A Dialogist’s Perspective on Conversation Analysis

Per Linell (prof. emeritus, SoK)

Dialogism and Conversation Analysis (CA) both focus on linguistic practices, especially speech, in the real world. The two will be juxtaposed in this paper. The perspective adopted will be an extended version of dialogism. While recognising that CA is a successful method to analyse recorded spoken utterances in local sequential contexts, the theoretical background of CA will be critically assessed on five points: (i) CA’s assumption of adjacency pairs as the basic structures of “talk-in-interaction” cannot be generally taken for granted; (ii) CA’s adoption of the norm of “one speaker at a time”, cannot be assumed to be the single universal principle underlying turn-taking systems in languaging; (iii) CA underrates the notion of communicative activity types, (iv) CA lacks a general theory of contexts, despite the fact that various dimensions of context(ure)s, some local and others ‘remote’ from the specific situation at hand, are obligatorily involved in participants’ sense-making in each moment; (v) CA’s inadequate view on intersubjectivity and on analysts’ and participants’ understandings of utterances.