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Studies on emotions in social interactions

Introduction

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In recent years, the study of emotions in social interactions has become the object of a growing number of publications in interconnected and yet independent disciplines. Deviating from traditional approaches, relevant studies from a number of disciplines including linguistics, psychology and sociology take up the question of emotions and suggest alternative conceptions that are based on the assumption that the best place to observe the existence of emotions is within social interactions. Although these studies involve theoretical and methodological instruments that are partly common and compatible, few publications simultaneously collect studies which originate in approaches such as interactional linguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis, ethnomethodological sociology, discursive psychology as well as psychology of interaction and social development.

What makes this issue unique is that it brings together research material from precisely these approaches. This allows for a cross-disciplinary view of studies which, despite their occasional differences in discipline, theory and methodology, share the commitment to work with data derived from authentic, recorded and transcribed social interactions. This issue also opens up the opportunity for a diverse public of specialists and non-specialists on the subject of emotions to become acquainted with topics and trends in current research. The articles in this issue put forward a collection of reference points that these approaches use in order to conceive and analyse emotions.

Essentially, the following articles present approaches that tackle emotions from a critical and innovative perspective by linking them to the context in which emotions occur. These approaches are critical in the sense that they oppose dominant models which are based on the assumption that emotions are natural phenomena, mainly biological, neurological or cognitive in nature (cf. i.e. Arnold, 1960; Darwin, 1998 [1872]; Frijda, 1986, 2007; Kagan, 2007; Izard, 1977; Lazarus, 1999; LeDoux, 1998; Plutchik, 1980; Power & Dalgeish, 2008 [1997]; Scherer, 1984; Tomkins, 1984; Zajonc, 2003). These models revolve around an abstract, generic and isolated individual who experiences emotions within. Thus, they investigate emotions as decontextualised phenomena, essentially abandoning social, relational and interactional dimensions of emotions. From a methodological point of view, these models use extensive laboratory experimental methods and questionnaires.

The articles compiled in this issue adopt an alternative perspective by grounding their analysis in concrete encounters. In these encounters, emotions are first and foremost considered to be social phenomena in which the individual is positioned within the framework of intersubjective relationships. Seen from this angle, emotions circulate between individuals, groups, situations and cultures. They are displayed and constructed in and through talk-in-interaction, subjected to social norms and accountable for participants as well as for observers. Methodologically, these approaches have a higher empirical value based on authentic discursive data observed, collected and transcribed by the researcher.

These approaches are also innovative in that they assume the existence of close links between emotions, the organisation of interactions and social relations. It is these links that allow us to examine the notion of emotion with regard to notions such as cognition, the circulation and transfer of knowledge, identity, politeness or the socialisation of individuals in a new perspective. Although the authors in this issue do not necessarily share the same view on the nature of these links, they all agree that a better understanding of emotions relies on the analysis of social interactions and interpersonal communication.

Studies on emotions in social interactions

Studies on emotions in social interactions do not represent a field of homogenous research. Under this label, I am in fact putting together studies and approaches which can vary in their disciplinary anchorage, epistemology, definitions and methodology. However, going beyond these differences, I will focus on a certain number of assumptions that are in large part common to these approaches in order to put forward a first provisional systematisation.

Six assumptions on emotions as social phenomena

1. Emotions emerge in situated activities (cf. i.e. Bazzanella, 2004; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2001 [2000]; Sandlund, 2004; Whalen & Zimmermann, 1998). To approach emotions in the domain of social interactions calls for a re-specification: formerly isolated, decontextualised and individual phenomena, emotions become situated as they appear in various cultural environments, occurring during the accomplishment of social activities in interactional settings of different natures: face-to-face interactions or multiparty interactions; interactions in co-presence or in mediated (for example by telephone) situations; institutional settings or private encounters; with or without an audience; at work, at home, etc.

2. Emotions are sequentially embedded in talk-in-interaction and thus closely intertwined with its sequential organisation. In principle, a conversation is organised in turns following a temporal axis¹. On this axis, every turn reacts to one or several turns that preceded it (e.g. a response reacts to a question) and, simultaneously, it projects (creates expectations) how the interaction will proceed (a greeting projects a greeting, a question projects an answer, etc.). This retrospective-prospective characteristic of turn-taking in conversation allows the speakers to reorient the conversation every time they take the conversational floor. Depending on the speakers' objectives, the participants' status and position, their interpretation of the situation and other parameters, speakers are not obliged to respond to a question with an answer; they may instead choose to ask a question in return or to remain silent. In this sense, even if the preceding turn opens up a relatively fixed scope of expectations, it is the succeeding turn which determines the course of the conversation with the third turn repeating this pattern and so on. Bearing this principle in mind, the researcher considers emotional phenomena not as isolated segments in themselves, but in relation to their sequential environment and, in particular, to the turn preceding and succeeding an emotional segment. In doing so, the researcher is lead to explore the role of emotions in the organisation of turn-taking as well as in the actions realised by the participants. In this manner, the majority of the articles in this issue do not only investigate the types of display of emotions, i.e. the way in which speakers exploit language systems, prosody, delivery of speech, pauses or silences, gestures, looks or even objects that surround them to display emotion, but move beyond them and take an interest in the way in which emotions intervene in the accomplishment of activities in which the participants are involved. By postulating that emotions are not independent of the sequential organisation of talk-in-interaction, their analysis is closely linked to the analysis of the course of interaction.
3. Emotions are resources for actions. Emerging for and in social interactions, emotions fulfill a local function to make individuals perform social actions through talk-in-interaction (cf. i.e. Edwards, 1999, 2001). Emotions do not only contribute to render occurrences intelligible and to give them meaning; they also influence actions taking place in the course of interaction and the behavior of other participants and their relationships with them. In this sense, emotions do not only function, as traditionally

¹ For a detailed illustration of the evidence of turn-taking mechanism put forth by Sack *et al.* (1974) for the very first time, cf. in English: Hutchby & Wooffitt (1998), ten Have (1999); in French: Gülich & Mondada (2001); in German: Gülich & Mondada (2008); in Italian: Fele (2007).

attributed to them, in reaction to the environment, they also act upon the environment, the social actors and the development of the course of action.

4. Emotions are co-constructed. As social phenomena, emotions are not given on a one-off basis. They are on the contrary socially constructed, as social constructionist theories (cf. i.e. Averill, 1985; Harré, 1986; Ratner, 1989) and anthropological theories (cf. i.e. Besnier, 1995; Lutz & White, 1986)² have shown. The indexical nature of emotions (the sense of an emotion depends on its context of occurrence) functions in such a way that, as they emerge in and through social interactions, emotions are jointly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by the participants. Co-construction is furthermore linked to the reflexive characteristic of talk-of-interaction³: on the one hand, the context influences the emergence of emotions; on the other hand, each realised emotion contributes to configuring and reconfiguring the context. As an example, the display of tears on the part of the bride / bridegroom at the moment of saying 'I do' impart a solemn character on the wedding ceremony while the shouts of joy on the part of the assistants standing near the exit of the church orientates the participants towards a less solemn context of the celebration. One of the characteristics of the interactive nature of co-construction is that the emotional categories do not need to be explicit (it is indeed rare that speakers make their emotions explicit in their daily interactions) or univocal. The desire that drives the researcher to identify emotions in interactions in order to label them is often defeated by the practices of the participants who can easily turn towards emotion without specifying the slightest emotion or what the emotion is. Another characteristic of co-construction is that the emotional process is linked to the fluidity and the versatility of talk-in-interaction. That allows the participants to turn, within a matter of a few interval seconds, towards very different emotional displays.
5. Emotions are embodied and distributed phenomena. They are displayed through a wide range of methods that largely exceed the verbal code and involve the body in particular (cf. i.e. Ekman *et al.*, 2002; Ekman, 2003 on the facial expression of emotions; Beach & LeBaron, 2002 on gestures and gaze in the interactional management of emotional; Goodwin *et al.*, 2002; Planalp, 1998, 1999. On the use of bodily terms to express or to

² Furthermore, Bateson (1936), in his study on Naven, a New Guinean ritual, considers that emotions are culturally organized systems. Geertz (1973) suggests that emotions are cultural artefacts. Lutz (1988) speaks of *unnatural emotions*. Mauss 1969 [1921] underlines the symbolic nature of emotions.

³ cf. Garfinkel (1967) on *indexicality* and *reflexivity*.

talk about emotions, cf. Enfield & Wierzbicka, 2002). A grimace of disgust, a scream released in terror, a gesture of scorn or a sudden movement of fear can be sufficient to display an emotion. The body is one of the essential vehicles for emotions and their deployment during interaction, even if the display and the management of emotions in interaction involve a coordinated and partially simultaneous use of all modal dimensions. This assumption underlines the necessity to take into consideration the multimodal nature of social interactions in the study of emotions. As Goodwin & Goodwin (2001 [2000]: 254) claim:

[...] what is called for is an embodied performance of affect, through intonation, gesture, body posture and timing. An explicit emotion vocabulary is not necessary for powerful displays of emotion with language in its full pragmatic environment.

It is important to state that the coordination mentioned above concerns not an isolated individual but generally a number of participants or even all participants in an interaction. In this sense, emotions are not only embodied but also distributed: distributed among the different modes of verbal and non-verbal communication, distributed among the various partners of the conversation and finally distributed among different types of support exploited during an interaction, such as the space in which the participants move around, or the objects that surround them and which they manipulate.

6. The public character of emotions. Participants in conversation play an important part in making emotions vernacular: by turning towards them to carry out their daily activities, they render them accountable. From an analytical perspective, the public character of emotions is of important consequence: they are not only accessible to participants in an interaction but also to external observers, including researchers. The construction and the management of emotions, the importance they have in the development of courses of action, the accomplishment of activities and the constitution of interpersonal relations are only possible due to their public and accessible character. Because of this fact, emotions are analysable in view of their circulation in a shared space by adopting an endogenous view, i.e. appropriate for the internal logic of the situation, or, more specifically, for what the participants render accountable via their behavior and the manner in which they coordinate themselves in order to accomplish their activities.

Objects of study

The research material on emotions in social interactions covers many areas. During the past few years, a particularly rapid development of studies focusing on a large number of objects of study has taken place. I offer a small overview of said studies with the aim of providing a few indicative references.

Only a few studies discuss the notion of emotion in social interactions in a theoretical and programmatic manner. With the exception of the article by Coulter (1986) in sociology, contributions by Edwards (1997, 1999, 2001) in discursive psychology, the article by Goodwin & Goodwin (2001 [2000]) entitled *Emotion within situated activity*, the reflections of Ochs & Schieffelin (1989) in a more linguistic perspective or the article by Caffi & Janney (1994) in pragmatics, most of the studies do not offer a study on a strong conceptualisation of emotions. The works by Goffman have doubtlessly been influential, but this is mostly in connection with other aspects of his reflections (such as the notion of *frame* or *face*). Even though they recurrently mention topics like embarrassment, feeling bad or good, shame and pride, his works do not suggest a strong conceptualisation of the notion of emotion, which is mostly dealt with in a vague manner.

Having said this, the studies on emotions in social interactions have contributed to discovering and investigating several objects which have remained unexplored in other approaches.

Thus, there are studies which focus on connections between emotions, participation and activity organisation, e.g. Goodwin (2006a) on family conversation, Goodwin (2007), Leudar *et al.* (2008) on how talk about emotions is used as a psychoanalytic phenomenon, Nikander (2007) on emotions in meeting talks, Ochs & Schieffelin (1989) on affective intensification, Selting (1994) on emotive involvement, Svennevig (1994) on other-repetition as display of emotional stance, Firth & Kitzinger (1998) on emotion work as a participant resource or Toerien & Kitzinger (2007a, b) on emotional labour in a beauty salon.

Certain authors retrieve notions of cognitivist origin from a conversationalist point of view. This is the case, for instance, for the notion of *state of mind*: Drew (2005) on confusion, Edwards & Potter (2005) on mental states and descriptions, Heritage (1984) on a change-of-state token and its sequential placement. In addition Barnes & Duncan (2007) describe how private thoughts are used as speakers' resource for reporting and explaining actions and events.

Several studies do not display any interest in emotions in a general manner, but focus, on the contrary, on specific phenomena: embarrassment (e.g. Goffman, 1956; Heath, 1988), empathy / sympathy (Auchlin & Simon, 2004; Hepburn & Potter, 2007; Pudlinski, 2005; Ruusuvuori, 2005, 2007; Wynn & Wynn, 2006), pain in medical consultations (Heath, 1989, 1991, 2002), hysteria (e.g. Kidwell, 2006), deception in auction sales (Clark & Pinch, 1992), or surprise as an interactional achievement (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006).

Another number of equally important studies focus on typical phenomena concerning display of emotions: crying (e.g. Goffman, 1978; Hepburn, 2004;

Hepburn & Potter, 2007; Manzo *et al.*, 1998), laughter (e.g. Arminen & Halonen, 2007; Glenn, 2003; Haakana, 2001; Jefferson, 1984, Jefferson *et al.*, 1987; Lavin & Maynard, 2002), interjections (e.g. Drescher, 2003; Ehlich, 1986).

Other studies focus on talking about troubles and verbalisations: mitigation (Caffi, 1999, 2001; Fitzgerald & Austin, 2008), formulations and elicitations (Hutchby, 2005; Local & Walker, *forth.*), telling troubles (e.g. Drew, 1997; Jefferson, 1980, 1988; Jefferson & Lee, 1981; Nevile, 2008), linguistic ways of displaying emotions (e.g. Bamberg, 1997; Caffi & Janney, 1994; Drescher, 2003; Fiehler, 1990; Janney, 1986, on emotive uses of English; Maynard, 1993, 2002; Niemeier & Dirven, 1997; Ochs, 1986; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989; Plantin *et al.*, 2000; Weigand, 2004; Wowk, 1989), delicate topics (e.g. Haakana, 2001; Silverman, 1996; Silverman & Peräkylä, 1990).

Finally, other studies address typical situations where emotions can be displayed, for instance, in situations in which help is required (e.g. Emmison & Danby, 2007; Edwards, 2007; Fele, 2006; Sacks, 1967, 1987; Watson, 1986; Whalen & Zimmermann, 1998), or situations involving disagreements, conflicts or complaints (e.g. Goodwin, 1982, 1983, 2002a, 2002b, 2006b; Dersley & Wootton, 2000; Drew, 1998; Edwards, 2000, 2005; Fele, 1991; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984, 1986, Pomerantz *et al.*, 2007; Vuchinich, 1990), in telling jokes (e.g. Sacks, 1974, 1978) or in connection with (im)politeness (e.g. Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper *et al.*, 2003; Hutchby, 2008; Locher, 2004; Spencer-Oatey, 2005).

These studies and others which I cannot cite for the lack of space or due to insufficient knowledge of the contents do not all offer a conceptualisation of emotions. Some studies do not even mention this domain and are oriented towards the specific treatment of their topics and questions. However, in varying degrees, they all contribute to exploring and defining the scope of the field of studies on emotions in social interaction(s).

Definition, terminology, units of analysis and observables

A very strong instability where definition and terminology are concerned exists in research on emotions; it becomes impossible to retrieve a definition which meets with unanimous approval and agreement. Nevertheless, one conception seems to dominate a certain number of studies. It takes into consideration, according to Coulter (1986), that the definition of emotions is a social task accomplished by social actors in their interactions. It is then the analyst's task to discover how and to what extent the emotional categories and displays are accountable for the interactants. This conception, which has known less radical descriptions and stances, is definitely not taken up by all researchers, but it is particularly relevant for conversation analysis and discursive psychology.

At the terminological level, the term *emotion(s)* is dominant (e.g. Edwards, 1997, 1999, 2001; Fiehler, 1990; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2001 [2000]; Leudar *et al.*, 2008; Maynard, 1993; Nikander, 2007; Nishizaka, 2000; Plantin *et al.*, 2000; Weigand, 2004; Whalen & Zimmermann, 1998). One may also encounter the terms *emotivity* (*linguistic emotivity* Maynard, 2002), *affect* (Goodwin, 2007; Och & Schieffelin, 1989 who developed the notion of *affect keys*; Ochs, 1989; Peräkylä, 2008; Ruusuvuori, 2007), and *affectivity* (germ. *Affektivität*, cf. Drescher, 2003). One may also encounters descriptors like *emotional labour*⁴ (Toerien & Kitzinger, 2007a, b), *emotional stance* (Svennevig, 2004), *emotive involvement* (Selting, 1994), *emotion talk* (e.g. Wowk, 1980), *emotive communication* (Caffi & Janney, 1994) or *feeling(s)* (Ochs, 1986; Hutchby, 2005 discuss *feelings-talk*) for instance. In this issue, it is the term *emotion(s)* which stands out.

At the level of units of analysis and observable elements, the studies on emotions in social interaction(s) have contributed to a shift which has mainly been adopted by the authors in this issue. As Goodwin & Goodwin (2001 [2000]) point out:

[...] the relevant unit for the analysis of emotion is not the individual, or the semantic system of a language, but instead the sequential organization of action.

From this perspective, the observables are therefore not limited to the individual or to the verbal material s/he uses. They concern the course of action for the realisation for which different dimensions are involved (e.g. language, prosody, gestures, gaze, movements, objects). Consequently, the analysis orients itself towards the articulation of these various dimensions for which one has to take the sequential placement and its role in the organisation of the talk-in-interaction and the construction of social relations into consideration.

Analysing authentic data

In the 1950s, the sociologist E. Goffmann started to explore the rules of life in society through close observation of authentic situations; that is, situations that are unprovoked by the researcher. His article on embarrassment (Goffman, 1956), his later studies on face-to-face interaction (in particular Goffman, 1959, 1967) and his article entitled *Response cries* (Goffman, 1978) are examples of this.

With the advancement of technology, recording equipment has become less bulky, more discreet and has adapted to the demands of computer technology while simultaneously increasing in quality. The development of technological

⁴ For more information on the notion of *emotional labour* from a sociological perspective, cf. Hochschild (1983).

tools has gone hand in hand with an improvement of analytical methods. Under the influence of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), conversation analysis has advanced, paying close attention to the treatment of recorded data and, more importantly, to its transcription. This has allowed the reader to gain access to analytical data that was previously difficult to get hold of. Due to the lasting effect of its approach, conversation analysis has marked an important stage for empirical methods and has influenced an entire field of research that goes largely beyond sociology as it touches upon domains such as linguistics, pragmatics and psychology.

Research on emotions has benefited from this turning point, too, as it has allowed researchers to not only change the mode of observation but also switch locations. Instead of conducting experiments in a laboratory or distributing questionnaires, researchers have gone on site and placed their recorders at the centre of social life, at precisely the locations where people go about their daily interactions.

The studies gathered in this issue all participate to some degree in this shift of research methodology in that they are all based on authentic and recorded data. Most of the authors draw on audio data or, as Esther González Martínez and Penny D. Xanthopoulou do, on audio transcriptions derived from video data. Others, as the articles of Marilena Fatigante and Nicolas Pepin demonstrate, make direct use of video data.

In working with recorded and transcribed data, it soon becomes obvious that existing transcription systems are not geared towards accounting for emotional phenomena such as laughter, cries, tremulous voices, high pitch vocalisations, gestures and so on. The solutions adopted by researchers on emotions to overcome these shortcomings can be presented as follows:

1. The first possibility consists of not introducing new symbols in the transcription conventions and therefore to treat the phenomena in question within the framework of analysis. This option has the advantage of allowing for a smooth reading of the transcription, but it abandons the principle that the transcription is intended to account for the analysed phenomena.
2. Another possibility consists of describing certain phenomena (such as gestures, looks, mimics, body movements, etc.) with the help of the transcriber's commentary. Phenomena are then represented through a verbal description and not through a specific symbol, which has been the case for the majority of well accepted transcription systems. Occasionally, this description is replaced or accompanied by a picture or graphic representation (cf., for instance, Goodwin, 2007).
3. Finally, there is the possibility of refining the transcription system by adding new symbols that represent emotional phenomena. This is, for

instance, the case for Hepburn (2004), who has developed an extension of Jefferson's transcription system (cf. Jefferson, 2004) to include audible elements of crying. This extension presents two advantages: 1) it improves Jefferson's system of transcription and adapts it to certain emotional phenomena and 2) it documents some features of emotions. Accordingly, Hepburn (2004) lists seven features of crying: whispering, sniffing, tremulous voiced vocalisation, high pitch vocalisation, aspiration, sobbing, and silence.

In this issue, John Moore and Penny D. Xanthopoulou, who both work with Jefferson's system, exploit this extension. The other authors, who mostly use other systems of transcription, opt for one of the two other solutions or for a combination of the two.

Presentation of the articles in this issue

Esther González Martínez investigates the answers "je ne sais pas" (*I don't know*) in an accelerated criminal procedure in France from a sociological point of view. The author shows that these answers do not result from an absence of knowledge on the nature of the experienced occurrence or from being unable to recall the incident. These emotional *I don't know* answers are actually solutions adopted by the suspect in the face of an interrogation which addresses an aspect of his experience which is too emotional to be put into words. Thus, the *I don't know* answers serve to display the emotional nature of the difficulties experienced by the accused when it comes to describing what he has experienced and rendering it accountable for his interlocutor.

John Moore discusses the question of emotions from the perspective of discursive psychology. He analyses the manner in which call-takers working for a British phone service offering assistance for mental issues react interactionally to the crying of the callers. The author also documents a professional management practice of emotions by showing how the responses are recurrently organised to display empathy, to maintain a neutral position with regard to the cause of the crying, and finally to guide the interaction towards the main goal of the service, which is the provision of information.

Penny D. Xanthopoulou, on her part, is interested in what she calls *emotion discourse*, and more particularly, *emotion categories* and *emotion displays* provided by the testimony of traumatic occurrences on an English-speaking Christian TV channel. Also positioned in the field of discursive psychology, the author shows how emotional display enters into the narrative of the witness in order to express a belonging to the Christian community. Moreover, the author emphasises a practice which is connected with the course of interaction and which consists of situating the emotional display towards the end of the account in such a manner that the story is not interrupted and can continue until the end.

Nicolas Pepin analyses the linguistic and multimodal evidence which allows teachers and students participating in English as a Foreign Language classes in Switzerland to orient themselves towards emotions in order to involve it or, on the contrary, to neutralise it. While documenting the manner in which the participants coordinate themselves during the beginning of the lessons in order to orient themselves towards the classroom activities, the author shows that the work of neutralisation assumed by the teacher contributes to orienting the students towards appropriated participation and serves to create an atmosphere conducive to working. From this point of view, neutralisation can be viewed as a recurrent process to *cool down* the *emotional temperature* of the class by working on the type of participation and by exploiting the interactional specifics in class.

In her article, *Martina Drescher* examines the links between taboos and emotions from a linguistic point of view by drawing on a corpus of training courses for future Peer Educators in Burkina Faso who will be active in raising awareness of HIV/AIDS. In this situation of circulation of knowledge, the author explores the interactive construction of the taboo. She shows that the taboos possess an emotive component infused with a negative meaning which can reflect in certain linguistic and interactive uses. These contribute to the construction of delicate topics and are part of the evidence which helps the interactants show, in a reciprocal manner, that they are dealing with such topics. Besides their topic-sensitive character, the ethnographical dimension of the article allows to emphasise the specifics of the emotions in the Burkinabe context.

Marilena Fatigante, in the meantime, analyses various modalities of managing negative emotional intensity ("intensità dell'affetto") in Italian families' dinner conversations. The author shows how the participants use different displays of emotive signalisation ("segnalazione emotiva") which do not only involve linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic markers, but also exploit the sequentiality of the talk-in-interaction and its organisation in speech turns. In particular, the author focuses on discussing the role of formulations (Heritage & Watson, 1979) in the work of modalisation of emotional intensity realised by parents. From the point of view of the socialisation of children which interests the author, it is clearly shown that children are not submitted to emotions which are transmitted to them as they are in themselves; on the contrary, a co-constructed, embodied and distributed process is involved.

Finally, *Miriam A. Locher* and *Andreas Langlotz* use a central approach to examine the connections between emotion and cognition. The authors indicate that the emotions a human being possesses influence his/her judgments on the relational work he/she has with other people. Adopting a more classic concept of emotions (conceived as internal categories that can be perceived subjectively and expressed to interacting parties), the authors

explore the links between (im)politeness, the emotions involved in interpersonal communication and the judgments made on the relational dimension of social interaction. Basing their analysis on the idea that emotions contribute to defining the relationship individuals share with their social environments, the authors exploit sequences where the interactants explicitly express their emotions and judgments on relational work by using meta-comments in order to label the social and emotional behavior of the participants.

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