CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AS A METHOD FOR STUDYING ACADEMIC WRITING

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS (CA)
A theory of interaction and a method for studying interaction
- Used widely in social sciences and linguistics
- Uses videotaped and transcribed data from real encounters
- Analyses the sequential unfolding of interaction
- Analysis based on participants’ interpretations and orientation
- Analysis not based on predetermined discourse roles or contextual factors

CA AND WRITING

Studying activities involved in writing (e.g. giving feedback)
- Observing social roles and identities constructed in discussions
- Considerable amount of research done on writing-related interaction
- Rarely contextualised with references to writing research
- The results can be compared to “stocks of interactional knowledge” (Peräkylä & Vehviläinen 2003), e.g. instructions on giving feedback

FEEDBACK AS PROBLEM-SOLVING
(Svinhufvud 2008)

Discussant’s feedback turns in master’s thesis seminar
- Data: 12 videotaped seminar sessions
- What do people do when they give feedback?

Feedback consists of three activities
1) Praise = a positive evaluation
2) Questions = seeking information
3) “Problem-solution feedback” = a problematic issue or an action to improve the text is discussed
- Praise is relatively rare
- The problem and the solution can be explicated, or they can imply each other
- Problem-solving can be collaborative, e.g. the discussant presents with a problem and the supervisor suggests a solution

Problem-solution is viewed as the primary form of feedback
a) The most common form
b) Questions are interpreted as indications of a problem

Application
- General advice on feedback (“Start with positive comments” or “Formulate critical feedback as questions”) is problematic


DOCUMENTS IN SUPERVISION
(Svinhufvud & Vehviläinen 2013)

The role of documents in the openings of supervision encounters
- Data: 22 master’s thesis supervision encounters

Documents are a necessary resource for joint activity
- The documents are taken out, organized, and leafed through
- The gaze and bodily orientation are fixed at the documents even before the supervisory activity
- The supervisor doesn’t seem to register the student’s turns at this stage
- The document is seen to represent the student’s effort: you have done loads of work now so-it seems,

Two ways of starting the main activity
1) The participants proceed immediately to discuss the documents
2) The supervisor starts with a question
- In both cases the attention and discussion is oriented toward the documents

Application
- Agenda-talk might provide the student with opportunities to raise her concerns and put her in a more responsible position