. (Wu 2004: 19)

It is safe to say that even though stance has not in the past been a regular focus of research in conversation analysis, it is more and more becoming one, notably in the work of Goodwin and Goodwin (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992, 2000; M. H. Goodwin 2006a, 2006b; C. Goodwin 2007) and in many other authors as well (Clift 2000, 2006; Wu 2004; Kärkkäinen 2003, 2006, 2007; Haddington 2006; Keisanen 2006; Local and Walker 2008; Golato 2012; Reber 2012). As researchers more and more bring together the twin challenges of affect and stance, the disciplinary activity we survey here proves to be at the forefront of new research in the field.

3. Where stance comes in

How important, and how pervasive, is stance? And what can it bring, if anything, to the study of emotion and affect display? In line with a growing number of researchers, we find it useful to pursue the view that every utterance in interaction contributes to the enactment of stance, even if this stance is only evoked and not explicitly spelled out (Ducrot 1984; Du Bois 2007; Martin 2003). Whenever we engage in interaction, we are taking stances: there is never a time out from the social action of taking stances and adopting positions. In the same way, participants attend to the “omnirelevance” (Schegloff 1995) of the potential for stance, affect, and even emotion as a joint achievement. Affect is integrated with stance in myriad ways, and even where it is not overtly marked in an obvious way it may still be oriented to as interactionally relevant—by its dispreferred absence, if nothing else. We see stance and affect as closely related phenomena which interact and overlap in a variety of ways.

One view of the relation between affect and stance is that affect is one among several types of stance (Ochs 1996), where “stance” is used as a superordinate term to subsume a set encompassing affective stance, epistemic stance, and others. Such an approach is implicit in the definition given by Wu:

“[S]tance” is referred to as a speaker’s indication of how he or she knows about, is commenting on, or is taking an affective or other position toward the person or matter being addressed. (Wu 2004: 3)
Wu’s description amounts to a disjunctive definition, i.e., a listing of several alternative types of stance. But the disjunctive approach has its limitations. It is difficult to know how long the list should be, where it should stop, and, most importantly, what it can tell us about the general character of the phenomenon in question. What is it that unifies this particular set of actions into a coherent category called stance?

An alternative to disjunctive definition is to seek a prototype definition, which offers the possibility of capturing a more holistic, unifying characterization. The definition proposed by Du Bois (2007) specifies a conjunction of prototypical features of stance as social action:

Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field. (Du Bois 2007: 163)

This approach defines the stance act by conjoining features to characterize the prototype. Applied to the domain of emotion, the participant’s expression of affect can itself be considered an act of taking a stance. In the “stance triangle” model (Du Bois 2007), the prototypical stance act is characterized as consisting of three subsidiary acts:

1. *The subject evaluates an object.* What gets evaluated by the speaking subject is thereby constituted as the object of the present stance. The object of stance may be a thing, a person, a situation, an utterance, even another participant’s stance. In the context of affect, the object of evaluation (object of stance) is what a person expresses an overt emotional reaction to, or displays an affective orientation toward. The affect display is itself the expression of evaluation.

How can we evaluate this interpretation? Its merit can be tested in the applicability of the stance triangle as a framework for the practical analysis of participants’ affect displays. For example, we note that when participants show affect in public, they give evidence of knowing that their affect is supposed to be about something. Indeed they will be held interactionally accountable for their affect being demonstrably orientable to some aspect of their lived experience. This is in line with a conclusion that was drawn by Goffman (1978), who argued that response cries present an element of public display, even theatricality, in which a social actor must show that her expressive display is about something, such as a crack in a sidewalk that would engender first a problem, then an expressive response. In our terms, affect requires a stance object—what the affective response is presented as observably oriented to. This affective stance object can be anything or anyone that participants express an emotional orientation toward (things, persons, situations, actions, and so on). Its reality is confirmed by the fact that one’s interlocutors will look for it if they do not immediately see what it is.
2. *The subject positions a subject.* The speaking subject typically positions herself, via the very act of taking a stance. By invoking a specific evaluation toward some stance object, the subject in effect shows herself to be the kind of person who would make that kind of evaluation about that kind of thing. (Sometimes, however, it is someone else who gets positioned—the addressee or even a third party.) In the context of affect, the positioned subject is the one who makes the affect display—who presents herself as taking a particular affective orientation toward a specific stance object. Positioning often occurs as an indirect consequence of overtly evaluating an object, which is made possible by the fact that stances are typically taken within a known “stance field”—a social force field constituted by the history of stances taken, then and now, yielding a sequential and dialogic layering of participants’ positions.

3. *The subject aligns with other subjects.* By taking a stance in the public space of interaction, that is, by entering the stance field, one finds that one’s own stance is inevitably compared and contrasted with the stances of co-present others. At the most basic level, alignment simply means a “lining up,” that is, a mapping of elements in one stanced utterance onto parallel elements in another stanced utterance (Du Bois forthcoming). The first consequence of alignment is simply to highlight the similarities and differences in positioning and evaluation, constituting the basis for what is interpretable as a “stance differential” (Du Bois 2007). In the context of affect, alignment means that as empathic co-participants we line up our affective stances, assessing the nature of the relation between my feelings and yours about the shared object of our affective orientation. We take stock of the affective stance differential.

Alignment thus becomes key to a more dynamic understanding of intersubjectivity as dialogically constructed in interaction. Alignment is not to be collapsed with agreement or affiliation, nor should it be treated as binary or dichotomous (*you’re either with me or you’re against me*). Alignment becomes a subtly nuanced domain of social action, in which speakers negotiate along a continuous scale the precise nature of the relation between their presently realized stance and a prior stance, whether overtly expressed or left implicit by another. Participants deploy subtle and often elusive signals to articulate the complex and highly variable mapping of the stance–alignment relation. The exact nature of this alignment is in any case often left implicit by co-participants, and it is scarcely the business of analysts to impose a specious clarity on such cases. This would negate the participants’ careful wrought achievement of strategic ambiguity. Alignment in this sense, whether it is labeled convergent or divergent, becomes a key dimension of the social construction of intersubjectivity. On this view, intersubjectivity is dynamically constructed in real-time interaction out of the actualized realizations of the subjectivities that participants put on display, via the taking of stances. Inter-
subjectivity is no longer about an attempt, presumably futile, to enforce a hegemonic sameness on everyone in a conversation or a community (Rorty 1980). Intersubjectivity presupposes not commonality, but simple commensurability (Du Bois 2007). This opens up a space to acknowledge the reality that stances are open to contestation in interaction, as are the very values they invoke.

The approach to stance as a triplex act linking evaluation, positioning, and alignment is dialogic to the extent that it targets processes of distributed action, calibration and co-construction between the stances taken by successive speakers. Intersubjective alignment becomes an integral part of every act of evaluation and positioning, though it most often remains implicit, left for participants to infer from a comparison of the several evaluations made in sequence. The measure of the dialogic perspective’s utility lies in its effectiveness in accounting for how participants respond to a prior speaker’s stance with a stance of their own. The resulting sequence of stance displays juxtaposed across turns is interpreted by participants as defining a dialogic resonance (Du Bois 2007, forthcoming; Du Bois et al. forthcoming) of stances to each other, through which detailed correspondences are established between analogous portions of the sequenced stances. These correspondences contribute to shaping the emergent meaning of each stance in the sequence. Each individual’s act of taking a stance becomes in effect a form of distributed action, to the extent that it depends not only on the current speaker but also on the interlocutors who take stances that engage with it across successive turns.

This methodological criterion unites the perspective of dialogicality with that of sequentiality in conversation analysis. Such an approach is adopted by Kärkkäinen (2006), who elaborates on the essentially intersubjective nature of stance, calling attention to the fact that stances often emerge as a result of joint engagement in stance taking. She also discusses the necessary implications of this for linguistic research: the inventory of linguistic resources used now expands to include syntactic, semantic, and prosodic resonances between contributions and stance acts by different speakers (on resonance, see Du Bois 2007, forthcoming; Du Bois et al. forthcoming). The dialogic-sequential approach combines the examination of turn-sequential and dialogic dimensions of social action, ultimately offering new opportunities to work toward a unified and coherent picture of stance.

The micro-level analysis of sequential interaction can be further contextualized within a larger social perspective, bridging across the two levels:

Stance can be approached as a linguistically articulated form of social action whose meaning is to be construed within the broader scope of language, interaction, and socio-cultural value. Setting the problem in this way brings into play several aspects of language in interaction. As we seek the theoretical resources needed to account for the achievement of stance, we find ourselves faced with a complex web of interconnections.
linking stance with dialogicality, intersubjectivity, the social actors who jointly enact stance, and the mediating frameworks of linguistic structure and sociocultural value they invoke in doing so. (Du Bois 2007: 139–140)

This interest in the consequences of stance for social constructs at the macro-level of social organization is prominent in another line of stance-related research on attitudes and evaluation, that of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter 1993; Potter and Wetherell 1987, 1988; Potter 1998).

Where does affect then fit into the stance picture? By attending closely to the role of affect in stance taking, we can begin to build a detailed picture of the interactional construction of emotional life as a socially situated phenomenon. The analysis of stance displays relies first and foremost on the participants’ orientation toward, and interpretation of, the trajectories of talk and unfolding action, as distinct from the analysts’ orientations to the same. While one common approach compartmentalizes affect by treating it as a separate type of stance (Wu 2004), we seek a more encompassing approach, seeing affect as a pervasive presence in the field of stance, constituting an always-imminent potential. On this view, affect is in principle relevant to any act of stance taking, though this potential may not always be realized in a direct way. Even in its seeming absence, affect can be interpreted as stance-relevant. This is one way to understand the case of negative evaluations of “flat affect,” where participants may attend to and respond to the “noticeable absence” of expected (or projected) affect. Similarly, the argument can be made that so-called “neutral” affect may be performed as a kind of stance (or at least a stance-relevant move), one that may be actively cultivated in certain kinds of discourse practice (Biber and Finegan 1989; Hunston and Thompson 2000), such as scientific prose (Halliday and Martin 1993), while being rejected as censurable in others.

One problem that remains is to account for how any given stance, while clearly a locally occasioned and articulated achievement, may in addition be understood as relating to more distant expressions of stance. In some circumstances at least, a stance can remain relevant over longer sequences of interaction, such as a sequence of stories, which may even be told as part of a recurring encounter over several days. The availability of a prior stance as a reference point can extend beyond the current face-to-face engagement to include enduring sociocultural constructs such as story rounds (Maarit Siromaa, this issue), allusions, quotes, proverbs, rituals, films, theatrical (re-)enactments, rules, laws, and other prior texts. We have emphasized the structure of stance taking as an activity jointly oriented to by conversational co-participants, involving coordination beyond the current turn and even beyond adjacent turns. The implications extend still further, as one can claim that stance “both derives from and has consequences for social actors, whose lives are impacted by the stances
they and others take” (Du Bois 2007: 141). The exploration of stance as a motivating framework and as consequential for broader aspects of linguistic and sociocultural structure is in line with the concern of Ochs (1996) to show how affective and epistemic stances serve as central meaning components not only of momentary social acts but also of more enduring social constructs such as social identities.

4. **Orientation of the special issue**

This special issue of *Text and Talk* builds on and complements two earlier well-acknowledged special issues of this journal, one on the pragmatics of affect (*Text* 9 [1], 1989) edited by Elinor Ochs (1989), and the other on social perspectives on evaluation (*Text* 23 [2], 2003) edited by Mary Macken-Horarik and James R. Martin (2003). Since we consider evaluation to be a central component of stance, we see the current special issue as uniting the concerns previously targeted by Ochs and by Macken-Horarik and Martin. In focusing on stance, affect, and intersubjectivity, we seek to further develop their theoretical implications, with the aim to capture new insights about the nature of each phenomenon in its own right, and to explore the ways in which each intimately interacts with the other.

This special issue locates stance, affect, and intersubjectivity within a larger research orientation which draws on two major theoretical perspectives that have been applied to the use of language in interactional contexts, the sequential and dialogic perspectives. The sequential perspective is closely linked to conversation analysis (CA), where it has supplied a consistent framework for integrating a wide variety of actions that participants achieve in and through turn-taking, including displays of stance and affect, and the interactional achievement of intersubjectivity. The second methodological strand is supplied by the dialogic perspective (Voloshinov 1973 [1929]; Bakhtin 1981 [1934], 1993, 1995); see Linell (2009) for a valuable survey. Dialogicality in one form or another has been influential in the emerging field of sociocultural linguistics (Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Du Bois 2009, 2011) and in the associated fields of linguistic anthropology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology, rhetoric, literature, and others. Dialogicality deals with the ways in which the words of the current speaker engage with the words of others who have spoken before, in ways that generate observable consequences for the production of discourse, the interpretation of situated meaning, and the collaborative construction of intersubjectivity.

The sequential and dialogic perspectives pursued in this work share an insistence on going beyond the overt lexical and syntactic indices of stance to encompass linguistic and interactional phenomena not hitherto conceived of
as indexing stance, including those which are located in the interactional space where relations arise between turns, between utterances, between the evaluations and positionings of co-participants. The present work emphasizes the constitutive role of sequential position and dialogic resonance in shaping the recognition and interpretation of stance. It is only in sequential context that a given linguistic pattern or practice can be interpreted as indexing a particular stance. In line with one of the cornerstones of conversation analysis, stance is seen as contributing to social action, becoming an inevitable part of action formation. The treatment of stance as emergent is also characteristic of the dialogic perspective as applied to interaction, providing further motivation for linking conversation analytic and dialogic perspectives in this special issue. Though the sequential and dialogic perspectives on interaction have often been pursued separately in the past, they effectively complement each other, and offer great potential for mutual contributions in the future. This potential can be seen in the work of several of the contributors to this special issue (Ritva Laury, Liisa Tainio, Maarit Siromaa), who combine them to good effect, gaining more insight than either perspective would afford on its own.

Most of the papers in this special issue foreground the importance of sequential position and sequential design in one way or another, pointing to their consequences for some combination of stance, affect, and intersubjectivity. Those situated specifically within a conversation analysis framework include the papers by Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen, Liisa Tainio, and Elise Kärkkäinen. Couper-Kuhlen discusses the sequentially third turn, i.e., affect displays in response to rejections of requests or proposals; Tainio similarly examines how teachers in the third turn repeat and imitate prosodically marked student answers; Kärkkäinen focuses on the practice of inserting a stance within an extended turn, where such inserts may be indexing stance explicitly (through lexical cues) or only by virtue of their sequential position.

In a second major line of inquiry, several papers explore and develop the perspective of dialogicality as one of the foundational themes for the special issue, most importantly the papers by Ritva Laury and Maarit Siromaa. Laury’s paper combines sequential design and dialogicality in examining the use of one grammatical construction, extraposition, in Finnish conversation, to do assessments at points of transition. Siromaa investigates a particularly clear case of dialogicality, involving the constitution of dialogic resonance between parallel elements in first and second conversational stories as a resource for intersubjectivity in stance taking. Finally, the role of alignment in articulating convergence and divergence between participants’ stances is explored by several papers (Laury, Tainio, Siromaa).

Several of the papers in the present issue extend the treatment of stance, affect, and intersubjectivity beyond the level of the lexical and syntactic elements (words and grammatical constructions) to encompass prosodic dimen-
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sions. The papers by Couper-Kuhlen, Kärkkäinen, Tainio, and Siromaa attend to the role of prosody in marking either the realization of stance or its structural organization. Others go beyond this to situate the actions that achieve stance and affect within larger sequences of embodied actions; the idea that stance and affect represent embodied practices is prominent in the papers by Kärkkäinen and Tainio.

These papers can be viewed as part of a new turn to take up the challenge of long-neglected aspects of interaction such as embodiment and emotion (Goodwin and Goodwin 2000; M. H. Goodwin 2006a; C. Goodwin 2007). Accompanying this larger trend, stance is increasingly being put into focus in conversation studies. A growing body of stance research draws from conversation analysis, interactional linguistics, and other fields of inquiry informed by conversation analysis, as well as sociocultural linguistics and the dialogic perspective.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have explored the domain of affect and emotion as they arise in interaction, from the perspective of stance, sequence, and dialogicality. We frame the issue of affective display as part of a larger concern with how co-participants in interaction construct the socioaffective and sociocognitive relations that organize their intersubjectivity, via collaborative practices of stance taking. We draw mainly on two research traditions, conversation analysis and the dialogic turn in sociocultural linguistics, focusing on their treatments of affect, emotion, and intersubjectivity. Key ideas from the respective approaches are the role of sequence in shaping the realization and interpretation of stance, and dialogic resonance as a process of alignment between subsequent stances.

We believe that the combined perspectives we have argued for will help us to take important, if preliminary, steps on the way to meeting the intellectual challenge of taking a stance on emotion. Sometimes the first step is a side step, and that strategy will become evident here, in the preference for framing the problem of emotion in terms of displays of affect. This is a methodological move we can live with, as we work toward the next level of understanding of the interrelation of affect and emotion, of feelings and stances, of surface behavioral displays and deep embodiment, of the individual social actor and the engaged interlocutors, of the verbal description of emotion and the empathic experience of embodied primary intersubjectivity. We are only too keenly aware of the hidden dangers of a cryptic mind–body dualism that threatens to engulf any seemingly safe talk of “displays” of emotion or affect. (Just who is the homunculus doing the displaying, and what does her face look like when
she is “doing” it?) At some point it will be necessary for research on the social construction of intersubjectivity to bridge the gap between deeply embodied emotion and the public face of what we like to call face-to-face interaction. But these are enduring challenges that will be with us for a long time. In the meantime we focus on what we can accomplish today, and we have a lot we can work with right now. In this enterprise, the role of stance can be pivotal—once it is situated, as argued here, within the sequential and dialogic perspectives—in providing a theoretical and analytical foundation for future explorations of affect and emotion.

We present a view of stance as a triplex act, achieved through overt communicative means, in which participants evaluate something, and thereby position themselves, and thereby align with co-participants in interaction. Applied to the domain of emotion, we argue that the expression of affect is itself an act of taking a stance, a claim whose merit is tested in the practical applicability of the stance triangle model to the analysis of instances of the display of affect. We observe that when participants display affect, it is supposed to be about something, and indeed participants are held interactionally accountable for their affect being demonstrably orientable to something. This something is the affective stance object, which can be anything or anyone that participants can express an emotional orientation toward. At the same time, in the very act of invoking a specific affective evaluation toward some stance object, participants position themselves as the kind of person who would make that kind of evaluation about that kind of thing. The third side of the stance triangle comes into play in alignment, which at its most basic is simply a “lining up” of one person’s stance with that of another, taking stock of the parallels and differences in form, meaning, and affective value. Alignment is argued to operate as a continuous variable rather than a dichotomy, as participants subtly monitor and modulate the “stance differential” between them, while often maintaining a strategic ambiguity that does not lend itself to a binary interpretation.

The themes raised in the title of this special issue are broad, and no one can provide a definitive treatment of all these matters within the space available. Instead, each author here carves out some salient portion of the problem. Taken together, the papers manage to shed light on the enduring questions of affect, stance, and intersubjectivity, and to take steps toward an understanding of emotion that will be better grounded in the sequential dynamics of dialogic action in social life. We hope to have opened a path toward investigating stance, affect, and intersubjectivity as a unified domain, one that calls for integrated treatment within an extended interactional framing. We develop in tandem the methodological and analytical implications of the perspectives of sequential design and dialogicality. While the contributions in this special issue take a variety of starting points representing a diverse array of approaches to the phenomenon, they are linked by a shared concern with the dynamics
of naturally occurring interaction. Together they present a rich panorama of current research on stance, affect, and intersubjectivity from an interactional perspective. We offer it as an initial contribution to the bigger questions that await us.

Notes

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1. What we call divergent alignment is often referred to as “disalignment,” a term we reject as dichotomizing. In contrast, alignment in our sense is analyzed as continuously variable. Degrees of divergent alignment, as well as of convergent alignment, are recognized.

2. Several of the contributions in this special issue were originally presented at the Fifth Finnish Seminar on Conversation Studies, on the theme, “Locating stance and affect in conversation: From syntax to prosody to embodiment” (University of Oulu, 2006).

References


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