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Caswell, Dorte; Dall, Tanja

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Dorte Caswell and Tanja Dall

Aalborg University

Department of Sociology and Social Work

A.C. Meyers Vænge 15,

 2450 Copenhagen SV.

Corresponding author: Dorte Caswell (Caswell@socsci.aau.dk)

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Abstract

The need for professional reflection has been argued extensively in social work literature. A separate literature has demonstrated the potential of using conversation analytic research (CA) in interventions seeking to inform professional practice in social and health care. Nevertheless, we know little about how social workers actually do 'reflection' and how CA can be used to facilitate reflection, specifically.

The objective of this paper is to examine how CA can be used in interventions that develop reflective professional practice. Our dataset consists of audio recordings of 21 mutual learning and innovation platforms, taking place as part of a collaboration between researchers and five Danish social work agencies. We use CA to examine how researchers and professionals reflect on social work interactions.

We find that the use of CA (a) makes professionals aware of aspects of practice that are often performed in routinised ways and (b) provides concrete starting points for the non-evaluative reflection on such practice. The paper has implications for researchers and professionals looking to utilise CA in developing reflective practice as it outlines one model for intervention, demonstrates the detailed ways in which reflection may be accomplished in interaction and discusses the organisational requirements of such interventions.

Keywords: reflective practice, conversation analysis, talk-in-interaction, knowledge mobilisation

Introduction

The need for professional reflection in social work has been argued extensively. Reflection has been claimed to be necessary in order to improve the practices of social workers in complex situations (Kirkwood et al., 2016), to illuminate and/or avoid practices that are insensitive or detrimental to users (Askeland and Fook, 2009) and to ensure the emotional well-being of social workers (Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2009). At the core of reflective practice is awareness of how language (re)constructs the world (Askeland and Fook, 2009; Dewey, 1934), and proponents of *critical reflection* in social work argue for a constructivist attention to the contingent nature of social work and how assumptions, categories and discourse inform our understanding of what constitutes a 'problem', a relevant intervention etc. (e.g. Taylor and White, 2000). Within the literature on interventions using conversation analysis, several authors have argued for the practice of improving the potential of conversation analytic research (CA) (e.g. Antaki, 2011; Markee et al., 2021; Toerien et al., 2011). In this paper, we examine how researchers and professionals use CA to reflect on social work interactions in an intervention based on practice/research collaboration.

In the following section, we ground this aim in the existing literature on reflection in social work, CA on institutional talk and literature on intervention using CA. We then present the setting in which our analysis is based: a formalised collaboration between researchers and social work agencies in Denmark. We detail our methodological approach to the analysis before sharing the findings of our analysis. The findings are presented in two sections: first, we show how the methodological framework of CA allows social workers to discover aspects of their own interactions with clients, which may otherwise remain invisible to them. Second, we show how specific pragmatic concepts from CA may serve to facilitate social workers' reflection on the details of their interaction. In the final section of the paper, we discuss our findings, including challenges and prerequisites needed for CA-informed reflection in social work practice.

Critical reflection in social work and the potential of CA in informing reflection

Reflective practice in social work

The seminal works of Dewey (1934) and Schön (1983) provide a reference point for a great many of the writings on reflection in social work (though this literature is characterised by bringing together many different disciplines, cf. Askeland and Fook, 2009). According to Dewey (1934), language is the central medium through which the social world is de- and reconstructed. It is through ideas, concepts and hypotheses that new insights – which can potentially foster new actions – are created.

Proponents of *critical reflection* in social work argue for a constructivist awareness of the contingent nature of social work and how assumptions, categories and discourse inform our understanding of what constitutes a problem, a relevant intervention etc. (Askeland and Fook, 2009; Taylor and White, 2000; Thompson and Pascal, 2012). We can also talk about an *instrumental reflection,* which is concerned with identifying aspects of practice (methods, procedures, actions) which may be more effective than others in solving a given problem. The two types of reflection are not (necessarily) mutually exclusive; however, they each address different challenges and potential outcomes. Different understandings of reflection may also be related to different timings (D'Cruz et al. 2007: 83), as illustrated by Schön's ideas on reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). *Reflection-in-action* denotes (self)awareness and possible adjustment of professionals' actions as they are involved in said action, whereas *reflection-on-action* takes place after the fact, with professionals having to understand a given situation to create learning for later situations (Schön, 1983). These ideas have informed literature on social work arguing for the relevance of (critical) reflection in social work and offering theoretical and practical models for reflective practice for social work students and professionals (Fook and Gardner, 2007; Taylor and White, 2000), including specific tools such as journaling or reflective writing (Sanchez et al., 2019). Muurinen and Kääriäinen (2020) argue that the use of theory holds the promising potential to 'disturb', reframe and restructure the way in which social workers reflect on their own practice. Since social work is essentially an interactional activity, we

shall substantiate throughout this paper that CA research on institutional talk is similarly able to reframe professionals' reflections on their own talk-in-interaction.

Conversation analytic work on institutional talk

Conversation analytic (CA) work on institutional talk has produced widely established insights into how goals and activities are accomplished in social work and other settings of relevance to social work practice (i.e. Dall and Jørgensen, 2021; Hall et al., 2006). Central to CA is an interest in understanding *how* a given action may be accomplished in talk, rather than focusing solely on *what* is being said. To facilitate such an interest, CA is strictly oriented towards data in the form of recordings of naturally occurring interactions. Turns of talk are the main unit of analysis, although they are always sequentially embedded in ongoing interaction. A core feature of CA is the attention to participants' orientations, as applied in analysis through the next-turn proof procedure (Schegloff, 1992: 109; Sidnell, 2013: 79), according to which analysts examine the recipient's response to how they understood the prior turn, using this to ground the analysis of what a turn of talk has produced in the interaction. CA is descriptive rather than evaluative, and it seeks to detect how particular institutional tasks are managed and accomplished through talk (Heritage and Clayman, 2010: 18).

Interventionist conversation analysis

Within the broad literature on applied CA, 'interventionist CA' focuses on how CA can offer solutions to a given problem, with the intention of bringing about some kind of change (Antaki, 2011; Markee et al., 2021). For example, Stokoe (2014), Lamerichs and te Molder (2011), Toerien et al. (2011) and Wilkinson (2014) all argue that CA research can identify more effective communicative actions in interactions with clients/patients. Stokoe's influential work on the Conversation Analytic Role Play Model (CARM) offers a framework for taking CA analyses of (un)successful outcomes in a given type of interaction to professionals in a way that allows professionals to 'live through conversations' without knowing what is coming next and finally role-play what they might do next to handle the situation (Stokoe, 2014: 257). While the models for

taking CA into professional settings vary, all authors highlight the potential of basing professional development on audio recordings of actual practice and analysis inspired by CA, rather than on professionals recalling, retelling or (re-)enacting a practice situation, which may miss much of the detail of actual interactions. Such interventions are not specifically about supporting reflective practice but about using CA to inform training. However, O'Reilly et al. (2021) delineate a specific focus on 'reflective interventionist CA', which emphasises the value of researcher/professional reflection as part of the collaborative process. The mutual and shared reflection of professionals and researchers, they argue, can lead to new types of knowledge, providing the basis for new ways of working (ibid. 2021: 624). Kirkwood et al. (2016) provide one of the few examples of interventionist CA directly oriented towards more (critically) reflective social work practice. The authors outline a model for enhancing reflective practice among social workers in the criminal justice system, drawing on CARM. They show the potential of applied CA to facilitate social workers' critical perspective on existing practices and to identify opportunities for change. They also note that specific efforts may be required to ensure this type of reflection, rather than 'simply' a focus on effective practice (Kirkwood et al., 2016: 12). Indeed, communicative skills are often deployed by professionals unthinkingly, and there may therefore be advantages to making them visible and available for discussion in order to challenge and enhance practice (Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi, 2006: 169). As professionals see their practice reflected back to them through recordings and transcripts, the systematic approach of CA provides an opportunity to look at professional work as it unfolds in actual and routinised practices (Kirkwood et al., 2016), which may not otherwise be perceptible to participants in real time (Hall and White, 2005). However, the aim is not to direct social workers' practices but to illuminate the landscape for interaction, providing a framework for thinking about it (cf. Hall, Slembrouck and Sarangi, 2006: 169).

Setting

The analyses of this paper are based on an ongoing research collaboration between a group of researchers from Aalborg University and five Danish social work agencies – that is, local branches of the public

employment services. Our ambition is to develop research-based knowledge and innovative practices that strengthen both quality and user involvement at the frontline of the social and labour market policies targeted at vulnerable adults in the Danish welfare state.

A central arena for collaboration is mutual innovation and learning platforms (MILPs, see Andersen et al., 2017). MILPs typically involve between four and eight professionals and up to three researchers in two-hour meetings. The general aim is for researchers and professionals to work together in consecutive sessions with a problem-oriented focus, such as challenges in the institutional interaction between social workers and clients. These may concern how to facilitate clients proposing initiatives for further action (see e.g. Dall and Jørgensen, 2021) or how to discuss possible future work with clients who are far away from the labour market (see e.g. Caswell, 2020).

A MILP session focusing on talk-in-action will most often be guided by the researcher. The researcher presents a selected concept or research finding and subsequently initiates a data session sequence in which all professionals are generally active in initiating and exploring observations in data. Towards the end of the MILP, the researcher initiates a meta-reflection on the session, inviting reflections on any insights and challenges resulting from the MILP, before closing the meeting.

In advance of a MILP session, professionals submit recordings of their meetings to the researchers. These recordings are then transcribed verbatim, and the researchers select several excerpts that are more finely transcribed according to CA conventions. Excerpts are most often selected as examples of a recurrent interactional activity (e.g. information giving) or feature (e.g. initiatives or questions), but sometimes professionals suggest excerpts that they consider examples of either particularly challenging or good interactions on which they wish to reflect further.

MILPs are intended to be a platform for reflection in order to discover new perspectives and challenge what is typically taken for granted. The overall ambition of the collaboration between research and practice is to develop research-based knowledge and strengthen user involvement on the frontline.

Methodology

The data for this paper consists of audio recordings of 21 mutual learning and innovation platforms (MILPs), in which social workers and researchers work together to examine the social workers' interactions with clients. All MILP sessions are based on audio-recorded meetings between social workers and clients, which are then examined using the CA methodology. In our analysis below, we have included excerpts from the professional–client meetings as well as MILP sessions, since the former provide the background for the latter. Access to all data has followed from the research collaboration described in the previous section. Thus, the meetings between clients and social workers reflect a wide range of meetings between unemployed individuals and professionals in Danish employment agencies. Similarly, the group interactions in the MILPs involve a wide range of professionals who hold different functions within the employment services. However, they all have in common that they have regular meetings with unemployed clients.

In the MILP recordings, the role of the researcher goes far beyond that of an observer, and in analysing MILP interactions, we – as authors – face the challenging task of analysing interactions in which we ourselves are participants. The methodological principles of CA offer assistance in doing so – in the same way that they offer professionals assistance in analysing their own talk. For instance, the next-turn proof procedure facilitates a grounding of analysis in the data, rather than in personal perceptions. Despite our best efforts to the contrary, we can never be certain to have completely eliminated the risk of interpretive bias; however, the detailed and empirically grounded analytical tradition drawing on CA provides a high level of transparency in the analyses and should make a critical re-examination of the data possible for the reader.

All data was audio-recorded by researchers or professionals and transcribed by student workers. For the analyses conducted in this paper, we have focused on the data session phase of MILP sessions, looking to identify instances in which professionals express gaining new insights or understandings of their interaction

with clients. These instances have then been analysed with the aim of understanding what happens interactionally and how (if at all) CA is used to arrive at these instances.

The original Danish transcripts were analysed, and the excerpts used for publication were translated into English after the completion of the analysis. Subsequently, we chose the excerpts used in the article based on the following principles: excerpts should be exemplary of the phenomenon we wish to analyse and the finding we wish to illustrate, they should be understandable to readers unfamiliar with the context, and they should be (relatively) short.

The research was carried out in accordance with university policy regarding ethical procedures around collecting sensitive data. The legal basis for collecting sensitive data in Denmark is based on two legal grounds: research authority and affirmative consent. When collecting the data for this article, we adhered to both grounds, as we collected data for research use while also collecting written consent from participants allowing us to use the data for educational purposes. All analyses – as well as MILP sessions – are based on anonymised data. However, due to the local nature of MILP sessions and the ambition to work with professionals' own meetings, it is likely that the identities of the professionals – and possibly of the clients – will be known to the MILP participants. Professionals and clients have been informed of this and have given consent to participate under the promise of pseudonymity, but not full anonymity in local contexts. The collected data has been stored in accordance with data protection rules, and the overall project has been registered with the national Danish Data Protection Agency, which may carry out inspections to verify compliance with these rules.

Findings

Our analysis has resulted in two main findings. First, the methodological framework of CA allows social workers to discover aspects of their own interactions with clients, which may otherwise remain invisible to them. Second, we show how specific pragmatic concepts from CA may serve to facilitate social workers' reflection on the details of their interaction in ways that reframe their perceptions of their own practice.

We shall present these findings by looking first at the excerpt discussed in the MILP (from a meeting between a social worker and a client), and then at the discussion of said excerpt between researchers and social workers.

Discovering one's own interaction

The following is an excerpt from a meeting between a social worker and a client. A recording of the full meeting was shared by the social worker in preparation for a MILP session with a group of her colleagues.

The excerpt below takes place 30 minutes into the meeting between the social worker and the client. At this point in the meeting, the social worker and client have just agreed that the client is to begin a public intervention program where the client can – among other things – utilise her creative talents and interests.

Excerpt 1: Meeting between social worker and client[i]

```
1    Client:          The the- I know that the creative °I can feel that
2                     that motivates me.°
3    Social worker:   It motivates you?
4    Client:          Because I have actually: (.) I have used knitting:
5                     to relax.
6    Social worker:   °Yes.°
7    Client:          And I have actually been invited- I have been invited
8                     into a knitting club- I've been to a store.
9    Social worker:   Ye:s.
10   Client:          So I don't know if that could heh: £if I suck up to
11                    them hh:.£
12   Social worker:   That- yes well I really think this is something for
13                    you ((client's name)) this thing with
14                    ((intervention)) I really think so eh: yes.
15   Client:          °°The creative.°°
16   Social worker:   So: isn't that what we'll agree on ((client's name))?
17   Client:          Yes.
18   Social worker:   Good. I will be in touch for sure. About vacation and
19                    about intro- eh: meeting or visitation meeting down at
20                    ((intervention)).
21   Client:          That sounds: I think that- you know I need something
22                    (.) creative.
23   Social worker:   Yes.
24   Client:          because I have some- you know I'm not- I can't like
25                    (1.0) >I was also thinking< b:because it's like eh
26                    (1.2) eh I was also thinking, that if I am to find
27                    some hours ((of work)) then=
28   Social worker:   =Yes
29   Client:          Mo most work and stuff then you have to be completely
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30                        steady
31   Social worker:       °Exactly°
32   Client:              [And I can't promise-]
33   Social worker:       [And that is why    ] right now I am not demanding-
34                        right now I would like you to like (.) eh: start an
35                        activity that can bring you joy, something that can
36                        motivate you. In the long run our goal is that you
37                        become settled in relation to the: eh: employment
38                        area and protection needs regarding your back
39                        problems.
```

In lines 1–2 and 4–5, the client states that creative work motivates her and helps her to relax. The social worker demonstrates alignment with the interactional activity of the client by asking a follow-up question that directly mimics the phrasing of the client (line 3, 'it motivates you?') and by minimal responses (lines 6 and 9) to the client's telling (lines 1–2, 4–5 and 7–8). Then, from line 10, the client seems to initiate a topic extension by moving from the description of 'the creative' as something that is good for her, to indicate that it may lead to some future, yet unspecified action ('if that could–'). The potential action is not explicitly stated, and the turn is marked by several indicators of delicacy (van Nijnatten and Suoninen, 2013). Thus, the wording is unspecific and indirect ('if that could–'), it is formulated as a hypothetical ('I don't know'; 'if that could–'; 'if I suck up to them'), and it is mitigated by laughter ('heh', ':hh'). The formulation of the turn may also suggest that the client is about to ask a question ('I don't know if that could'), but no question is explicitly stated, and the social worker does not orient to the turn as a question warranting a reply in her following turn (from line 12). Instead, the social worker confirms that the previously agreed-upon intervention program is a good choice for the client, stressing her personal belief herein ('I *really* think…'). There are no markers of disagreement or other forms of misalignment, such as 'but', pauses or accounting (Pomerantz, 1984), which suggests that the social worker is aligning herself with the idea that something creative will be important to the client. We do not see her take up the delicately framed initiative of the client in the previous turn. In line 15, the client repeats in a very low voice 'the creative' before the social worker initiates the closure of the meeting (Schegloff, 1973) by stating that a decision has been made ('isn't that what we'll agree', line 12) and summarising the next steps in the case ('I will be in touch…', line 18).

However, the client does not fully cooperate with the attempted closure, as she reiterates the importance of 'something creative' in lines 21–22, thus suggesting that the topic has not been exhausted (Schlegloff & Sacks, 1973). The client's following turns are characterised by several false starts, self-interruptions and unspecific formulations (i.e. 'I have some– you know I'm not– I can't like', line 24), which may suggest some delicacy is at play for the client (van Nijnatten and Suoninen, 2013). While she starts out repeating the need for 'something creative' (lines 21–22), in later turns she is problematising her possibilities for gaining work hours (i.e. 'I can't promise–', line 32). If we are to understand lines 7–8 and 10–11 as initiatives to open up a new topic of discussion in relation to the knitting store, at this point in the conversation – after the social worker did not take up the initiative – the client seems to be simultaneously keeping the topic of something creative open and opposing opportunities at a 'real' place of work.

When preparing for the MILP session, the researchers found the above excerpt interesting because of the ambiguities that seem to be at play around the client's initiative. Excerpt 2, below, comes from a MILP session in which excerpt 1 was analysed in collaboration between researchers and professionals. At the beginning of the session, the researcher introduced research on the cultivation of client initiatives in institutional social work interaction (see Dall and Jørgensen, 2021). We enter in the middle of the data session, as the social worker from excerpt 1 (social worker 1) observes the transcript of her meeting with the client. Present are two researchers and five colleagues of social worker 1.

Excerpt 2: MILP in which excerpt 1 is discussed
```
1    Social worker 1:    What I noticed– now I don't know if haha: but here on
2                        line 151 (2.0) I hadn't noticed that.
3                        I don't know if that's something?
4    Researcher 1:       Yes.
5    Social worker 1:    I think that then she actually starts to say (.)
6                        ((reading)) I've been to a store (.) and
7                        ((reading)) I don't know if that could (.)
8                        ((reading)) if I suck up to them'(.)
9                        Become an opportunity for work placement?
10                       And then I go on to say-
11                       £but I just have not caught onto it heh: in
12                       the conversation£ [but I just go on to say-]
13   Researcher 1:                        [°It's pretty interesting°.]
14   Social worker 1:    ((reading)) yes well I really think this is something
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15                         ((reading)) for you ((client's name))(.) isn't
16                         ((reading)) that what we'll agree on ((client's
                           name))?
17                         If I had caught on to that one with
18                         if I suck up to them?
19   Researcher 1:         Yes.
20   Social worker 1:      Then I could have asked her (.) but what do you mean
21                         by that? Are you actually thinking that this could
22                         become a work placement?
23                         And I have actually not (.)noticed that.
24   Researcher 2:         It was a missed opportunity for
25                         [cultivating an initiative?]
26   Social worker 2:      [°Yes, it was actually°.]
27   Social worker 1:      And I can't even remember I heard her say tha:t (.)
28                         about that knitting: I really can't remember that at
29                         all.
```

In the first turn, social worker 1 begins to share what she has noticed in the transcript (line 151 mentioned in excerpt 2 corresponds to line 8 in excerpt 1). She prefaces her observation with a short laugh and a hedging remark that she '[doesn't] know if that's something' (line 3). When researcher 1 responds with a minimal response ('yes', line 4) this functions as an encouragement for social worker 1 to continue her turn (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974), and she goes on to describe her observation from line 5. Social worker 1 uses the word 'actually' to preface her quote of the client's turn in the transcript ('she actually starts to say…'). Tognini-Bonelli (1993: 209) finds that the word 'actually' is not only used as a way of 'anticipating the unexpected'. It is also commonly used when a speaker is about to introduce a point that goes against herself. The counterpoint here entails a new understanding of the client's turn contrary to the way she heard and responded to it in the original interaction ('and then I go on to say…', line 10). Here 'actually' marks a shift from one positional state to another, which is further established by using 'but' to contrast her recorded action ('but I just go on to say…', line 12) with her current understanding ('but I just have not caught on to it…', line 11). Social worker 1 goes on to speculate what another interactional practice ('if I had caught onto that…', line 17) could have produced in the interaction with the client ('Then I could have …', line 20).

Through these first turns, we see the social worker express a new understanding of her own interactional practices informed by a close reading of those practices. Up until this point, the researcher has encouraged the social worker to go on, offering minimal responses ('yes', lines 4 and 19) and a confirmation that 'that's pretty interesting' (line 13) without otherwise engaging with the observation made by the social worker. In lines 24–25, the second researcher then introduces a conceptually grounded interpretation, suggesting that the turns can be understood as a 'missed opportunity for cultivating an initiative'. In doing so, the researcher refers to the previous part of the MILP, in which research on cultivating client initiatives was presented. This is followed by another participant confirming this reading ('yes, it was actually', line 26), again using the word 'actually' to signal that this reading is perhaps contradictory to (her own) previous understanding. Finally, in lines 27–29, social worker 1 further establishes the 'newness' of the discovery by repeating twice that she doesn't 'even remember' this part of the conversation or the information provided by the client in the transcript (mentioning a knitting club).

Altogether, the excerpt illustrates how CA may bring about new understandings of one's own interactional work which would not have likely occurred if the reflection were grounded in the recalling or retelling of a given situation. The fact that the social worker in this excerpt does not remember the exchange that she herself was involved in underscores the importance – and potential – of examining the recordings of interactions, rather than the memories of such interactions.

Reflecting on interactional accomplishments
The use of CA-informed analyses in MILP sessions allows professionals not only to enhance their awareness of their interactional practices but also to explore challenging interactional tasks and different ways of managing them.

At one point, the professionals suggested a thematic focus on interactions in which the professionals are informing clients about rules obligating them to participate in meetings at the agency and the risk of being sanctioned if they do not comply with these rules. A recent legal change has meant that professionals are obliged to send a nine-page folder to clients detailing the duty to participate in meetings and activation,

and also to present the contents of the folder verbally to clients, potentially every six months. Professionals

experience these interactions as difficult because they challenge attempts to establish trust and

collaboration with clients, and they are perceived as counterproductive to increasing client participation. A

MILP session was planned with professionals who submitted data from such interactions. Excerpt 3 is an

example from one of those submissions (13 meetings were submitted in total) showing a phone

conversation between a social worker and a client. Due to COVID-19, meetings took place over the phone,

but as the lockdown is coming to an end, meetings and activities in person are about to start up again. We

enter the conversation eight minutes into the 15-minute-long meeting, as the social worker is introducing

the rules of sanctioning.

Excerpt 3: Meeting between social worker and client
```
1    Social worker:      Now what is it. In relation to this re-opening of the
2                        active labour market efforts then eh: (.)
3                        even though I just counselled you on sanctioning (.)
4                        I actually have to do it a*gain.*
5    Client:             *O* kay.
6    Social worker:      because ehh tha:t is what the law says. (1.2)
7                        because now-
8    Client:             Well you better do it then=
9    Social worker:      =yeshehe ((laugh)) £otherwise we get in trouble
10                       with them [we  ] don't want that.£
11   Client:                       [Yes.]
12   Social worker:      But what is it now ehm: (1.5) do you *remember* the
13                       sanction? £do you remember what I counselled you on
14                       the last time?£ (2.0)
15   Client:             H: <well it was something about me having a *duty* to
16                       a:> (.) >you know that was in terms of phone
17                       meetings< but otherwise it's my duty to answer the
18                       phone.
19   Social worker:      Mm:. (1.0)
20   Client:             And say (.) you know well in advance if I can't (.)
21                       you know if I have a proper reason <you know if I for
22                       instance (.) >have to go to the hospital or
23                       something< and I can't talk on the phone,
24   Social worker:      Yes.
25   Client:             then I have to say so.
26   Social worker:      Mm:
27   Client:             Ehm and if I don't say so then I will get
28                       <a de:decution i:n pay> or what it's called.
29   Social worker:      Yes. (2.0) You were really good at remembering that
30                       (.) £maybe you should counsel me then.£ [((laugh))]
31   Client:                                                     [((laugh))]
```

In the first turn, we see the social worker introduce the topic of sanctioning by framing it as necessary ('have to', line 4) while also acknowledging that the client has already received this information once ('I just counselled you', line 3; 'again', line 4), making it somewhat redundant ('even though', line 3) or unexpected ('actually', line 4, cf. Tognini-Bonelli, 1993). The client aligns with this topic introduction with a marked '*O*kay' (line 5), which may be understood as an expression of surprise incorporating the change-of-state token of 'oh' (Heritage, 1984) into the aligning minimal response of 'okay'. In line 6, the social worker offers an account of why she has to repeat this information ('because…'), which may serve to bridge the gap between what is expected or preferred and what is stated (Scott and Lyman, 1968). That some delicacy is at play around the topic introduction is further indicated by the hesitation with which the account is formulated ('eh', 'tha:t', pause). In line 8, the client seems to align with the account put forward as justifying the topic introduction with regards to legal demands ('you better do it then'). The social worker treats this as a humorous remark by laughing and uses an inclusive 'we' (line 9, cf. Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007) to position herself and the client against 'them' (line 10), which can be seen as an act of affiliation, wherein the social worker is distancing the legislative demands while positioning herself alongside the client.

In lines 12–14 the social worker then moves on from accounting for why the topic is being introduced by asking the client whether she remembers the information she has previously received ('do you remember the sanction?'). The question is prefaced with a pause, and then slightly reformulated ('do you remember what I counselled you on…') and delivered with a 'smiling' voice. While the design of the first question ('do you remember the sanction', lines 12–13) makes less of a presupposition of the client's knowledge than the second ('do you remember what I counselled you on', lines 13–14), both questions follow the establishment of this information as repetitive (line 3). By reformulating the first question with a direct reference to what the speaker herself has told the client, the turn contains a clear preference for an

affirmative answer: that the client remembers this information. However, in the following turn, the client does not simply reply with an affirmative 'yes'. Instead, she goes on to state the rules of sanctioning as she remembers them. The following turns of the client (lines 15–18, 20–23, 25 and 27–28) are marked by several instances of prolonged speech (e.g. lines 15 and 28), reformulations (e.g. lines 21–22) and formulations signalling uncertainty ('it was something about…', line 15; 'or what it's called', line 28). Still, the information is treated as correct and sufficient by the social worker, who responds with minimal responses throughout the client's re-telling (lines 19, 24 and 26), before praising the client on her recollection in line 29 ('you were really good…'). The sequence ends with the social worker making a comment ('you should counsel me', line 30), which both the client and social worker treat as a joke by laughing (lines 30 and 31).

This excerpt was one of four excerpts from information-giving sequences concerning sanctioning included in the MILP session analysed below. The session was initiated by the researcher, who gave a short presentation on CA literature on question design, focusing on epistemic gradient and preference (Heritage, 2008), since several excerpts contained examples where the social worker used questions as part of the information-giving. The researcher and professionals then analysed the above excerpt (excerpt 3) together. We enter this analysis as the participants are discussing a question posed by a professional in the transcript.

Excerpt 4: MILP in which excerpt 3 is discussed

```
1    Social worker 1:    And if you assume (.) that the citizen has previously
2                        been told a lot about sanctions and so on (.) then
3                        there could also be a bit of a preferred answer here-
4    Researcher:         Yes, and what does she prefer?
5    Social worker 1:    That eh: the client knows what is going on.
6    Researcher:         Yes, there actually is a preference for a a: 'yes',
7                        £I really hope you know this because I have said
8                        it before.£
9    Social worker 3:    £This is the third time!£((laughs)) ((2.0))
10   Social worker 4:    And then there is some kind of re*pair* in this turn
11                       where the social worker laughs.
12   Researcher:         Mm when we look at data and how sanctioning talk is
13                       done in meetings (.) we see a lot of laughter.
14                       And that can seem like an odd thing. I mean on the
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15                        surface she is telling the client that she can take
16                        her benefit away-
17   Social worker 3:     Ha. Ha.
18   Researcher:          Ha ha. ((laugh))
19                        But I would define that laughter as affiliation. You
20                        know the continuous work on the relation and and
21                        defusing the intensity of this delicate communication.
22   Social worker 5:     And you said repair. ((1.5)) [((social worker 4))] is]
23   Social worker 4:                                 [Yeah: maybe-         ]
24   Social worker 5:     that also about repairing the relation?
25   Social worker 4:     Ye:s exactly. Yes ((2.0)) Yes that thing when one
26                        have talked about sanctioning you know and 'do you
27                        know what happens then?' You know it is also related
28                        to power and all that. That one then (.) repair that
29                        by sort of (.) laughing a bit or (.) yeah.
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In the first turn, the social worker makes an observation and suggests a possible interpretation of a specific turn of talk in the data (corresponding to lines 12–14 in excerpt 3), using concepts from CA as a resource ('a preferred answer', line 3). The researcher confirms this reading ('yes') and then elicits a continuation ('and what does she prefer?', line 4). Social worker 1 then specifies her reading ('the client knows…', line 5), which is once again responded to with a confirmation in line 6 ('yes…').

Then, from line 10, another observation is shared by a professional. We understand the professional's turn as reflecting an interpretive initiative in that she brings forward certain features of the data ('where the social worker laughs', line 11) and suggests a CA-inspired interpretation ('repair', line 10). This is followed by the researcher first elaborating on the occurrence of laughter in the larger dataset of which the excerpt is part and second, offering an alternative interpretation of this instance of laughter not as repair, but rather as affiliation (line 19). Considering the epistemic authority of the researcher as an expert on the methodology used in the session, we can understand line 19 as not simply an alternative reading of the data, but rather an adjustment of the shared interpretation of the data. That the turn is seen as a suggested adjustment rather than – for instance – a correction is supported by the next turns (lines 22 and 24), in which social worker 5 asks social worker 4 to elaborate on their initial interpretation. While the differences in epistemic status between professionals and researchers may entail a preference for alignment with the

researchers' interpretation, line 24 is nevertheless treated as an invitation to elaborate on this interpretation ('is that also about […] the relation'?). In lines 25 and 28 social worker 4 uses the word 'one' as a generic third-person pronoun (the Danish 'man'), suggesting that she is not referencing the data excerpt, but is rather drawing on her own interactional experience of mitigating expressions of power by using laughter ('that thing when one have talked about…', lines 25–26). While what the social worker describes as a 'repair' does not correspond to a CA understanding of interactional repair, we nevertheless see how the exploration of naturally occurring interaction using CA concepts spurs professionals to reflect on their own interactional practices.

Altogether, these interactional activities make up a reflective session, wherein the methodological inspiration from CA sustains focus on the actual interaction in the data. Thus, the researchers facilitate the social workers' use of these tools by confirming and adjusting the social workers' interpretations. The social workers try out different interpretations of the data at hand, and finally, they relate the specific analysis to their own interactional practice. The reflective aim of the MILP sessions is also exemplified in this excerpt, as the interaction is not about training professionals in identifying or utilising the most effective way of communicating sanctions. Rather, the activity is an exploration of how a certain dilemma-laden task is achieved in a situated interaction in contingent ways. Thus, the exploration of different examples of how to achieve the same task (here, to inform about sanctioning rules) makes apparent the contingencies in the situated interaction and allows the professionals to become aware of their own, often routinised practices.

Conclusion

In our collaboration with professionals, we find that (a) reflection on the details of an interaction makes professionals aware of aspects of practice that are often performed in routinised and standardised ways. The theoretical and methodological principles of CA lend themselves well to framing the reflective practice of professionals. This approach to looking at naturally occurring interactions, including one's own interactions, in ways that are non-evaluative and systematic offers insights into practices which

professionals are often not aware of, as they occur in routinised professional practice. Thus, social workers become aware of the devices used in talk and how they constitute contingent practices that engage with clients' talk in different ways. Furthermore, we find that (b) the pragmatic concepts of CA literature constitute concrete tools for reflection which facilitate professionals' non-evaluative reflection on their work. For instance, research on question design, personal pronouns or affiliation may serve to zoom in on the details of talk. This approach additionally lends itself to suspending subjective perceptions of talk, as it offers a data-driven curiosity that structures observations and discoveries. Our findings add to the few previous studies arguing for – and experimenting with – the potential of CA to inform professional reflection (Kirkwood et al., 2016).

As social workers become aware of the contingent nature of interaction, opportunities for both instrumental and critical reflection emerge. Social workers initiate their own micro-experiments, looking to explore the instrumental functions of certain features of talk, and they become more critically aware of how the details of their talk can both enact certain normative structures and might expand or limit client participation in interaction and action planning.

In our case, CA with social workers has been organised in MILP sessions as part of a research/practice collaboration. We do not, however, claim that MILP sessions, specifically, are necessary for realising the potential of CA-informed reflection. What is necessary is an introduction to research on talk-in-action and guided sessions which gradually introduce social workers to the principles and theory behind this, as well as facilitate that these principles are followed in practice. The empirical and non-evaluative focus on the *how* of interaction – which is the very feature that makes analysis of naturally occurring interaction so useful for reflection – is, in our experience, very different from the ways in which social workers tend to discuss their work. We have found that it requires some training to become familiar with this type of analysis. We also have seen that, over time, professionals become able to conduct their own reflective sessions without the presence of researchers (or other 'experts' on analysing talk). Other necessary prerequisites for analysing

talk-in-action entail support from the managerial level to ensure resources and time to record and analyse interaction, as well as a collegial environment in which professionals feel safe in sharing and exploring recordings of their interactions.

The challenges of analytic competence, managerial support and a collegial environment conducive to sharing have been recurring in our collaborations and somewhat persistent in some local contexts. However, we have found that, as more and more social workers share their experiences of aha moments and improved practices, both managers and reluctant colleagues tend to become swayed towards participating in (and supporting) these reflective activities.

When taking seriously the contingency of talk-in-interaction, social workers must be able to act *in situ* in ways that are both informed by research (CA and other methodologies) and allow the unique situations and wishes of clients to have consequences in meetings and action planning. In such endeavours, reflection informed by research on talk-in-action (not only knowledge about findings from such research) becomes crucial.

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[i] **Transcription key**

>Yes absolutely<	Greater-than and less-than symbols pointing inwards indicate that speech is rushed
<yes absolutely>	Greater-than and less-than symbols pointing outwards indicate that speech is prolonged
<yes	A pre-positioned less-than symbol indicate a 'left-push' – a hurried start
[Yes] [That's] good	Square brackets mark overlapping talk
.hhh	A dot-prefixed row of h's indicates in-breaths
°yes°	Small circles indicate whisper/low volume
£Yes£	Pound-Sterling signs indicate a 'smiling voice'
ye::s	Colons show degrees of elongation of the prior sound
(1.5)	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time by seconds
(.)	An untimed pause (just hearable)
=	Equal signs indicate no gap between utterances
becau-	Hyphens mark a cut-off of the preceding sound
((laughs))	Doubled parentheses contain transcriber's descriptions