

'T' be 'onest wiv ya': Explorations of orientations to honesty in the face of authority figures.

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Introduction

- We live in a society that has a high appreciation of honesty and truth and lies are intrinsically linked.
- In language there is an assumption that people tell the truth.
- Conversation analysts demonstrate that within interaction members treat talk as functional and invested.
- Our examination of truth and lies needs to be located within actual interactions because whilst there is research on how truth is reinforced, there is little work looking at honesty.

How honesty gets constructed and how it is used by participants in their accounts.

By examining the formulations we will facilitate our appreciation of the sequential order of talk with the aim of providing a wider understanding of how honesty functions within interactions.

The aim is to explore empirical examples of when and how honesty is drawn upon within conversation, to explore honesty formulations as a discursive practice.

Methodology

- Two data sets were investigated:
 - 22 hours of video taped family therapy data from 4 different families and two different therapists.
 - 46 semi-structured interviews with homeless young people with mental health problems and service professionals.
- Jefferson transcription
- The British Psychological Society's 'Ethical principles for conducting research with human participants'.

Further Methodological reflections

- Conversation analysts have a preference for natural data.
- Although we accept this position we tentatively argue that interviews are also a form of social interaction in their own right in which both speakers communicate to co-construct reality.
- And while we appreciate that no narrative emerges without the provocation of a question, information about people's social worlds is obtainable through interviewing.

Findings

- In talk honesty is flagged up with explicit formulations such as 'to be honest' and in more extreme cases is upgraded.
- The two types of honesty formulations that we identified are:
 - TYPE 1: Where speakers describe something negative
 - TYPE 2: Where they demonstrate a lack of knowledge through not knowing

Findings: Type one, something negative

Extract 1: Niles family

- Dad: See 'cause >t' **be 'onest< wiv**
↓**ya** >I mean< I (.) I mean (.) >don't get me
wrong< (0.8) we're 'ere now (.) and we se- 'e
se::ems t' be alright (.) for this little (.)
↑say an 'our
- FT: I know >I know<
- Dad: then <once we> le:ave the 'ospital
everythin' so- (.) goes berserk >again< (.)
>I mean< (.) the only thing I th- I re:ally
↑think we're gonn↑a get >to the bottom< of
this is if 'e if 'e 'as this tuition on 'is
own

Extract 2: Sally

- In: What kind of (.) ↓u:m (.) ho- d-(.) >how did you< get involved with Connections = and wha- ↑can you >tell me< abo:ut what they did with you?
- Re: ((sniffs))
- (0.4)
- Re: → .hhhhh <to be honest> connections <↑were not> very helpful::l
- (.)
- Re: ((sni[ffs]))
- In: [Why not?
- Re: Um
- (0.4)
- Re: Well
- (0.2)
- Re: ((sniffs)) ↑all right (.) but
- (0.8)
- Re: >you ↓know< when it. comes
- (0.8)
- Re: >I dunno< whe- >at the ↑time< when I wuz sixteen

Extract 4: Sophie

- Re: Nobody helped me do that, (.) and like everythin' I've done it's like (.) "↑oh (.) which member of staff >'elped you do that?<"
- → and <**to be quite honest**> no-one
↓did
- (0.2)
- Re: people in this building are b↑etter off .hhh >I mean< (.) everybody's figured it no:w but (.) you're better off gettin' up (.) and goin' out and doin' things yourself

Co-constructing factuality

Extracts 5: Niles family

- FT: <I do ↑ not disbelieve> for one <↑minute> what either of you two are sayin' (.) 'cause I 'ave be:en to your >old house< I 'ave se:en the damage (.) I've se:en >the bag full of stuff< (.) so .hh in some ways,
- Dad: ↑Yeah b[ut
- FT: [I don't ne:ed Steve t' do it 'ere to believe ↓you

Extract 6: Veronica

- In: >What kind of s-< what kind of (0.2) impact did se:ein' her have on you?
- Re: → To be 'onest (0.2) >I thought< she was pretty crap heh ((sniffs))
- In: **Re[ally?**
- Re: [>think so
- Re: ↓Yeah
- In: **Why >why< was she crap?**

Type 2: not knowing

Extract 7: Clamp family

- Dad: But. >the problem< we got off
this social worker ↑yesterd↓ay
- (2.2)
- Dad: → **I dunno >to tell you< the ↓truth**
.hh yet bu- I don' (.) I can't re:ally
>see us< getting' on
- FT: How >how< d' the three of yo::u
(.) as the adults in the house decide.
whose goin' t' discipline who

Extract 8: Sally

- In: Yea- (.) Okay .hhh so
↑what. (0.2) what d' y' reckon's
gonna ha↓ppen = sort of lookin'
>towards the future now<, with (.)
you (.) here? How long >d' you
reckon you're goin' t' stay in the
Foyer< for (.) >have you got any
plans?<
- (0.8)
- Re: → ↑No (.) **t' b(h)e 'on(h)est**
li(h)ke I sa- (.) >**I don' know**<
- In: Just see what happens
- Re: ↑Yeah

Discussion

- HONESTY FORMULATIONS ARE FUNCTIONAL:
 - Within the family therapy parents have at stake a host of issues relating to their parenting ability and their narratives are loaded with accountability for their children's behaviour and as part of this they manage the problem of having their versions disbelieved by the therapist directly with honesty formulations.
 - Within the research interviews the participants put forward their accounts to the interviewer which include potentially unbelievable given the interviewers category entitlement to knowledge and therefore use honesty formulations to authenticate their descriptions.

Conclusion

- Phrases such as 'to be honest' and 'honest to God' are frequent in both data sets.
- It is notable and important that interaction is a two-way process and each speaker is active in the construction.
- In our analysis we have given serious attention to the ways in which speakers flag up and directly draw attention to the factual nature of their account through honesty formulations.

The importance of further research:

- Type 2 honesty formulations (Where a lack of knowledge is demonstrated) were less frequent in the therapy data set and this could be a reflection of the institutional context.
- Future directions need to look at honesty in natural settings where direct questioning occurs such as law courts or classrooms to investigate whether 'To be honest, I don't know' is salient.

Please feel free to contact us at any time with any feedback or questions!

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