Conversational Analysis as a Theoretical Foundation for Language Action Approaches?

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Abstract

Communication modelling approaches within the Language Action Perspective (LAP) are based on two important theoretical cornerstones: 1) considering language use as action and 2) organisation of communication in accordance with pre-defined patterns. The basis for the first cornerstone can be found in speech act theory, but the basis for other must be searched for elsewhere. The paper investigates the origin for many LAP approaches, the Conversation-for-action schema of Winograd & Flores. It tries to detect an influence from the sociological approach of conversational analysis. Could conversational analysis be a basis for the study of communicative patterns within LAP? A discussion is pursued concerning differences between and possibilities to combine speech act theory and conversational analysis within LAP. This discussion, which is supported by the use of a simple example of business interaction, concludes with a contestation - in a spirit of conversational analysis - of a too heavy use of pre-defined patterns in communication modelling.

1   Introduction

There are several approaches to business modelling and information systems modelling that build on the language action perspective (LAP). This perspective emphasises that communication is one kind of action. It objects to a restricted referential view on communication, i.e. to limit communication to a mere transfer of information. Speech act theory, as formulated by Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Habermas (1984) has been a major source of inspiration for LAP approaches to business and information systems modelling. Prominent approaches within this LAP tradition are Action Workflow (Medina-Mora et al, 1992) and DEMO (Dietz, 1999). There are other approaches as SAMPO (Auramäki et al, 1988) and BAT (Goldkuhl, 1996). The speech act basis is obvious in these different approaches. When using this LAP approaches different communicative actions are classified in accordance with established speech act typology, which is mainly the classification scheme by Searle (1979). This gives however not the whole picture. In the LAP approaches,

mentioned above, the interest goes beyond single speech acts. There is a great interest for speech act patterns, i.e. how different speech acts are related to each other. In Action Workflow as well as DEMO there is a pattern of four sequentially organised speech act types. In words of DEMO this pattern is: 1) request, 2) promise, 3) statement 4) acceptance (Dietz, 1999). Consequentially, one can say that the LAP approaches are built upon these two theoretical cornerstones:

1. Communication is action in accordance to generic speech act types
2. Communicative acts are organised and framed in accordance with pre-defined communicative patterns

For both cornerstones there is a use of pre-defined constructs. The first one is directly derived from speech cat theory (SAT). The other can however not be seen to be a part of SAT. This theory has been criticized for being too monological (e.g. Linell, 1998). The communication pattern orientation must be searched for elsewhere.

Most LAP approaches has the origin from the seminal work "Computers and cognition: a new foundation for design" by Winograd & Flores (1986). In this book they introduced their Conversation-for-action (Cfa) schema. The basis in speech act theory was here acknowledged, but besides this, they introduced this scheme as a communicative pattern of speech acts. This idea of communicative patterns has later being brought further in succedent LAP approaches.

In order to assess and further develop LAP approaches it is important to identify and evaluate their *historical roots*. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the theoretical foundations for LAP approaches concerning communicative patterns, since this does not follow speech act theory. What is the theoretical basis for communicative patterns as this is put forth by Winograd & Flores (1986)?

When presenting their Cfa schema, Winograd & Flores used the term "conversational analysis" (ibid p 64). Conversational analysis (CA) is an established sociological and socio-linguistical approach. This paper can be interpreted as an attempt to investigate if conversational analysis can be seen to be one theoretical foundation for LAP approaches besides speech act theory. This will also take me to some comparisons between the two theoretical traditions of CA and SAT. I will also use a simple example of a business interaction to illustrate and test some of my reasoning and the application of CA, SAT and LAP.

There have been other analyses[1] of the relations between SAT and CA within LAP; for example Holm & Ljungberg (1996) and Steuten (1998). I will not start with their analyses; instead I will follow my own tracks. In section 4 below I will comment on their attempts to integrate SAT and CA.

2   Conversation-for-action: A foundation in conversational analysis?

Since the Conversation-for-action schema (of Winograd & Flores, 1986) can be seen to be an origin for many LAP approaches it is well suitable to start an analysis of theoretical foundations there. The Conversation-for-action schema appears in figure 1. It describes a generic communication pattern when an initial speaker (A) makes a request to another actor (B). The Cfa schema describes different states in the conversation and how the states are altered through the performance of speech acts.

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[1] It might be possible to conceive the well-known debate between Suchman (1994) and Winograd (1994) as such a discussion. I will however not interfere in that particular discussion.
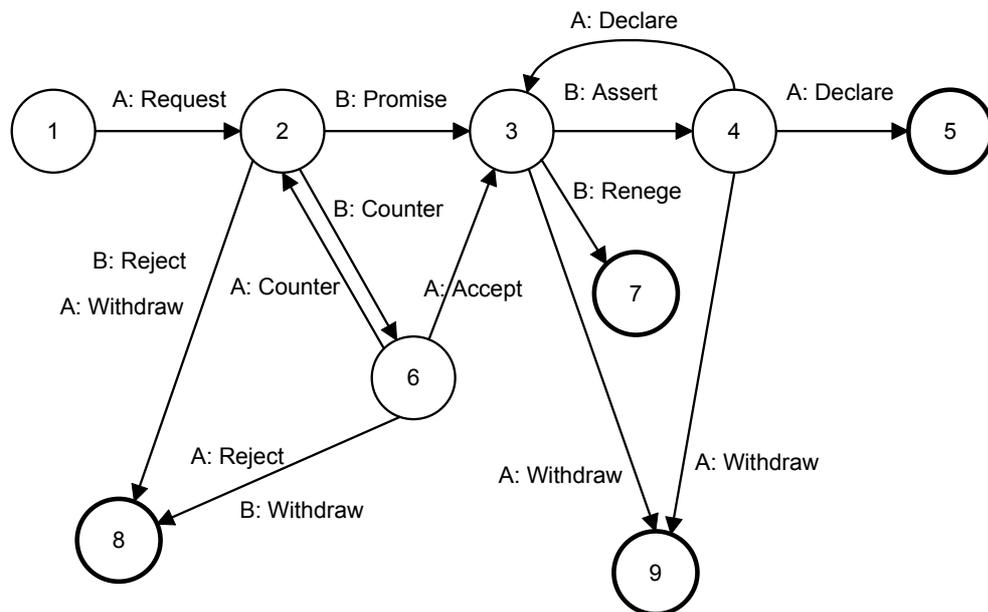
Figure 1 Conversation-for-action (from Winograd & Flores, 1986 p 65)

It is interesting to read to the theoretical argumentation by Winograd & Flores concerning the foundation for this schema. I will quote at some length from their book, since it is important to scrutinize the foundations.

"The issue here is one of finding the appropriate domain of recurrence. Linguistic behavior can be described in several distinct domains. The relevant regularities are not in individual speech acts (embodied in sentences) or in some kind of explicit agreement of meanings. They appear in the domain of conversation, in which successive speech acts are related to one another. This domain is like Maturana's cognitive domain in being relational and historical. The regularities do not appear in the correlation between an act and the structure of the actor, but in relevance of a pattern of acts through time. As an example of conversational analysis we will consider in some detail the network of speech acts that constitute straightforward conversation for action – those in which an interplay of requests and commissives are directed towards explicit cooperative action. This is a useful example both because of its clarity and because it is the basis for computer tools for conducting conversations." Winograd & Flores (1986) p 64.

I will comment on this quotation and repeat some of it for reasons of emphasis. They explicitly state that the "relevant regularities are not in individual speech acts". This is actually remarkable, since much argumentation in LAP approaches rests upon speech act theory with a directed focus on individual speech acts[1].

The authors claim that the regularities "appear in the domain of conversation, in which successive speech acts are related to one another". In their following argumentation they explicitly use the term "*conversational analysis*". They call "the network of speech acts that constitute straightforward conversation for action" as an "example of conversational analysis".

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[1] This comment can be conceived to be unfair since LAP approaches do not only rely on the SAT view of speech as action, but also on this patterning of speech acts; cf section 1 above.

There are two important comments to be made from this. First, their main idea of theorizing communication seems to be rooted in a conversational perspective. The conversational character is emphasised. Second, they explicitly use the term conversational analysis, but without making any references to literature in this area. Conversational analysis is not a term that they coined. It is the name of sociological theory tradition of great importance emanating from the works of Harvey Sacks (1992). There is no CA reference in the passage quoted above and I cannot find any other references in the rest of the book either[1]. How come that Winograd & Flores do not make any references to the works within conversational analysis? We can only guess here. The concept of conversational analysis is within social sciences a well-established approach and the term and what it stands for has become "public property". This may sometimes entail that authors, when talking about conversational analysis, do not explicitly refer to CA works. We shall judge not Winograd & Flores hard for this omission. It is more important to reflect upon the consequences of their omission.

There are, as said above, many LAP approaches developed with great inspiration from Winograd & Flores (1986) and their Cfa schema. In their book there are substantial references to speech act theory (e.g. Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; 1979; Habermas, 1979). LAP followers have of course read these works. *What had happened with the LAP tradition if there were some references to conversational analysis works in Winograd & Flores (1986) and if LAP followers as a consequence of this had tried to explicitly build on the CA tradition?* I think this is an important question to pose and there cannot be a straightforward answer to it. In the following I will reflect upon this issue and express some furthers questions. The question is important since there is an influence from CA to LAP approaches[2] although it is not an explicit theoretical foundation. I claim that it can be seen to be an implicit theoretical foundation, and I find it worthwhile to examine this connection closer.

3   Conversational analysis – the legacy of Harvey Sacks

Conversational analysis has its roots in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967). In that way it is a study of the participants' own methods for production and interpretation of social interaction. The sociologist Harvey Sacks is the originator and key constructor of this research approach. As Silverman (1998) says in his introduction to Sacks's works and conversational analysis, Sacks did not publish very much during his lifetime. However, after his premature death in a car accident, much of his intellectual contribution (as it was presented in lectures), has been compiled into the comprehensive two volumes of "Lectures on conversations" (Sacks, 1992).

I will here only briefly present some general issues concerning conversational analysis and Sacks's work. For more detailed descriptions I refer to Sacks's own work (Sacks, 1992), the well-written introduction by Silverman (1998) or to the numerous overviews of CA made in linguistic or sociological textbooks (e.g. Levinson, 1983; Schiffrin, 1994).

As said above, Sacks argues for an interest in how people, through some kind of procedural rules, engage and succeed in conversations. To be able to do this, Sacks emphasises the need for data and for detailed data. "Sacks's work is always driven by data. Rather than sit in his armchair and construct grand theories of society, he preferred like the

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[1] In their bibliography and name index there are no references to Sacks or his research colleagues Jefferson and Schegloff. There are references to Garfinkel and Cicourel, who are other prominent persons of the ethnomethodological school, within which CA is founded. The references to these two scholars are however not concerned with CA, but with issues of pre-understanding.

[2] This influence is concerned with the second cornerstone of the LAP approaches (the patterning of communication); cf section 1 above.

early ethnographers to get 'his hands dirty' with some data" (Silverman, 1998, p 60). Sacks has a clear preference towards observational data, instead of interview data. In order to study real conversations, we should record and transcribe the utterances. Sacks (1992 p 622) says in his own words: "I could get my hands on it, and I could study it again and again. And also, consequentially, others could look at what I had studied, and make of it what they could, if they wanted to disagree with me". The importance of working with observational data and transcripts depends on the focus on utterance sequences and not on single sequences. "It is in these sequences, rather than in single turns of talk that we make sense of conversation" (Silverman, 1998 p 62). This quote is interesting to compare with what Winograd & Flores said about their motivation behind the Cfa schema. I re-quote: "The relevant regularities are not in individual speech acts (embodied in sentences) or in some kind of explicit agreement of meanings. They appear in the domain of conversation, in which successive speech acts are related to one another" (Winograd & Flores, 1986 p 64). The resemblance is striking.

Sacks has a great hesitation towards the use of pre-defined structures and patterns in analysing and theorizing conversations. Levinson (1983 p 295) has made the following characterization of the CA approach in this respect: "Out of this [ethnomethodological] background comes a healthy suspicion of premature theorizing and ad hoc analytical categories: as far as possible the categories of analysis should be those that participants themselves can be shown to be utilize in making sense of interaction; unmotivated theoretical constructs and unsubstantiated intuitions are all to be avoided". Here the difference to speech act theory stands out clearly. The works of SAT uses mainly constructed "arm-chair" examples. There is a heavy use of pre-categorisations in the analysis of such idealised examples in the works by Austin, Searle and Habermas[1]. Speech act theory is a tradition rooted in the *philosophy* of language, where conversational analysis is rooted in an *empirically oriented sociology* of language.

It may sound that conversational analysis does not aim at constructing theoretical categories. This is however not the case. There is a clear ambition to categorise, but to do this in a strict inductive and empirically based way.

CA has a primary focus towards utterance sequences and the organisation of such sequences. A primary concept is *turn-taking*. This means that one participant is talking and then stops and another participant is talking and stops and so on. CA problematizes how turn-taking is performed. In doing this other constructs are inferred as e.g. *next-speaker selection* and *transition-relevance places* (e.g. Sacks, 1992; Levinson, 1983). In understanding sequencing of conversations Sacks has introduced the concept of *adjacency pair*. An adjacency pair is besides being adjacent, an ordered pair of utterances (a first and a second) produced by different speakers. A first requires a second, and not everything counts as a second. Examples of adjacency pairs are question – answer, greeting – greeting, offer – acceptance, request – acceptance, complaint – excuse. The clear linkage to communication patterning in LAP should be recognised.

Different functions of adjacency pairs are described within CA. They are used for e.g. starting and closing conversations, for moves in conversations, for remedial exchanges. Adjacency pairs can also "separated" due to different reasons (e.g. clarifying obscurities) by the aid of so-called *inserted sequences*. This means that adjacency pairs can be embedded in adjacency pairs.

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[1] Habermas (1984 p 322f) expresses his hesitations towards empirically based categorisations in the following way. "The classes of speech acts that are arrived at inductively and constructed in accordance with pragmatic indicators do not consolidate into intuitive types; they lack the theoretical power to illuminate our intuitions". This is a critical comment made towards the empirically based theorizing on speech acts conducted by Kreckel (1981).

The concept of adjacency pair has been further used and developed in dialogue theory (e.g. Linell, 1998; Schiffrin, 1994). The first is categorised as *initiative* and the second as a *response*. However most utterances can be classified as both initiative and response. This is due to the principle of *double contextuality* of utterances in conversations. An utterance is both context-shaped (i.e. dependant on prior utterances) and context-renewing (i.e. creating conditions for possible next utterances). Utterances are linked actions. An utterance is linked to prior utterances as being a possible response to what has been said earlier. An utterance is linked to succedent utterances as being an initiative to what might be said. This means that an utterance should be both new (offering something new, making a difference) and linked to what already has been given (being an understandable continuation of the prior utterances). An utterance is made in the present, but with (implicit or explicit) references to the historical given and to the projected future.

CA has had a great influence on sociological and linguistic studies of language-based social interaction. Levinson (1983 p 287) claims that "the strength of the CA position is that the procedures employed have already proved themselves capable of yielding by far the most substantial insights that have been gained into the organisation of conversation".

4   Language action: Speech act theory vs Conversational analysis

In the LAP approaches to business and IS modelling (as e.g. Action Workflow and DEMO) there is, as said in section 1 above, an orientation towards 1) viewing communication as action and 2) how such communicative actions are organised into patterns. The theoretical grounding of cornerstone 1 is obvious in speech act theory. There is however no such theoretical grounding for the cornerstone 2. My discussion in sections 2 and 3 above can be interpreted as an argumentation that such a theoretical might be found in conversational analysis.

Let me first clarify the differences between speech act theory and conversational analysis. There are both epistemological and ontological differences. The epistemological differences relates to the classical controversy between empirical vs rational ways to obtain knowledge. CA is well rooted in an empirically and also inductive tradition. SAT, on the contrary, is more to be seen as "arm chair philosophy", trying to make sense of "intuitions" mainly with abstract philosophical reasoning and sometimes supported with small and arranged examples. SAT uses to a much larger extent pre-defined constructs, i.e. constructs defined by the inquirers, while the position of CA is to reconstruct the rules applied by those inquired.

There is also a difference in scope and focus of what to study and theorize. SAT has a focus on single speech acts, while CA has a focus on conversations consisting of related utterances (speech acts).

The main idea of this paper is to pose and reflect upon the question "Can conversational analysis be used as a theoretical foundation for approaches within the LAP tradition of communication modelling?". Following the background description behind the Cfa schema (by Winograd & Flores) and what has been exposed concerning CA, it is tempting to answer with an affirmative yes to this question. However, there are issues of controversy between SAT and CA that must be taken into account. The differences of scope and focus are of less import. This is rather something to be gained; the complementary foci on single vs organised acts.

There are some attendant questions to pose concerning a possible use of CA in LAP approaches. Would it lead to more emphasis on studying and recording real conversations? Would this involve less use of pre-defined constructs? What would happen to the pre-defined schemas of Action Workflow and DEMO if a true CA perspective is adopted? The scepticism in CA towards a priori theoretical constructs seems to be hard to combine with a use of such

pre-arranged patterns. I doubt that Cfa, Action Workflow and DEMO really build upon a comprehensive amount of un-biased empirical work on organisational communication. There are studies performed, based on a CA perspective, on different aspects of organisational communication (e.g. Drew & Heritage, 1992). Perhaps more empirical work is needed before it is possible to create generic patterns of customer-performer interaction as is done in Action Workflow and DEMO.

Winograd & Flores (1986 p 157) explicitly state that "organizations exist as networks of directives and commissives"[1]. I agree that such speech act types are essential in the constituting of organisations, however I think that their position seems to be narrow and excluding. In the spirit of CA, I suggest a more open-minded attitude towards studying and theorizing communication in organisations. Other types of communication might also be of importance.

If we return to the main starting point of LAP approaches, i.e. the Cfa schema of Winograd & Flores, it is interesting to make a comparison between SAT and CA. The LAP approaches has used speech act theory to categorise the main conversational sequence: Request, promise, assert (state) and declare (accept). Other aspects are down played[2]. CA constructs should also be possible to use for describing the conversation-for-action and thus having an illuminating function. Turn-taking, adjacency pair, inserted sequence are categories, which may be used to describe and clarify the different steps taken in the conversation. These and other CA constructs seem to be possible to use in communication modelling, and I do not see any reasons for not trying to use them and other CA categories when modelling communication in business and IS settings.

The two acts of request and promise (in Cfa and the other LAP models) can be seen as an adjacency pair. The request is an initiative and the promise is a response to it. Following, the insights from CA there might be interruptions[3] in this conversation. If the second person (B) does not fully understand the request by the first person (A), he can ask for clarification. There might be an inserted sequence (of utterances) where the solicited response to the request from B is postponed. This is often an option in conversations. This is dependant on a speech act not sufficiently *accountable*. In conversations people are usually making their communicative moves accountable, i.e. comprehensible and understandable for each other[4] (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1992). Otherwise the conversation would not proceed in an organised and successful manner. In order to respond in a proper way, the listener must interpret the speech act presented. This means that an adjacent pair of utterances depends on an adjacent pair of speaking and listening. Let me clarify this distinction. Clark (1996) describes communication as a joint action consisting of one act of a speaker presenting an utterance and one act of an addressee identifying and recognizing what is said. The emphasis on two interrelated acts seems very important. The terminology of Clark is however a bit misleading. I would not conceive communication to be a *joint action* performed by a speaker and addressee together. It is rather a *joint activity* consisting of two distinct, but related actions, performed by each actor (speaker and addressee respectively). The speaking and the listening[5] are two reciprocal acts. A reciprocal pair of action consists of a give (an intervention) and a corresponding take (receiving).

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[1] Confer also Boden (1994) and Taylor & van Every (2000) about a communicative view on organisations.
[2] There are LAP studies concerning other parts and aspects of this kind of communication. For example van Reijswoud (1996) has besides the transaction layer studied failure handling (discussion and discourse layers).
[3] Winograd & Flores (1986) talk extensively about different interruptions in terms of communication breakdowns.
[4] Actions which are "visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes" are considered as accountable (Garfinkel, 1967). Confer also Sacks (1992).
[5] Goldkuhl (2001) has made a similar distinction between the *intervening* act of speaking and the *receiving* act of listening and interpreting.

This means that the performance of an adjacent utterance pair (an initiative and a response) includes embedded interpretive acts. In his structuration theory on social action, Giddens (1984) emphasises that the actor continuously monitors his own actions and the effects and responses of these in his environment. This means also a monitoring of the interpretive acts of the listener. Interpretation can be seen as a covert action in contrast to the overt action of speaking[1]. However listening and interpretation is not totally covert. It is possible to monitor and interpret something from the act of listening performed by the addressee. While listening, the addressee may *give off symptoms*[2] of his interpretive acts, like facial expressions or other body movements. The speaker has some possibility to monitor if his speaking is accountable, when he simultaneously, during his talk, may interpret the given off reactions of the addressee.

This means that an actor in a communication situation does not only interpret what is uttered, but also other clues are important for his understanding of the situation. An actor interprets what is said but also what is expressed intentionally and unintentionally in other ways. In the LAP approaches there is a strong tendency towards modelling communication and disregarding material actions. The performance of a requested material act is not modelled in the Cfa schema or the Action Workflow loop. Instead there is a statement reporting this performance. Only this statement is modelled and not the performance of a material act. I find this exclusion of material acts inappropriate. There are several prominent scholars within the field of language studies who emphasise the close relation between linguistic and other behaviour. Vološinov (1985) says: "Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation." "In its concrete connection to a situation, verbal communication is always accompanied by social acts of a nonverbal character, and is often only an assessory to these acts, merely carrying out an auxiliary role". I can also refer to Wittgenstein (1958a), where the interdependence between linguistic and non-linguistic activities is emphasised[3]. Andersen (1990) gives some good examples and analyses of the close connection and interdependence between linguistic and material actions.

The linguistic as well as the material actions of humans are intentionally made accountable so other persons may interpret them as meaningful units in the social interaction. People make sense of both what is said and what is done in other ways. This means that not all what is materially performed must be commented upon by the performer, like for example "now I am passing you the salt that you asked me to do"[4]. The explicit statement of performed action (as it is described in Action Workflow and DEMO) is usually not needed.

Holm & Ljungberg (1996) have discussed LAP approaches and communication patterns in terms of discourse vs conversation. They differentiate between 1) communication patterns organised according to strict rules of sequencing and 2) communication patterns much more flexible and contingently organised. The first type they call discourse and it is such patterns which are presupposed in LAP approaches. The second type they call conversation and the inspiration from CA is obvious. They try to integrate these into a common framework, which is also used as basis for their design approach Commodius (ibid). The total work communication is separated into discourse vs conversation parts. Their attempted integration is to my opinion only halfway. Those parts, which they call discourse, seem not to be

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[1] Schutz (1970) uses the notions of overt and covert actions with these meanings.
[2] Goffman (1959) distinguishes between intentionally *giving* expressions and unintentionally *giving off* expressions.
[3] Confer also the analysis of the Wittgenstein's language-game concept performed by Arens (1994).
[4] The production of such a commentary would probably most often be considered as not necessary, and therefore as being "over-accountable" it is not fully accountable. It would probably be met by a surprising reflection like this one: "Yes, I see that you do, but I do not see the point of telling me?".

influenced by CA reasoning. They have a good point in that there are parts of a social interaction which are more formal and more governed by sequencing rules (discourse) and other parts which are less formal and more contingent (conversation). I think, howeever, that it might be problematic to have these as two sharp categories; instead the road forward should rather be to look upon it as a continuum. My approach is not to put these categories besides each other; i.e. discourse (with inspiration of SAT) and conversation (with inspiration of CA). Instead I will try to conceptualise communication and social interaction with an integrative use of both SAT and CA.

Steuten (1998) has made such an attempt to integrate SAT and CA in a LAP based analysis approach. When analysing business communication[1] she uses speech act classes, some CA constructs together with the DEMO transaction concept. Her ambition is very commendable, but I consider her approach and results also halfway. With clear inspiration from CA, she has added some more types of interactional acts, like identification, feedback, mediation and repair, besides the original DEMO types (request, promise, state, accept). These original action types (within the DEMO transaction) are never challenged; they are simply taken for granted and forced on her empirical material. This means that she has only used the ethnomethodological principles of CA partially. Those acts which do not fit the pre-defined pattern are analysed in an open-minded and inductive way. I do not of course deny the possibility to use speech act types of request, promise, state and accept. However, what becomes problematic in Steuten's approach is that this sequential action chain is forced upon the material without any consideration of alternatives. It goes far beyond the scope of my paper to make any detailed analysis and critique of her approach and empirical analysis. I will just conclude that a multi-functional characterisation would probably lead to other action categories and above all to another interpretation of the over-all organisation of this business communication.

5   Business interaction patterns – an illustration and a contestation

The discussion above can be summarised into a couple of principles to be used when analysing and modelling business interaction. These principles are derived from both speech act theory and conversational analysis and my comparative discussion on them. My ambition here can partially be seen as an effort to harmonize these approaches and arrive at some kind of synthesis to be used for business modelling. Even if there are some opposite positions between these approaches I find it desirable to try to establish a synthesized position.

The following principles may be useful when modelling business interaction:
- To communicate is to act (to perform linguistic actions)
- Actions within a social interaction situation are related to each other as initiatives and responses
- Both linguistic actions and non-linguistic (material) actions and their different results should be acknowledged; as well the interdependence between these different types of actions
- Social interaction is conceived to consist of both giving and taking (i.e. intervention and receiving/interpretation)
- The use of pre-defined interactional patterns should be done with caution

I will adopt these principles when analysing a small example. This is done with several purposes. One purpose is to illustrate, to make the discussion in the rest of this paper more concrete. Another purpose is to test the combinatory power of these principles. A third

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[1] Steuten (1998) uses an example of a telephone conversation as her main empirical material. The topic is reservation of a hotel room and the conversation is conducted by a hotel receptionist and a client.

purpose is to use these principles in order to challenge some basic assumptions of LAP approaches.

The use of a small and arranged example can of course be criticized from a CA view. I am fully aware that we should use larger and real-life examples for more comprehensive empirical studies. I will not, however, rule out the use fictitious examples. They have their roles in an introductory stage, when initially trying out some ideas. This can be done in the spirit of what Wittgenstein (1958b) says about starting with the simple and then scaling up to the more complex.

I have constructed a small example concerning business interaction: A newsstand in the street where a customer buys a newspaper. The example is intentionally chosen to consist of a minimum of communication. In this sense it can be seen as an extreme case, but I do think we can learn from extreme cases. One intention of using this case with minimal communication is to make an investigation in relation to the communication-emphasising LAP approaches.

I give a brief description of the example. A man on the street walks up to the newsstand with the intention to buy his morning newspaper. He picks up a coin (the exact change) and puts in on the desk in front of the salesman. Then he picks up a newspaper from the stand and leaves. Meanwhile the salesman takes up the coin from the desk and puts it in his cashbox. This business interaction was performed without any oral communication at all.

I have made an analysis of the different actions, which is documented in table 1. I have identified and described four main actions. For each of these I have specified precondition, performer, result and addressees. From the example text above, three actions can be recognized. The customer paying for the newspaper. The salesman taking care of the payment. The customer taking out a newspaper. To these actions I have added an initial action performed by the salesman. In order to obtain customers, the salesman exposes papers in his newsstand. Results of this action are offered papers. These offered papers are preconditions for customers to approach the newsstand for a purchase. In my analysis I count the salesman's exposure of papers as the first of four analysed action.

#	Precondition	Performer: Action	Result	Addressees
1	Papers to be sold	Salesman: Expose papers	Offered papers (afforded in a stand)	Potential customers
2	Observation of offered papers; decision to buy	Customer: Pay	Money on the desk	Salesperson (observing payment)
3	Money on the desk	Salesman: Receive payment	Money in the cashbox	1) Salesman (securing payment) 2) Customer (observing receipt of money)
4	Offered papers	Customer: Take out a paper from the stand	Paper in customer's hand	1) Customer (to be able to read paper) 2) Salesman (observing paper in correspondence to received payment)

Table 1 Action analysis of newsstand example

The first two actions are intervening (giving) actions. The two next actions are receiving (taking) actions[1]. Action #2 (the payment) is a response to the initiative of paper exposure (#1). The payment action[2] is in turn an initiative for the response of the salesman's putting the money in his cashbox (#3). This kind of action (as a receiving action) has the actor himself as the main addressee. However, the customer can also be seen as an addressee. One social

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[1] Not all receiving actions are considered as explicit and separate actions in my analysis. Important interpretive actions are however acknowledged in figure 2; either as precondition for action or as succedent interpretive action in the addressee column.

[2] Actually this action of putting money on the desk is a *payment in advance*, and as such for a yet not specified article.

meaning of the salesman putting the money in his cashbox is that he accepts this as a payment. The customer observes the salesman's receiving action and he will interpret it as a receipt of payment. The giving and taking of money, as these actions are monitored by both actors, are understandable as part of a purchase. The actions are understood so against the background of the situational arrangements of the newsstand as place to trade.

The last action, the taking out of a newspaper performed by the customer himself (#4), can be seen as a consequential action of the payment performed (#2, #3). This receiving action has also two addressees: The customer who grabs the paper and the salesman observing this self-service action. After this is done, the purchase is accomplished. The customer has become the owner of the paper and can take it away without grounds for complaint. If the payment for the newspaper is correct, no condition of indebtedness remains.

As said above, nothing is said in this business transaction. The case of no explicit communication is of course dependent on the actors monitoring each other's actions and also a monitoring that this monitoring is taking place. This follows the social action principles of making actions accountable (Garfinkel, 1967) and the constant monitoring of own and others' actions (Giddens, 1984) as mentioned above. This means that material actions performed have social and accountable meaning. The putting of money on the desk has the social meaning of paying for something. The move of the money from the desk to cashbox has the social meaning of receipt of payment. The taking out of a newspaper from the stand has the social meaning of a self-delivery of a good being purchased.

The tacitness in the business interaction has also a social meaning. It has the meaning of a tacit consent concerning the actions conducted. The salesman monitors the actions of the customers and he finds them acceptable. If something were not considered acceptable, then this would have been brought to attention, probably by an utterance.

What has this account of non-linguistic actions to do with language action and conversation? The domain is business interaction, which is the primary domain of LAP approaches. There is a main claim behind LAP approaches to conceptualise and model business interaction. If we take the action chain presupposed in DEMO and apply it to this newspaper trade, what will emerge? Is there a request? Is there a promise? Is there a statement of delivery? Is there an acceptance of delivery? I do not find any such actions, at least not any explicit actions of these kinds. One could possibly argue that there are such implicit actions, but I think that this is far-fetched. Is the payment action (#2) also an implicit request for a paper? The payment action is of course *multi-functional* and it has several social meanings. It is not a request for any particular product. It is a part of a self-service activity at the newsstand and it must be interpreted in relation to the other self-service action (#4). If we look closer to the interpretive content of the action, it "communicates" something like this: "Here is my payment for a newspaper that I presume you have offered to me" and "I presuppose that you accept this payment and let me take a paper from your stand". It communicates a *purchase intent* and in this sense a symptom mode is thematized, i.e. an expressive/commissive mode. As said above, I think it is far-fetched to consider the payment to be an order (a request). There is an expectation (in the payment) from the customer towards the salesman to let him take a paper from the stand in accordance with the presupposed trade situation.

There is no statement or acceptance of delivery. The delivery action[1] (#4) is accountable in itself and there is no need for any comment for making it more comprehensible. How about a promise, which according to the DEMO model should be expressed after the request? There is no explicit promise made. Is the tacit receipt of money a promise to the customer? I think it is

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[1] Actually, the delivery of the paper can be conceived to consist of two actions in this business interaction. The self-service part (#4) of the delivery is preceded by the arrangement of papers in the salesman's exposure of papers (#1) as a kind as preparatory stage of delivery.

far-fetched as well to consider it a promise. There is, as said above, a tacit consent to the on-going business transaction. This is however a dimension in all actions taken; as long as there is no objections raised, the flow of action is accompanied by tacit consent. I would rather claim that there is a more legible commitment in the initial offer made by the salesman. The arrangement of the newspapers on sale gives a clear signal that the salesman is prepared to sell them.

Promises and requests are actions explicitly concerned with the future (Searle, 1969). In the propositional part of such actions there must be a reference to an intended respectively an expected future action. If we do not hear such illocutionary forces (as requests/promises) or any references to future actions it is hard to label actions as requests or promises.

I conclude that the action categories of request, promise, statement, acceptance are not adequate for description of the described business interaction. Instead I propose the following action categories: Offer, pay, receive payment and self-deliver.

The claims behind LAP approaches (like Action Workflow and DEMO) to describe generic actions in business interaction need to be contested[1]. The analysis of this example of minimal business interaction brings instead fore other basic actions, which probably cannot be omitted in any business interaction. *There must be an act of offer, an act of payment and act of delivery*. These three types of intervening actions (and their corresponding receiving actions) must occur.

Speech act theory and conversational analysis help us to understand why these actions can be seen as generic in business interaction. Offer is multifunctional speech act (Goldkuhl, 1996). It is both a directive (as an appeal to buy a newspaper) and a comissive (as expressing an intent to sell). As being multifunctional in this respect, the propositional part of the speech act should (explicitly or implicitly) refer to future actions of both the locutor (I will give you the paper) and the addressee (if you pay me this amount of money). Actually, the future actions can be seen to consist of two pairs of reciprocal actions[2]: The transfer of the paper can consist of a give[3] and a take and the same goes for the transfer of payment.

If we consider this offer made by the salesman as a multifunctional initiative, then there might be several responses to this initiative in accordance to what was stated (at least implicitly) in the propositional part of the offer. As said above the proposition can be seen to refer to future actions of payment and delivery. This means adequate responses to this offer are precisely such actions. These responsive actions are also interdependent, due to the condition specified in the speech act of the offer.

Even if there was minimal communication in this business interaction, conversational analysis has been helpful in disclosing the action character of it. I have worked in a spirit of avoiding pre-defined categories and patterns. I have only used the perspective that actions are linked to each other as initiatives and responses. The important principle of action accountability has been used.

I claim that I have performed an analysis of this business transaction from a social interaction perspective. My interest has been on *social meanings established through this interaction* and the *accountability of different actions*. As I understand the LAP tradition this is in the core of it. I have performed a social interaction analysis, but with partially different perspectives and analytical tools. I do not at all contest the original pragmatic insight from speech act theory, that speech (and other types of communicating) is to be conceived as action. What I have contested is a too extensive use of pre-defined patterns for business

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[1] Confer earlier critique by Goldkuhl (1996) and Weigand et al (1998).
[2] As said above (section 4), a reciprocal pair of action is a give and a corresponding take.
[3] In the actual case, the give of the newspaper is rather an implicit permission to the customer to take (out) a newspaper, since it is a self-service situation.

interaction. Let the actions inquired 'speak for themselves'! Let their accountabilities come through! Do not force a presupposed pattern upon them!

I do not deny the possibilities to find and conceptualise patterns and even to use them in analyses. I think, however, that the LAP tradition would benefit from less pre-conceived structures. It seems to me to be possible to use conversational analysis as a perspective, an inquiry method and a theoretical grounding for the study of the organisation of different communicative and material actions as socially meaningful and coherent wholes. And also, as I have done here, to combine the use of CA with insights from speech act theory.

6   Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was not to give definitive answers. The purpose was rather to open up for a discussion and pose questions. Of course some provisional answers have been given to my concerned questions:

- What had happened with the LAP tradition if there were some references to conversational analysis works in Winograd & Flores (1986)?
- What would be the consequences if LAP followers had tried to explicitly build on the CA tradition?
- Can CA constructs be used for conceptualising and modelling of business interaction?
- Can a more inductive way of investigating business interaction be performed with less use of pre-defined communicative patterns?
- Can CA be used as theoretical grounding for structuring of communication in LAP approaches?

My recommendation for future research is to look closer into possible contributions from conversational analysis as a complement to speech act theory. There are epistemological and ontological conflicts between SAT and CA, which should be acknowledged and addressed. These conflicts should however not prevent us from trying to utilise parts of the ethnomethodological tradition of conversational analysis for business and communication modelling.

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