Collaborative Forms of Talk in Supervision:
A View from Discursive Psychology

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Abstract

The purpose of this text is to offer a methodological path for describing the collaboration process. I use the tools of discursive psychology to explore collaborative forms of talk within a community of therapists in a supervision setting. Data analysis shows this community has created a unique format for collaborating, with the main features of this format being simultaneous and multiple participation, as well as utterances designed to invite the presence of other voices into the conversational ground. Through analysis of real fragments of interaction, I show the multiple facets collaboration can take. I specifically discuss three instances of collaboration: repetition, the joint creation of utterances and choral participation. This way of analyzing real interactions can add new understandings of collaboration as a contextual and situated activity. It can also provide a new pathway to reflect on processes of supplementation and joint action.

Key words: collaboration, supervision, discourse analysis, discursive psychology, joint action.

Context

There have been an increasing number of practices that place collaboration at the heart of their philosophy. The interest for collaboration has as its background a distinct form of consciousness we can identify as constructionist.

To speak of collaboration is to describe a specific kind of social process and of relationship, and at the same time, a distinct way of using language within that relationship. Thus the notion of collaboration cannot be separated from this constructionist consciousness.

This article is inspired by two basic questions. What is collaboration? What are the means and tools available for recognizing collaboration?

I want to approach the idea that we need theoretical and methodological tools to explore how collaboration takes place, its consequences and its possible expressions.

Throughout this text I will try to provide an alternative pathway to describe the process of collaborating: one that strives to go beyond anecdotal accounts, beyond a panoramic and distant description of collaboration. In order to do so, I will draw from discursive psychology and its methodological developments in the area of discourse and conversation analysis. This perspective has originated from social psychology and it draws on social constructionism to explore how people use language in interaction.

Starting from the perspective of discursive psychology, I set out to describe collaboration by a detailed study of how people use language inside an exchange whose main goal is clinical supervision.

I agree with those that assert that it is essential to watch the evolving process of collaboration, and observe what sort of actions and forms of participation within an exchange allow us to reach the conclusion that individuals are indeed collaborating (Strong, 2006; Sutherland & Strong, 2011).

About Collaboration

Collaboration as Relationship

Lately a relational sensibility has emerged that poses questions about the sort of conditions enabling more democratic and participative communities. It is within this context that values such as dialogue, collaboration, co-construction and relational responsibility have become relevant (Gergen, 1999; Gergen, 2001; McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

The notion of collaboration is not a stand-alone concept; it is part of an emerging and evolving tradition belonging to the relational sensibility that constructionism has made visible. The background of this new sensibility is the postmodern critique that questioned the notion of the individual as the point of origin of language and knowledge.

It makes sense to think of collaboration as an integral part of a philosophical stance, a way of being and acting in relationship with others. This means collaboration cannot be reduced to attributes, behaviors or words of an isolated individual. It is not possible to define beforehand what the steps are in order to act or to be in a collaborative manner (Anderson, 1997).

Collaboration is both the process and the product of a relationship; it is created in the space between people. It is not an easy task to translate to the written word the process of collaborating; any attempt to capture it may run the risk of reifying the philosophical stance, of reducing it to a procedure. What is highlighted is the way of being and acting in relation to others, rather than the specificities of collaboration.

Harlene Anderson has described collaboration as a specific mode of relationship defined by mutuality and reciprocity, a participatory and purposeful activity, and exchange flowing in many directions (Anderson, 1997).

In a collaborative relationship participants take a position of respect and curiosity, each one positions herself as someone who can learn *from* the other and *with* the other. Collaborating is a way of connecting; a way of creating bonds that invite agency and a sense of belonging (Anderson, 2012).

Contexts of professional practice pose a great challenge for developing collaborative relationships. When describing the world view of these contexts, Donald Schön used the term *technical rationality*. According to this perspective, practice should be structured around ideals such as the detection of a fixed and stable reality, standardized knowledge use and the ownership of accurate means to modify problems. If a practitioner asks herself how to act, the answer is of the technical kind (Schön, 1983).

Technical rationality not only provides guidelines for action, it also imposes hierarchical relationships; whereas a collaborative stance reflects on what ideals give shape to relationships between persons. If a practitioner asks herself how to act, the answer is of the relational kind. The answer does not come from the outside; that is, from standardized knowledge and previously defined technical means. It comes from within, emerging in the process of relationship.

Space for uncertainty opens up. Participants are open to newness and the unexpected; they act by responding to the present moment and their surroundings. When people enter into collaborative relationships they can take a situated reflective stance, where reflection does not entail a distant form of thought, but rather a way of thinking within the flow of activity. It means reflecting through participation and involvement with others and with the context (Shotter & Katz, 1996).

To collaborate is to develop non-instrumental ways of knowing and participating. Furthermore it is to question if everyone involved can have a say in and give shape to the emerging knowledge and

relationship. Collaboration is rooted in the acknowledgment of interdependence and in a continuing reflection on ethics (Andersen, 2001).

Collaboration as Conversation

The philosophy of collaboration steps away from the language of cause and effect, from mechanical relationships and from instrumental and unilateral forms of action. Collaborating is not doing *to*, it is doing *with* the other. Doing with the other is largely mediated through language. We can entertain the idea of collaboration if we share, or begin to create, a common language.

A collaborative stance pays attention to a pervasive but unnoticed activity: conversation. A large portion of our life, relationships and activities are realized in and through language. Nonetheless we rarely stop to think about the defining features of conversation.

The almost total lack of interest in conversation has also invaded psychology and the social sciences. Since everyday language use is considered to be flawed, too disorderly to be studied, it is thought that what should be researched are the basic rules and structures that make communication possible. By deliberately ignoring real interpersonal exchanges where language becomes alive, communication has been reduced to the transfer of private thoughts (stored in a private place like the mind) to the public arena, its counterpart being the act of passively receiving messages (Edwards, 1997).

Constructionism, in all its varieties, has contested this mechanical and decontextualized picture. Identities, relationships and our understanding of the world take shape within the seemingly disordered flow of conversation. We are the consequences of our conversational realities. Drawing on these insights, a collaborative stance has advanced the notion of conversation as a means for collaboration.

Conversation is a purposeful task, it positions us as active agents. Understanding, interpretation and meaning-making are processes unfolding in a social space.

An isolated utterance cannot be the bearer of meaning; it cannot be self-sufficient. It is only a noise with the potential to become meaningful action when and if it is met with a response. Therefore, words do not belong to the individual uttering them; they belong to the relationship they are directed to.

It is through a supplement that the initial utterance can take a form and a function that it previously lacked. The possibility of meaning starts with the utterance-supplement pair but it does not end at that point. A supplement lends a temporal shape to the initial utterance, while future responses can fix or alter not only emerging meanings but their relevance within the relationship (Gergen, 1994: 265-267).

According to John Shotter, conversation is a form of joint action, a collective activity that cannot be accounted for in terms of a cause and effect logic. Participating in a conversation is a situated activity, individuals respond by recognizing the uniqueness of the situation, creating utterances that search to fit inside a history of previous conversations, while simultaneously anticipating the conversations to come (Shotter, 1993).

Discursive Psychology

The notions of supplementation and joint action remind us that conversation is a complex process deserving careful exploration.

In this section, I want to advocate for a close study of real conversations. Looking closely into real exchanges between people can provide a detailed and much more substantial view on collaboration, as a process evolving moment by moment in the connection between utterances. I am also seeking to offer tools to make collaboration visible, to provide a way to reflect on interpersonal exchanges where the individuals involved achieving collaborative conversations, regardless of whether this

achievement comes from a deliberate intention or is simply an unintended effect. In order to do so, I will rely on a discursive perspective in social psychology.

A discursive perspective can be likened to a microscope of interaction. Instead of getting an overall view about what people say, it looks closely into what people say and how they say it. We can learn what people do with their words through the small details, how utterances fit together and how people manage to achieve interpersonal coordination through language use.

In order to research such a process, discursive psychology analyzes interaction turn by turn. When people are talking to each other they achieve two kinds of action, they form utterances while at the same time they give space for others to have a presence inside the conversational ground. Even though (almost) everyone can take part in a conversation without stopping to think how we do it, a procedure as simple as knowing when to speak or when to let others speak demands implicitly negotiation of how to distribute turns.

The notion of turns refers to the order needed to allow for the realization of an activity. For instance, traffic lights distribute and organize vehicle transit, just as a chess game can be played if turns are properly followed. It is a specific arrangement signaling the right time to make a move. Social interaction works in the same way. However, what separates conversation from other activities is the lack of external rules or agents allocating turns. What might seem as a trivial or simple activity such as everyday talk is actually a social achievement that is locally managed (Sacks, H., Schegloff., E. & Jefferson, G., 1974).

The starting point for discursive psychology is the close study of sequences, chains of turns appearing in a successive order. A turn is an opportunity for participants to show each other their understandings of what is going on inside an exchange: Are we joking? Are we debating? Are we planning?

Turns are like links in a chain; one person's talk is tied to what has been said before and to what will be immediately said afterward. If we want to discover what a person is doing with her words, we need to look for utterances nested in a sequence. Because a sequence defines a context and the specific relations between utterances, we can understand utterances not as isolated units but as a response (Hutchby & Woofit, 1998).

A discursive perspective has developed a theoretical and methodological project that shares points of view with other forms of constructionism, it rejects the metaphor of language as a direct window to the mind or to the world, and instead it holds the view that language has a creative and formative function (Potter & Hepburn, 2008).

Discursive psychology can be defined as a proposal about social action focused on the active and constructive role of language. It studies discourse; that is, talk and text as part of social practices (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Garay, Iñiguez & Martínez, 2005).

It is impossible to provide here a full map of discursive psychology. I will only describe its basic theoretical principles, as these principles become the guidelines for exploring collaborative forms of talk in interaction.

Discourse is constructed and constructive. We can think of utterances as built out of different materials, therefore we can identify how they have been assembled, they have been put together with different words, categories, metaphors and other linguistic resources. At the same time discourse constructs versions of actions and events, the world and the self are created and modified through the use of language (Potter, 2003, 2004).

Discourse is oriented to action. We can do things with words. When we use language, we can state, invite, make accusations, refute, and persuade. Even though these may appear to be small actions,

they can be used to bring life to larger and more complex activities, practices and institutions such as teaching, psychotherapy or legal counseling (Potter, 2003, 2004).

Discourse is situated. Every utterance is conditioned and occasioned by surrounding utterances and it has been designed to fit the particular context to which it is directed. Our words are made for specific individuals and situations. (Potter, 2003, 2004).

In brief, discursive psychology offers a different path for observing how people make meaning by way of a close inspection of interaction and the way people organize and link their turns at talk.

On Constructing a Research Question and a Method

When starting this research, my attention was not focused on collaborative forms of talk. The idea behind this study was to understand how supervision worked. At the same time, I was particularly interested in watching this community of therapists, and the way they organized their supervision practice since it seemed to possess unique qualities (which I will describe in the subsequent pages).

Inquiry was directed towards forms of talk and participation. I was looking to describe actions that take place through use of words, and its contribution to the formation of a specific practice or activity such as supervision

In this process some fragments of talk began to stand out. What struck me in particular were those moments where conversation seemed to be chaotic and disorderly, far from being an exception, this conversational style seemed to dominate the entire exchange.

In this process some fragments of talk began to stand out. What struck me in particular were those moments where conversation seemed to be chaotic and disorderly, far from being an exception, this conversational style seemed to dominate the entire exchange.

At first sight conversations appeared to be inscrutable. Regardless of the moment where the tape recorder would be turned on, therapists seemed to have a prolonged history of previous conversations; they would take for granted that topics of conversation were familiar and known to everyone.

The atmosphere was relaxed, informal, even playful and humorous at times. Therapists talked in a way that seemed chaotic and disorderly; the conversation seemed to lack purpose or direction. They would jump from one topic to the next without any warning. It was not easy to discern topics, purpose, or if the topics were even relevant.

It would seem that I am pointing at flaws or defects in conversation, but I am not; I merely want to show my first impressions, coming from an initial (and maybe superficial) contact with the recorded material.

There are two questions worthy of asking. One, for who is this conversation chaotic? And two, is there a standard by which conversations should be judged? The answer comes from a discursive position. Everyday life dialogues may seem obscure or amorphous because they do not fit a preconceived notion of what a conversation should be, whereas the contents of invented dialogues (such as those of movies and literature) are unambiguous and accessible (Tannen, 1994).

When characters inside a movie or a novel are talking with each other, their words are addressed to an external audience. When real people are talking with each other the researcher becomes an audience to the words that originally were not addressed to her. So the central issue is whether the conversation makes sense to participants, not to external observers. This poses a challenge for the researcher; to describe what participants do and how they do it, in order to create a conversation that *makes sense to them*.

A basic tenet of discourse analysis is that every interaction has its own order. No matter how odd or unusual it may seem, how structured or amorphous it may look from the outside. Participants inside a conversation are always taking action in order to understand each other and create meaning; they are creating a social order through local actions (Sacks, 1984; Psathas, 1995).

This tenet was the basic guideline for approaching moments of seemingly disordered flux within the therapists' exchanges. My goal was to describe their utterances, forms of response and participation as a means to accomplish meaning.

Participants: a Community of Therapists

The term supervision might mean different things for different people, and its structure and purpose may vary according to the setting in which it takes place. The supervision sessions I recorded was in many was unique. In the following lines I will describe the distinctive features of these exchanges.

The present data comes from a community of therapists gathering together with the purpose of talking about and reflecting on clinical practice. The members have joined this community spontaneously, out of common interests and concerns. They have created an autonomous space to discuss their work with clients and the theories behind this work. What holds them together as a collective is the common goal of thinking about and translating into practice the many varieties of relational and constructionist therapies, rather than any formal membership in an institute or training program.

The individuals forming this community are very diverse. Most of them are women, although there are a few men. Their ages range from 25 to 60. Their clinical experience is also diverse: there are beginner therapists in the process of training, others are very experienced and work as teachers and supervisors in various formal settings.

During the period of time I had access to this community, the number of members increased, so they decided to split into two different groups. Each group was made of six therapists and they would meet once a week. The conversations that are shown and analyzed here come from both groups.

Each weekly meeting was organized into 3 different activities.

Discussing a text. Therapists selected authors and topics for study and discussion according to their personal interests and curiosities. For each session they chose a text to comment on and discuss practical or theoretical aspects of therapy.

Interviewing a client. Therapists chose between live or narrated supervision, but in most cases, therapists would interview their consultants and the rest of the group members would act as a reflecting team.

Reflecting on the interview. Once the consultant left, therapists reflected on the recent interview and the dilemmas of the therapist regarding the case.

For the purpose of data analysis, only the first and third moments of the meetings were considered. With the exception of the clinical interview, every meeting was tape recorded. A total of 18 sessions were collected which amounts to over 40 hours of recorded material. All therapists agreed to be tape recorded and signed a written consent form.

About Transcription

There are two main strands in transcription. If the goal is to arrive at a thematic analysis based on the contents of talk, then the researcher will employ an orthographic transcription system akin to a script. It the theoretical premise is to treat talk as action, the goal will be to study interaction, and therefore the researcher will employ a transcription system showing the many facets of interpersonal coordination: volume, talk speed, silences, overlapping talk, etc. (Hepburn & Potter, 2009).

The most widely used transcription style in discursive psychology was developed by conversation analyst Gail Jefferson (2004).

This research focuses on interaction. Therefore the transcription format elected is the Jeffersonian system, as it makes visible that talk is a form of action.

The following is a list of the key symbols in the Jeffersonian system.

Symbol	Use
(.)	audible micropause but too short to measure
(2.5)	pause in seconds and tenths of a second
hhh	aspiration
.hhhh	inspiration
.	stopping intonation
,	continuation marker
?	questioning intonation
wor-	a cut-off of the preceding sound
wo:::rd	elongation of the prior sound
[word wo[rd	marks the beginning of overlapping talk
word= =word	latching of successive talk
WORD	louder speech
°word°	quieter speech
<word>	slower speed of talk
>word<	faster speed of talk
wo(h)rd	laughter within speech
(word)	word is not clearly hearable or dubious
((word))	additional notes from the researcher

Procedure

Discursive psychology does not provide a procedure for inquiry, understood to mean a predetermined and fixed course of action that the researcher should adhere to. Instead, discursive psychology poses a set of questions about social life and offers a variety of resources and pathways for giving answer to them .

Transcription was divided in two stages; during the first one all sessions were transcribed using a conventional or script-like system. The goal was to identify potential cases for analysis. The chosen sequences were then re-transcribed following Jefferson's conventions. Each one was analyzed separately and only after that different sequences were contrasted in order to arrive at a pattern.

Analysis aimed to identify actions performed through the content and form of people's talk. The key questions directing analysis were: What are participants saying? How do they say it? What actions are performed through this particular choice of content and style? These questions allowed for answers to remain in a descriptive mode, depicting what both participants in the conversation and readers can see (Edwards, 2003).

Talk is always analyzed within a context, as a part of a wider turn sequence. Therefore I made a turn-by-turn analysis of each fragment, bearing in mind that each turn is connected to previous and subsequent turns. This kind of research holds that even a seemingly minuscule feature of interaction (a silence, an out-breath sound, a word that has been suddenly cut off) is a reaction to a preceding utterance or the catalyst for a subsequent utterance.

By analyzing different fragments, I intend to show the collective organization of talk. Less attention is given to specific topics of talk, as I do not assume that such content is a direct window into participants' beliefs or thoughts. This way of treating data separates discursive psychology from other qualitative approaches (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

So far, I have been talking about the findings in two rather opposed ways. On one hand there is conversation as disorder and chaos, and on the other, conversation as a collaborative joint action. It was through the process of analyzing and working with the data, that I was able to move from one description to another.

I deliberately chose those fragments of talk that seemed to lack any sense, organization or purpose. Analysis proved this way of describing to be inaccurate. It was only through a recursive process of listening, transcribing, analyzing and comparing that similarities between sequences began to emerge.

The conversations between these therapists have unique qualities, and the possibility for entering the field of conversation is available for each and every one. There is *multiple participation,* that is, the presence of various participants is not an obstacle for more to join in an active manner. On many occasions (almost) every therapist takes an active role, and besides participation being multiple, it also becomes *simultaneous.*

These descriptions will be exemplified by including and analyzing real fragments. For now, it should be pointed out that multiple and simultaneous participation is not a random occurrence, it is a rather complex accomplishment, six people finding a way to speak and at the same time letting others speak. This accomplishment entails distributing turns in an efficient manner. Turn distribution is not relevant per se, but each turn is a space for making meaning with others. Throughout these exchanges, participants make meaning in a collective way by sustaining an ongoing and active presence on the conversational ground.

As we get a closer view, other features become salient. Participants employ short turns, or their turns tend to latch or overlap, and often we can hear two or more persons talking at the same time, therefore there are fewer and shorter silences.

Data Analysis

Now I want to make a fine-grained description of multiple and simultaneous participation through the analysis of specific fragments of talk.

Everyone present in the supervision setting enters the conversational ground actively and repeatedly. However not all group activities allow for the possibility of multiple and simultaneous participation to occur. For instance a lecture or a sermon may involve the presence of many persons but only one of them is allowed to hold the floor for long. There are other settings and activities involving many parties where access to the conversational floor is highly controlled. Therefore neither the presence of many parties, nor the willingness to speak can guarantee that everyone involved will have a right to speak or to be heard. For instance there are learning contexts where the teacher monitors and controls who can speak, when, and about what topics (Edwards & Mercer, 1997).

```
S2405 K1LA 24:35:8ⁱ
1      Ruth   =is very what?
2      Sonia  haylian=
3      Alec   =he makes an intervention [(         )
4      Nuria                                [but very stra[tegic
       Sonia                                             [but he IS
5             MUCH
6             MORE (harsh) than Hayley
7      Eva    =look imagine doing that in[mexico
       Nuria                               [he is much
8             mo:re
9             (1.3)
10            of a black humor or what [ha ha ha ha
11     Sonia                           [to me it doesn-
12            [to me it-
13     María  [to me it feels like a super black humor
14     Sonia  but to me it seems he borders [on too much
15     Eva                                  [(         )
16            (.2)
17     Sonia  I have a black sense of humor [but this one
              borders on
18     Eva                                  [he is very
              (cynical)
19     Sonia  [disrespectful
20     Eva    [very (cynical)
21            yes he is very (cy[nical)
22     Ruth                     [yes I feel that too.
23            [but I wish I could have seen him
24     Eva    [I don't fucking care
25            ((mumbling))
26     Sonia  it is [too much
27     Nuria        [it is fun but you don't dare to
28            I I [wouldn't dare
29     Alec      [it is fun
30     Nuria  but it is f[un it is fun to watch him
31     Ruth             [OH well to do-
32            to implement it? (.5) you mean [you wouldn't dare
33     Nuria                                 [yes
```

I have included this fragment without any previous information so the reader can have a direct contact with the conversation as it actually happened. We can see six different persons participating actively and continuously. All turns are of short length, we can find few and short pauses (lines 20, 27, 43). There is another noticeable feature, many utterances overlap.

At first sight this fragment may seem chaotic, lacking structure and purpose. It is precisely through this singular form of exchange that therapists gather together around the same activity: describing and assessing the clinical work of an (unnamed) therapist. Each utterance acts as a confirmation of this activity, each new offering adds something to the previous one. The prevailing atmosphere is one of affiliation and consensus.

The main discussion revolves around the clinical work of a therapist who had recently presented a workshop. Sonia describes his work as "haylian." This utterance triggers a series of adjectives showing the stance of all participants towards his clinical work. Utterances latch onto the next one, and there are no pauses in between. Also some utterances overlap briefly. This tendency continues

along the entire exchange in such a way that different utterances from different individuals coincide in time, talk becomes simultaneous, one voice in the exchange always meets other voices, and there is no possibility for one speaker to dominate the conversation.

This sequence fits within a typical way of organizing consensus; a first utterance making an assessment is met with a second utterance intensifying the assessment (Pomerantz, 1984). In this case, we can see a chain of utterances where each upcoming utterance heightens the one that came before.

```
Is very strategic
But he is much more harsh than hayley
He is much more of a black sense of humour
To me it feels like a super black humour
But to me he seems to border on too much
```

This shows participants' talk is not random, each one is responding to the other; they keep in sync with each other, not only through the content of their talk, but also through the tone and shape of utterances.

Through this exchange therapists make several achievements: they manage to describe, assess and satirize the clinical work of the therapist being talked about. They also reach some conclusions that his work can be seen as having "a black sense of humor", that it can be "cynical", "disrespectful" and "fun" but it is not suitable for real clinical practice "imagine doing that in Mexico" "I wouldn't dare". Describing, satirizing and showing investment in a topic are forms of action. The outcome is a collective image of the work of this therapist that has been actively agreed upon. It is a consensus that has been reached by weaving each utterance with others.

Repetitions

If one considers the excerpt called "haylian" as an isolated case, the arguments that have been presented so far may seem rather weak. A pattern of interaction can be described only through contrast and comparison with other excerpts.

When observing the previous fragment one can see that utterances are not separate entities. Many utterances tend to act as reproductions of previous expressions. For example, "black humour", "cynical" and "fun" all appear several times throughout the exchange and are voiced by different participants.

A recurring action in these conversations is repetition: one therapist duplicates the exact words of another. As a discursive phenomenon, repetition needs to be placed in the appropriate context, but if it is viewed from a standardized ideal of communication, it can be misconstrued as irrelevant. Nevertheless when the starting point is the close inspection of real exchanges, repetition is not only a constant presence but also plays a relevant role. In this data repetition works as a pivotal motor of conversation.

```
N3004 K1LB 22:42:5
1      Ester  well maybe this is something(.)
2             that you can bear in mind(.8) but it´s not
3             something that he's going to mention (.)
4    →  Ana    that he's going to mention (.5)
5             [sure
6      Ester  [or that it is important for him to discuss(.3)
7      Ana    Yes
```

In this extract we find therapists commenting on a clinical case. Ester marks a difference between the topics that may be relevant for the therapist (Ana) and the topics that the client may bring to the session. The first response from Ana is an exact repetition that is presented in an affirmative tone.

```
N2304 K1LA 09:42:02
1      Ester   and the::(.4) and this very important part that I think
2              does have an influence from (.2) the previous
3              thought doesn't it?
4              th(h)is tria(h)ngul(h)ation thing (.2)
5      Ana     Yes
6      Ester   yes? the parental (.) child (.)
7   →  Ana     the parental child mhm
8      Ester   the scape[goat
9      Ana              [the scapegoat
```

Here therapists are revising structural family therapy concepts. Ester begins by listing a series of concepts (1-4). Just as in the previous fragment repetitions are immediate and exact, in the case of "the scapegoat" the duplicate overlaps with the original.

In both excerpts a speaker reproduces accurately a piece of the previous turn; the duplicate comes right after the original or after a minimal pause and is delivered in an affirmative way.

First of all, duplicates work as an acknowledgment; that is, the speaker can have an unequivocal sign that her words have been received, besides she can tell what is being heard (Schegloff, 1997). Linguists such as Deborah Tannen and Jennifer Coates hold that repetition works as a propeller of the exchange, not only does it make the act of listening visible, it also pushes the conversation forward (Coates, 1996; Tannen, 1989).

In the following example, we join the conversation when Sonia argues for the possibility of using techniques when working with kids.

```
S2405KL 8:34:0
1      Sonia   to me it has a lot to do (.) with working with kids (1)
2              since I've been working more with kids(.3) during the last
3              years (.9) >cause I had stopped< (.6) and I've returned-
4              I mean with kids you have to do very tangible stuff (.5)
5              otherwise they don´t under[stand you
6      María                             [scales are so [good
7   →  Sonia                                           [scales are
8              so: [goo:d
9      Eva         [yes
10     María       [with teenagers too=
11     Eva     =with teenagers I use them all the time=
12     Sonia   =besides they love them
```

Sonia presents a new idea "with kids you have to do very tangible stuff otherwise they don´t understand you". María takes the next turn "scales are so good". Both utterances overlap and there is no space between them.

Seeing both utterances, an external observer can pose several questions: Has Sonia finished her participation? Is María interrupting? In what sense is María's turn relevant? What is the link between her turn and the previous one? The answer to these questions can help us tell whether this pattern of talk-in-interaction can be said to be collaborative.

For conversation and discourse analysts, every interaction has its own logic. The relevance of what has been said is created in the connection between utterances, therefore it is not a given but an emerging logic. In order to answer the former questions we need to attend to participants' actions, for only they can judge whether the actions of others can be suitable. In this sense, only Sonia can express

through her actions if "scales are so good" is suitable for the conversation, both in terms of content and timing.

Sonia responds to María with an exact repetition, she elongates the sound of "so good" thus intensifying the original words (7-8). Repetition marks acceptance, it welcomes María's participation, discarding the chance that her offering may be seen as an interruption or out of place.

From there on, participants keep the same direction by adding to and extending the conversation, they acknowledge each utterance by showing familiarity with the topics at hand. Eva adds an affirmative "yes", while María adds a new example where scales can be useful "with teenagers too", this utterance is accepted and extended by Eva. Sonia keeps along the same way; she accepts the previous utterance by adding a new element.

As in the fragment "haylian" we find an atmosphere of affiliation, each utterance joins the previous one, each one accepts the other. Likewise, participation is multiple and simultaneous. There is a chain of overlapping utterances (5-10) and the last three utterances are latched onto each other.

So far, I have shown different excerpts to illustrate the distinctive conversation pattern that this community of therapists has generated. Each fragment is a proof of multiple and simultaneous participation as the pathway for the creation of meaning. Data analysis shows that consensus is achieved in a collaborative way through deployment of specific discursive strategies such as repetition.

To repeat is to borrow someone else's voice, to position oneself as an animator therefore recognizing the other as author. Once utterances start circulating among a collectivity and are voiced by different persons, they stop having an owner - they become communal.

Joint Creation of Utterances

Even though repetition has a continuous presence throughout the exchange it can take part in more complex sequences. In the following excerpts, we can see yet another facet of collaborative joint action, this time through the joint creation of utterances.

In the next fragment, Sonia is reflecting on an interview with a patient that had just taken place.

```
S2604 K2LA 16:48:4
21     Sonia  in this one I had to think (1.2) kind of if what I was
22            doing was working. kind of what (2.9) and I think
23            that wh- a part I questioned myself(.) is
24            this thing you were saying Eva (.2) I stayed on the
25            children on purpose (.5) because I didn´t feel I was
26            allowed(.2)
27   → María  °to talk of something [else°
28     Sonia                        [to talk of something else.
```

In order to analyze this fragment, we can start by considering the final outcome. There is a coherent utterance, both in terms of grammar and meaning, "I stayed on the children on purpose because I didn't feel I was allowed to talk of something else." This utterance is not the product of one individual; it is the product of *joint participation*. Sonia offers a first part while María the second.

How can we tell this is a form of collaboration? Previously we have seen that repetition is a form of acceptance, of welcoming an utterance into the conversational ground. On line 28, Sonia repeats the same exact words María has just said.

María's participation needs to be taken into account. In and of itself "to talk of something else" cannot become a meaningful unit, a fully formed sentence, or a coherent thought.

If meaning resides in a response, María's talk can only make sense as an extension of Sonia's. Maria carefully shapes and places her participation; she reacts to a minimal pause and presents her talk not as a single unit but as a continuation of what was said before.

In the next fragment, participants discuss whether "philosophical stance" is an appropriate term for describing more interventional clinical work.

```
2304 K1LB 00:07:5
21  Ana    it is a philosophy (.4) because you're (.3) the: the:::
22         (.8)
23  Jordi  the healer (.)
24  Ana    the healer (.)
25  Ester  mhm (.)
26  Ana    you're the healer and the one in charge of the other's
27         wellbeing(.8) that's why I feel that that it's philosophical
28         it can too be construed as (.4) a stance-
29         a philosophical stance no?
```

Here we find again a two-voiced utterance "it is a philosophy because you're the healer and the one in charge of the other's wellbeing." It is essential to describe the interactional process leading to this outcome.

Ana has trouble building her utterance; there are pauses, self-repetitions and elongated words. Jordi's supplement is a reaction to that trouble. Just as in previous examples, Ana accepts the supplement with an exact repetition, and she uses Jordi's words as a resource for extending meaning, so she can develop her own argument by borrowing his words.

Collaborative creation of utterances is a complex process that can only occur as a consequence of a fine level of interpersonal coordination. Two different persons can create one utterance because a speaker builds a recognizable turn, at the same time, the listener can follow the trajectory of the first turn in order to lend further shape to the original utterance (Lerner, 2004).

Therefore, these are single utterances created by two different persons. I include this form of interaction as one of the many facets that collaborative action can take. It should be pointed out that this interactional resource plays a useful role. In previous fragments participants are not merely exchanging information o reproducing well-known ideas, they are reflecting on their work, building arguments.

Ownership of the conversational ground is always shared. Participants show shared ownership by encouraging others to speak and by offering scaffolds that extend and build on the ideas of other participants (Coates, 1996)

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Choral Utterances

By considering individual cases and contrasting them with each other we can begin to notice a pattern. Overlapping talk appears as a constant feature in these exchanges. Previously I have referred to it as simultaneous participation. If the starting point is an idealized notion of how communication should work, overlapping talk represents an anomaly to be corrected. Common sense tends to equate it with interruption (Coates, 1996, Edelsky, 1981).

When dealing with real interpersonal exchanges overlapping talk appears much more frequently. One cannot establish ahead of time its consequences; overlapping talk needs to be analyzed in its surrounding context and in relation to others' responses, since the same linguistic feature can play varied functions (Tannen, 1994).

In the next fragment, Ruth is arguing why patients may drop out of a therapeutic process with a reflecting team. She makes a distinction between a therapy conducted with the regular presence of a team, and a therapy where the reflecting team is present for a unique session.

```
S0102 K1LA 07:42:00
1      Ruth   and someone that like regularly meets his therapist and
2             suddenly goes (.) may or may not(0.3) happen
3             what you say, so likewise its people with pain, people
4             with a dilemma, so I don't think it  is thi::s
5             (0.5)the way the team works (.) that is it may be
6             that perhaps they are not used to hearing so: many
7             ideas (0.4) and perhaps they need more time to (0.3)
8      María  (digest them) (.)
9      Ruth   digest them or they felt threatened by
10            so many voices (0.5) but people that start with- with
11            a team it doesn't like m:(.) doesn´t happen that
12            that they don´t (0.5) suddenly don´t come back (.)
13     Sonia  no because the frame is(.) is
14  →         [is different
15     Ruth   [is different
```

Ruth is building an argument to justify why clients starting a clinical process with a reflecting team usually do not quit therapy. It is not an argument that has been achieved individually; on the contrary it is built alongside the participation of María and Sonia.

By the beginning of the fragment, the emerging argument is produced individually by Ruth. As the exchange progresses several voices enter the conversational ground and participate in the creation of emerging ideas. In line 8, Maria produces a supplement for an unfinished utterance which is accepted with a repetition. In line 13, Sonia offers a contribution searching to complement and enrich Ruth's turn.

There is a particular feature of this brief exchange to be underscored. By the end of this fragment, Sonia and Ruth utter the same words at the same time. This is not mere happenstance; rather it is the direct result of a unique pattern of interaction that is encouraging of mutual participation. It is also the result of a relational sensibility allowing participants to act in synchrony with others.

In the following example participants are remembering key concepts of family therapy

```
N2304 K1LA 12:56:7
1      Ester  and the identified patient was in charge of (.7)
2      Ana    ° (giving voice)[to the problematic°
3      Ester                  [of giving voice
4             (.6)
5  →   Ester  [to the problematic of the family
6  →   Ana    [to the problematic of the family
7             (1.5)
8      Ana    Exactly
```

This excerpt can be summarized into a basic idea: "the identified patient was in charge of giving voice to the problematic of the family". But this idea does not come about automatically, and we can see how both participants are struggling to get at it.

The overall pattern has been described before: participants are creating utterances together, therefore a piece of talk does not form a single coherent unit, rather it works as an invitation for others to join in. Just as in the previous example, here Ester and Ana are simultaneously producing the same ending for the utterance being developed. They create a choral form of participation, where two different voices match their entrance into the conversational floor both in terms of content and timing.

In both excerpts there seems to be a catalyst for choral utterances, an unfinished piece of talk that works as an invitation. Unlike conjoint utterances, where one individual is in charge of accepting the supplement, here the supplement is accepted by means of choral participation.

In the next fragment, Ester is reflecting on a recent interview with a patient.

```
N3004 K1LB 29:16:6
1    Ester   and on the other hand one of the things that very
2            much caught my attention of this session today is how when
3            (1.7) what is being built (.) comes from what he is
4            saying (.9) things flow (2.1) and it was so flowing
5            a lot of information came out(1) lots and lots of it
6            information about what he thinks (.5) and how he lives his
7            (     ) (3.2) and I don't know if I would give him a
8            little bit of:: this no?
9            (3)
10   Ana     a little bit of::? [(what?)
11   Ester                      [of being there
12           (.5)
13   Ana     oh [being there
14   Ester      [being there n [being there
15   Ana                       [being there [being there
16   Ester                                  [n being there n being there (.)
17           and then you start moving somewhere °else°=
18           =yes.
```

Ester begins by summing up the interview and highlighting some of its aspects. By the end of her turn she presents an indirect suggestion: "I don´t know if I would give him a little bit of this". Ana shows her lack of understanding by repeating the last stretch of talk in a questioning tone and adding the word "what."

At this point, something remarkable happens. Ester responds to this request for clarification with "being there," and Ana registers and accepts it with "oh" plus a repetition. The exchange suffers a metamorphosis, where Ester sets a chorus in motion and Ana joins this activity. Ester's repetitions are carefully placed to match Ana's; they both achieve an almost perfect ensemble of utterances.

This choral activity is built through a constant repetition of the same phrase, where the repetitions link together in a different way, not successively but simultaneously forming one voice. Hence the notion of authorship dissolves; one can no longer separate the originator of the utterance from the animator.

The previous three excerpts include instances of choral utterances matching both in content and timing; same exact words are uttered at the same time.

This form of participation can be assessed in terms of its outcome, what happens when two persons say the same words at the same time *in this specific kind of context.* Choral activity tends to form a group voice, therefore producing consensus where the possibility of disagreement is ever-present.

The sort of exchange these therapists have developed fosters multiple participation, which does not always take the form of a chorus. What enables the presence of choral utterances? The answer is the context of conversation. In a wider sense, context refers to the specific individuals participating, the history of conversation and a background of (assumed) shared knowledge. In a more specific sense,

context refers to how the aforementioned features are evidenced moment by moment throughout the sequence.

Participants react to the contents of talk, its packaging and the ongoing linkage of utterances. If two persons can produce the same words at the same time, it is because they can respond to the context as a whole and use it as a resource for generating relevant actions (Coates, 1996, Edelsky, 1981).

Final Thoughts

Throughout this text I have tried to think about collaborative relationships and conversations by using the tools of discourse analysis. It is not a limitless approach; therefore we need to define its scope.

Attention was focused on *forms of talk*, not on its topics or contents. The excerpts included here attempt to show the complexity of what at first sight may be considered shallow or chaotic talk.

The focus of analysis was interaction, those moments where utterances are intertwined in a collaborative way. By showing and analyzing different fragments, I set out to show a global pattern that has been actively created by therapists, a form of participation that encourages and fosters the presence of others in the conversational ground.

How can this fine-grained analysis of language-in-use contribute to a richer description of collaborative conversations?

A researcher can position herself from a farther distance in order to reach a panoramic view of the data focusing on the general contents of conversation. .This approach may have a wider scope but erases the complexities inherent in the interpersonal coordination process; it overlooks that contents of talk do not emanate from individual minds, but are constructed moment by moment as a response to the action of others (Silverman, 2005).

A close and detailed inspection of language-in-interaction evidences that any activity or social context can only be understood from its specificities, the seemingly small or insignificant actions that bring life to relationships and conversations….

…this research shows how creating a collaborative way of talking with others depends on the participants´ skillfulness to attend and react to the most minute of details. When people are in conversation the do not passively register messages, rather they are responsive; they react to the content, the packaging and timing of such utterances.

In fact, this research shows how creating a collaborative way of talking with others depends on the participants´ skillfulness to attend and react to the most minute of details. When people are in conversation the do not passively register messages, rather they are responsive; they react to the content, the packaging and timing of such utterances.

Ranging from the rather simple forms (such as repeating the words of others) to the more complex (such as producing utterances jointly or in a chorus); participants achieve collaborative forms of participation because they are sensitive to every aspect of the unfolding flow of interaction.

Collaboration is both a process and an outcome created within the history of a relationship. There is no normative standard that can determine if participants will achieve collaboration or how they will achieve it.

Research taking a discursive perspective can be very useful since it stays within a descriptive and not a normative mode, that is, it describes action and its outcomes. Therefore it can work as a powerful tool to show *the multiplicity of ways* in which persons can coordinate their utterances in a collaborative mode.

Such inquiry does not attempt to impose explanations or inferences. Any assertion must be grounded in participants' actions and orientations, that is, one cannot state that repetitions or choruses are forms of collaborative action *unless participants treat them in the same way.* If these forms of response were unwanted by participants, they would make it evident. It is for that reason that the researcher's statements always stay close to what anyone can see in interaction.

I have shown how an interaction format is configured: It is a format that meets specific needs, appearing in the current moment, and that are enabling of activities in need of supervision. Participants mold a type of exchange that can be labeled as collaborative due to the way they weave their utterances together. However this type of exchange does not represent a standard to be copied, for not all supervision activities can or should be carried out in this way.

Data analysis shows *one of many* contextual and specific forms of collaboration, one in that therapists have developed throughout history, one that can work for them given their idiosyncratic relationships, activities and goals.

I am not striving for universal or overarching descriptions. This sort of analysis offers a clear picture of a way of achieving interpersonal coordination, while recognizing that collaboration is a situated activity that unfolds in a unique context. Therefore it can only be performed in and through its details and specificities.

This sort of description attempts to build bridges between the philosophical stance of collaboration and the very concrete actions by which this stance is expressed. Its potential richness lies in seeing multiple translations of the same philosophical stance, translations that are always being created according to the specific individuals involved and the context of their relationship.

This view of research stays in sync with constructionist dialogues, and represents a useful medium for showing how theoretical notions such as supplementation and joint action become alive. A research stemming from a discursive perspective offers a way to ponder the relevance of those notions in *real conversations.*

If we assume language to be an active and constructive medium, it is not enough to take this premise for granted. We need to explore what people do with their words while in the midst of activities. We need to find out how language can be constructive, not from a theoretical, but a practical point of view, while it is being used by real people, on real occasions.

The sort of analysis shown here starts with real fragments of conversation to make expressions of joint action visible. Far from just proving theory right, the purpose is to offer an alternative, in order to reflect on our understandings of the constructive potential of language and relationship.

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Endnotes

[i] This kind of analysis relies on the nuances and subtleties of language use, its quality can be best appreciated in the original language the conversations were held, that is in Spanish. Therefore I suggest the English reader to read the conversations in Spanish and use the English translation as a guideline.

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