Bavelas, J. B., Rogers, L. E., & Millar, F. E. (1985).
Interpersonal conflict. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.),
Handbook of discourse analysis.
Vol. 4: Discourse in society (pp. 9-26).
London: Academic Press.

CHAPTER **2**

Interpersonal Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on methods for studying conflict as discourse between persons. Interpersonal conflict is a ubiquitous experience—sometimes stimulating and constructive, but potentially painful and threatening. For this is not conflict in the abstract, as political and other social conflicts may be. Interpersonal conflict is an activity we engage in directly, something we do with other people. Indeed, the first and most important contribution that a discourse analysis can make to this particular social issue is to equate interpersonal conflict with discourse between people. Most interpersonal conflict is verbal, not physical; the conflict is the argument itself. Thus, to analyze such dialogue is to approach and study the phenomenon most directly. In linguistic terms, interpersonal conflict is a speech event; it is performative in that saying equals doing. The argument, quarrel, insults, or disagreement are the conflict. In other words, people do not relate, then talk; rather, they relate in talk (Duncan, 1967, p. 249); the relationship is the exchange of messages (Bateson, 1972, p. 275). We should therefore study how people conflict (and not only why they conflict, with what outcomes, or how they feel about it). In this chapter, we describe some of the methods available for studying how people conflict.

The authors have reviewed relevant disciplines (communication, linguistics, psychiatry, psychology, and sociology) for methods and examples that fit three defining criteria: (1) A direct conflict should be identified and studied, (2) it should be interpersonal, that is, occurring between individuals, and (3) actual discourse should be recorded and analyzed. Surprisingly, only a handful of studies met these three simple criteria.

HANDBOOK OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, Vol. 4
Discourse Analysis in Society

ISBN 0-12-712004-1

Traditionally , linguists tend to approach discourse as a cognitive (individual) phenomenon rather than as a social (interpersonal) process. The other social sciences virtually ignore discourse itself, seldom even recording what was said, much less analyzing it for sequential patterns.

Thus, there are two reasons for applying scholarly methods to problems of social or practical import, such as interpersonal conflict. The first is obvious—to contribute our knowledge to the understanding and possible solution of a problem. The second is the converse—to contribute the problem to our knowledge, that is, to affect scholars and scholarly thinking. Traditional disciplinary boundaries have, in our opinion, been responsible for the striking paucity of research on the discourse of interpersonal conflict. Every discipline provides rich, unique tools for studying human behavior. Yet each discipline ends by studying topics as defined by that discipline and not as they naturally occur. This treatens to imprison us doubly, isolating us from natural phenomena and from other disciplines, each in its own ivory tower. Important problems have a compelling identity, a vitality of their own that invades disciplinary isolation. Such problems may introduce us to new ways of seeing and doing.

STUDIES OF INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Our focus in the following is more on methodology than on substantive findings. This set of selected studies represents the variety of available methods, arranged roughly in order from less to more complex procedures and phenomena. We conclude with a number of suggestions for other possibilities that would seem worth trying.

Brenneis and Lein (1977); Lein and Brenneis (1978)

The straightforward method of studying conflict discourse to be found in these two articles could serve as a prototype for a wide variety of initial investigations. They arranged for a conflict to occur by asking children to role-play an argument about, for example, who is strongest or whose ball it is. The children seem to have gotten quite absorbed in their roles and to have generated spontaneous and lengthy disputes, which were tape-recorded. An example may awaken memories of your own childhood (or your own children):

(1) (Brenneis & Lein, 1977, p. 55)
Bob: You're skinny.
Tom: You're slimmy.

Bob: You're scrawny.
Tom: You're . . . I don't know.
Bob: You're weakling.
Tom: You're the slimmiest kid in the whole world.
Bob: You're the weaklingest . . . .
Tom: You're baloney (etc.).

These classic quarrels were produced by children in grades one to eight, from three speech communities (white American, New England; black American children of migrant harvesters; and rural Hindi-speaking Fiji Indian children).

Lein and Brenneis approached this material inductively. They first identified content categories (e.g., threats, commands) and stylistic categories (e.g., volume, speed); these categories describe an individual's utterances. More important, individual utterances were organized into patterned argument sequences, involving the productions of both participants. Three sequential patterns were found: repetition, inversion, and escalation. An example of the repetition pattern is:

(2) (Lein & Brenneis, 1978, p. 300)
Alan: I'm the strongest.
Joey: I'm the strongest.
Alan: I am.
Joey: I am.

Inversion is evident in the following, especially in the last four statements:

(3) (Brenneis & Lein, 1977, pp. 56–57)
Dave: I am, you dumb-dumb.
Larry: I'm not no dumb-dumb, dodo.
Dave: Yes, you are.
Larry: No, I'm not.
Dave: Yes, you are.
Larry: No, I'm not.

Perhaps the most common pattern was that of escalation, either in content:

(4) (Brenneis & Lein, 1977, p. 62)
Ann: I can lift up our whole family. I bet you can't lift that up with one finger.
Joey: I can lift the whole world up with one finger.
Ann: Well, I can lift up the whole universe. So why don't you just be quiet about that?

or stylistic escalation, typically by volume:

(5) (Lein & Brenneis, 1978, p. 305)

Bill: Me. (p)
Ken: Me. (mf)
Bill: ME. (f)
Ken: ME!! (ff)
Bill: ME!!! (fff)

Clearly, then, these verbal conflicts are sequentially organized. Lein and Brenneis concluded that, for all the groups they compared,

> it is evident that arguments are rule-governed, socially organized and frequently quite complex events. Even in situations which one might initially expect are emotionally loaded and therefore likely to get out of hand, children are observing cultural conventions and each other quite closely. Overtly competitive as they are, arguments are also cooperative performances; children build arguments together. . . . Arguments do not represent the breakdown of interactional conventions and are not loosely linked individual diatribes. They rather have their own rules. (1978, p. 308)

Brenneis and Lein's findings run counter to the intuition that conflict equals chaos. Their observations, which are upheld in some of the studies to be described below, suggest that verbal conflict can be a speech event of remarkable regularity and coordination.

Camras (1977)

Again, conflict between children was studied, using a method with interesting similarities and differences from that of Lein and Brenneis. Camras created a spontaneous conflict between pairs of American middle-class kindergartners by presenting them with a desirable object (a caged gerbil) that only one could play with at once. The ensuing interaction was filmed, providing a permanent record of the side view of each child as well as their spoken interaction. Camras identified episodes of conflict both by verbal outcries (*My turn!, No!*) and by pushing and holding of the prized object. Then—and this is the offbeat aspect—the facial expressions of the paticipants were categorized and analyzed, especially aggressive expressions such as lowered brows, face thrust forward, or lips pressed together with tightened mouth corners. One pattern observed was as follows: Child A has the object, and B tries to take it. Child A displays oblique brows, and B not only desists but now waits before attempting to take the object again. If A did not display any aggressive facial expression, B would make the attempt sooner.

The advantages of this study are that it focused on the dyadic (rather than monadic) unit, that is, the relation between one child's facial expression and the other's response to the conflict; it extended stylistics from paralanguage (e.g., volume) to facial expression and found systematic patterns, as did Lein and Brenneis; and it showed that conflict could be created for observation—elicited rather than enacted. Obviously, including the verbal language of conflict would have been even more satisfying. Also, the reliance on standard, nonsequential statistical methods (analysis of variance) took a heavy toll in intelligibility, serving to obscure rather than to reveal the pattern of discourse.

Labov (1972)

Suppose you don't happen to be a black, inner-city adolescent, and you overhear the following exchange:

(6) (Labov, 1972, p. 141)

A: Eat shit.
B: Hop on the spoon.
A: Move over.
B: I can't, your mother's already there.

Or this dialogue between John and Willie, with Rel as observer:

(7) (Labov, 1972, p. 145)

John: Who father wear raggedy drawers?
Willie: Yeh the ones with so many holes in them when-a-you walk they whistle?
Rel: Oh . . . shi-it! When you walk they whistle! Oh shit!

A nonmember of this culture might expect an escalation into physical conflict to follow quickly from these insults to the other person, his family, and their poverty. However, as Labov shows, these are ritual insults, part of a complex and coordinated pattern of verbal conflict called "sounding," a speech event he studied among young American black males in south-central Harlem. His team used a variety of techniques, principally direct observation through long-term interaction with several adolescent peer groups. Conversations were tape-recorded in buses on trips and in group sessions, providing a great deal of spontaneous interaction for analysis. There was no necessity to arrange for or to instigate conflict via sounding, as it occurred frequently whenever a group was together.

What is sounding? It consists of a dialogue, performed for an audience of peer observers, in which the participants trade insults. The most

common targets of insults are the other person's mother, self, or house, which are typically characterized as ugly, disgusting, immoral, or poor, using certain fixed syntactical forms. For example, "Your mother raised you on ugly milk" (Labov, 1972, p. 136); "Your mother so low she c'play Chinese handball on a curve [curb]" (1972, p. 157); "When I came across your house, a rat gave me a jay-walkin' ticket" (1972, p. 137).

These "sounds" are typically delivered in a competitive sequence like (6) above and are freely evaluated by the audience, as with Rel's appreciation of Willie's metaphor in (7). In his elegant analysis of their forms and syntax, Labov proposed "rules" for sounding as a speech event. It is a highly structured and coordinated competition, performed for an audience, with winners and losers (the latter being those who are "topped" or who cannot keep up the series). The key difference between a ritual and a personal insult is that the ritual attribution must be so outlandish as to be clearly untrue in the eyes of both participants. That is, while it is true that these boys (and their homes) are poor, it is part of their shared knowledge that the following never happened: "When I came to your house, seven roaches jumped me and one search me" (1972, p. 137). To say directly that the other person is poor or hungry, that his father is old or stutters, or any other true statement is to descend to personal insult. Such exchanges quickly become a different kind of conflict, often ending in hard feelings and a strident argument, including protestations of unfairness from the audience:

(8) (Labov, 1972, p. 151)

Boot: At least my father ain't got a gray head! His father got a big bald spot with a gray head right down there and one long string . . .

David: Because he'old, he's old, that's why! He's old, that's why! . . .

Boot: . . . and one long string, that covers his whole head, one, one long string, about that high, covers his whole head.

David: [with tears in his eyes] You lyin' Boot! . . . You know 'cause he old, tha's why!

Ricky: [to Boot] Aw man, cut it out.

Thus statements about a simple truth such as the father's gray hair and baldness violate the rules of sounding, whereas the obviously exaggerated untruths do not: "He got a head like a water-pump . . . a mailbox . . . like the front of a bus" (1972, p. 132), or "His mother was so dirty, when she get the rag [to] take a bath, the water went back down the drain" (1972, p. 133). Again, verbal conflict follows an organized and rather sophisticated interpersonal pattern.

Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967)

The coordinated discourse of conflict described so far has interesting similarities to the structure of the fictional arguments in Albee's (1962) play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, as analyzed by Watzlawick *et al.* The main protagonists are a long-married couple, George and Martha, in circumstances quite different from Lein and Brenneis' or Labov's real subjects; the setting is a small New England university town, where George is a professor and Martha the president's daughter. Yet their unremitting verbal battles resemble Brenneis and Lein's children in elaborate forms of escalation:

(9) (Albee, 1962, p. 14)

George: . . . chewing your ice cubes . . . like a cocker spaniel. You'll crack your big teeth.

Martha: THEY'RE MY BIG TEETH!

George: Some of them . . . some of them.

Martha: I've got more teeth than you've got.

George: Two more.

Martha: Well, two more's a lot more.

George: I suppose it is. I suppose it's pretty remarkable . . . considering how old you are.

Martha: YOU CUT THAT OUT! (Pause) You're not so young yourself.

George: (With boyish pleasure . . . a chant) I'm six years younger than you are . . . I always have been and I always will be.

Martha: (Glumly) Well . . . you're going bald.

Or, in a more demanding exchange, performed in front of their guests:

(10) (Albee, 1962, p. 101)

George: Monstre!

Martha: Cochon!

George: Bête!

Martha: Canaille!

George: Putain!

As in sounding, they admire their game and expect others to, and they have rules for what is ritual (including her sexual conduct) and what is off-limits (their imaginary son). Thus the playwright, too, portrays interpersonal conflict not as chaos but as a speech event with pattern and structure. The analysis by Watzlawick *et al.* focuses on how the characters form an interpersonal system, which is manifested through and understandable entirely by their interaction.

Gottman (1979): Couples Interaction Scoring System

The methods to be described next are examples of more elaborately developed coding systems. These are applicable to a wide variety of dialogues, although they have usually been applied to marital interaction.

Gottman analyzes longish sequences of couples' discussions on conflictive topics, principally by applying the eight content codes given in Table 2.1. These content codes are partially derived from the work of Hops, Wills, Patterson, and Weiss (1972) and were further refined by Gottman using a combination of logical and empirical analyses. We have applied them to two sample couples' conflicts in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 in the following section. In addition to the verbal content, the nonverbal behaviors of speaker and listener are also coded at each point, though only as positive, neutral, or negative.

There are two other interesting aspects to Gottman's work. Dialogues are coded by "thought units" rather than the more usual message or utterance units. Any given conversational turn may contain one to several of these thought units, as in the third utterance in Table 2.4, which is first a disagreement (*No*) and then an example of mindreading (*You would have been scared too*). A second noteworthy aspect is the statistical analysis applied, called lag sequential analysis. The lag sequential technique provides information about the probability of given behaviors following a selected criterion behavior at different time-ordered behavioral steps (lags) in an ongoing interaction (Sackett, 1979). Lag profiles can be created that provide information about the interconnectedness of message sequences so that multiple-event patterns can be identified. Such patterns can then be used to test research hypotheses concerning the dynamics of discourse and specified outcome variables, such as the resolution or nonresolution of conflict. Few studies of conflict have employed this technique, with the notable exceptions of the work of Gottman, of Margolin and Wampold (1981), and of Notarius, Krokoff, and Markman (1981) on marital conflicts.

Rogers and Farace (1975): Relational Communication Control System

In 1936, Bateson proposed that a relationship evolves through cumulative interaction into two general forms: symmetrical, where the partners' behaviors mirror each other (e.g., competition); or complementary, where the behaviors differ but complement each other (Bateson, 1958). The two complementary positions have been called "one-up" and "one-down," indicating that one person defines the nature of the relationship and the other person accepts that definition. Sluzki and Beavin (1965) proposed that the symmetrical or complementary nature of the relationship would be manifested in the interactants' discourse, specifically in the grammatical and response form of sequential messages. Following these premises (see Rogers, 1981), Rogers and Farace (1975) designed a coding

Table 2.1
Content Codes in the Couples Interaction Scoring System[a]

Content code	Example statement
AG: agreement	You're right. I never saw it that way before. I'm sorry for the way I acted.
DG: disagreement	No, you're wrong. No, because we have to go to Mom's. Please don't smoke.
CT: communication talk	We're getting off the topic. Let's wrap this up in 5 minutes. I'm afraid I don't understand what you're saying.
MR: mindreading	You're lying. You always get mad in these situations. You spent a lot of time with that woman at the party last night.
PS: problem-solving and information exchange	You had your way last time so it's my turn to decide. We're taking the kids to the park this Sunday at 2 p.m. I just want us to be more happy.
SO: summarizing other	It seems to me that what you're saying is that I drink too much. To put it in a few words, you're tired of the way things are. What we're both saying is that we want to move to British Columbia.
SS: summarizing self	So, all I'm saying is that I do not want to take all the responsibility for disciplining the children.
PF: expressing feelings about a problem	Most people are selfish about how they spend their time. We have a problem with the kids. I'm very nervous right now.

[a]Partially derived from Hops, Wills, Patterson, and Weiss (1972) and from Gottman (1979). Examples are based on those given by Gottman (1979, pp. 82–86).

scheme for these aspects of dialogue. They were particularly interested in the "command" (Bateson, 1951) or "relationship" (Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967) level of a message, rather than in its content. That is, they assumed that any message not only conveys information but seeks to define or redefine the nature of the interactants' relationship.

Rogers and Farace's system is typically applied to a couples' open-ended discussion of topics they consider conflictive or problematic for their relationship (Millar & Rogers, 1976). Coding moves from the individual message unit to the "transact" (the relation between contiguous messages) and then to sequential patterns in the couples' interactions. First, each individual message is assigned a three-digit code. The first number designates the speaker. The second designates the grammatical form as (1) assertion, (2) question, (3) talkover, (4) noncomplete, or (5) other. The third digit describes the response functions of the message relative to the immediately preceding message of the other speaker, that is, as (1) support, (2) nonsupport, (3) extension, (4) answer, (5) instruction, (6) order, (7) disconfirmation, (8) topic change, (9) initiation–termination, or (10) other. Thus the wife (coded 1 for speaker) may make an assertion (coded 1 for grammatical form) that does not support the husband's previous proposal (coded 2 for nonsupport in response to previous speaker): 112.

Each of these 50 possible message types is then categorized according to how it defines the nature of the relationship: as an attempt to assert a definition of the relationship, a one-up movement (↑); as a request for or acceptance of the other's definition of the relationship, a one-down movement (↓); or as a nondemanding, nonaccepting, least-constraining movement, a one-across maneuver (→). The assignment of these control directions for each of the message types is given in Table 2.2. For example, the wife's nonsupportive assertion described above would be a one-up manuever.

Finally, by combining the control directions of contiguous messages, the minimum unit for describing relationship is created; this smallest unit is a transact. In a complementary transact, the control directions are opposite (↑ ↓, ↓ ↑). The definition of their relationship offered by one interactant is accepted by the other. In a symmetrical transact (↑ ↑, ↓ ↓, →→) the control directions are the same. Each conversant behaves toward the other as the other has behaved toward him or her. In transitory transacts (↑→, →↑, ↓→, →↓), the directions are different but not complementary, with one conversant choosing the minimally constraining one-across maneuver.

This general scheme has been applied to interpersonal conflict by defining such conflict as three consecutive one-up moves (↑ ↑ ↑); see

Table 2.2
Control Directions of Message Types

Response Code		Assertion	Question	Talkover	Noncomplete	Other
Support	1	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Nonsupport	2	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Extension	3	→	↓	↑	→	→
Answer	4	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Instruction	5	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Order	6	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Disconfirmation	7	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Topic change	8	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Initiation—termination	9	↑	↑	↑	→	↑
Other	10	→	↓	↓	→	→

Millar, Rogers, and Bavelas (1984). One interactant attempts to define the relationship; this is rejected by an opposing claim from the other, which is in turn opposed by the initial speaker. The conflict pattern then represents the first step toward a potential symmetrical escalation. In this coding system, a simple disagreement is a pair of symmetrical transacts, and a conflict is a double symmetrical transact. The coding system is illustrated in Tables 2.3 and 2.4, where conflicts thus defined can be seen.

Wiener and Mehrabian (1968); Bavelas and Chovil (1985)

All of the above methods have studied arguments, quarrels, insults, disagreements, and other means by which conflict is manifested as discourse. These are, as noted at the outset, speech events or performatives in which the conflict is the discourse and vice versa. Two other methods that do not fit this model, because the discourse studied in fact avoids such direct conflict, are here mentioned. Both of these approaches study the effect of an experimentally created potential for conflict involving another person on the subject's subsequent written or spoken message. This kind of data is worth considering if, as these studies suggest, one response to potential conflict among adults is that their language becomes more indirect or tangential. That is, one pattern of conflict discourse may be a coordinated disengagement that avoids direct conflict.

Table 2.3
An Interspousal Conflict

W: What did you expect of me when we got married?
H: Well, uh, . . . I really didn't have any expectations of you.
W: I expected you to take care of me.
H: Haven't I? (asked challengingly)
W: Yes. Have I complained?
H: Yeah.
W: No! No.
H: Silently!
W: No. No, no, . . . no.

	Rogers–Farace relational control codes			
Gottman's CISS content codes	Message type	Control direction	transact	triad
W: Q/PS[a]	123	↓		
H: (Blurp), PF	214	↑	↓ ↑	
W: PS	113	→	↑ →	↓ ↑ →
H: Q/PS	222	↑	→ ↑	↑ → ↑
W: AG, Q/PF	111/	↓	↑ ↓	→ ↑ ↓
	122[b]	↑	↓ ↑	↑ ↓ ↑
H: DG	214	↑	↑ ↑	↓ ↑ ↑
W: DG, DG	112	↑	↑ ↑	↑ ↑ ↑
H: MR	212	↑	↑ ↑	↑ ↑ ↑
W: DG, DG, DG	112	↑	↑ ↑	↑ ↑ ↑

[a]With CISS, questions are always double-coded, first as a question, then by a content code.
[b]Messages may be double-coded with the Rogers–Farace system.

Wiener and Mehrabian (1968) proposed that language can be characterized by (and coded for) a greater or lesser degree of "immediacy," where "non-immediacy" is a more distant separation of the speaker from the object of speech. Non-immediacy is, for example, saying "you and I" rather than "we"; or referring to "those people" rather than to "these people." Wiener and Mehrabian (1968, Chap. 5) and Conville (1975) found that non-immediacy increased (compared to a control group writing messages under positive conditions) in the language of experimental subjects who had to address or describe a person toward whom they had negative feelings.

In another program of research, such indirectness was measured differently, but with analogous results (Bavelas, 1983; Bavelas & Chovil,

Table 2.4
An Engaged Couple's Conflict

M: I think, I think that two or three years ago we'd been scared to death to a, to even consider it. So . . .
F: You would have been scared to death.
M: No, you would have been scared too.
F: [No. I wouldn't have been scared too. . . .]"
M: [You sure would have!]
F: Ahhh . . . anyway . . . I . . . you know, I'm really kinda glad that, that happened. Because I think, it, uh, you know, it just kinda moves us, moves us out, out of where we were and, you know, you know, we'll move into something, something different.
M: Yup.

	Rogers–Farace relational control codes			
Gottman's CISS content codes	Message type	Control direction	transact	triad
M: MR	213	→		
F: MR	112	↑	→ ↑	
M: DG, MR	212	↑	↑ ↑	→ ↑ ↑
F: DG, DG	132	↑	↑ ↑	↑ ↑ ↑
M: MR	232	↑	↑ ↑	↑ ↑ ↑
F: (Blurp), PF, PS	113	→	↑ →	↑ ↑ →
M: AG	211	↓	→ ↓	↑ → ↓

[a]The brackets represent a successful talkover in the Rogers–Farace transcription procedures.

1985; Bavelas & Smith, 1982). The concept of "disqualification"—saying something without really saying it—was borrowed from psychiatric studies of distressed families (e.g., Haley 1959; Sluzki, Beavin, Tarnopolsky, & Verón, 1967) and applied to the language used by normal adults in response to experimentally induced conflicts. The degree of disqualification was defined as the degree to which a message leaves unclear its content, sender, receiver, or context. For example, an experimental subject is asked to imagine a situation in which a friend has sent a gift so bizarre that it is not possible to tell whether it is a joke or serious and then to reply in writing to the question, "How do you like the gift I sent you?" One subject wrote the following: "Yes I received your gift. They say a person gives what he would like to receive. Hopefully one day, I'll be able to return the favor some way or another. Have a nice day" (Bavelas & Chovil, 1985). Applying the four above criteria of disqualification, this message is unclear in content because the sentences do not hold together well and because of its possibe double meanings. It avoids giving the

sender's opinion by use of the construction *They say*. It refers very little to the friend who sent the gift and, indeed, after the first sentence seems to be addressed to anyone in general; therefore it is not clearly addressed to the receiver of the message. Finally, it obviously changes context by not answering the question asked and giving other information instead. All messages written under such conditions were more disqualified than control-group messages.

As already emphasized, both the non-immediacy and the disqualification research seem quite far from natural conflict discourse. However, they are included here for two reasons. First, they illustrate the possible use of experimental manipulation in eliciting and analyzing discourse. More important, they could be adapted to dyadic exchanges to establish whether, in some circumstances, adults use a special language for conflict, one that continues the dialogue without direct confrontation (see also Brown & Levinson, 1978; Goguen & Linde, 1981). Given the apparent ability of children to build arguments together, as documented by Lein and Brenneis and by Labov, it should not surprise us that adults may avoid arguments together, by systematically deflecting their language away from the sensitive topic.

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

The studies reviewed above lead us to conclude that conflict discourse is not always bad, simple, or the same, and that it can be quite fruitfully analyzed. In the following, the many options suggested by our wider review of the literature are outlined in the hope that readers will find among them some directions of interest in this still underresearched area.

Kinds of Dyads and Groups

Whenever people interact, there is interpersonal discourse to observe, and some of this may be conflictive. This includes families (husband–wife, parent–child, siblings, in-laws); dating couples; friends, gangs, peer and social groups (from parties to meetings to playgrounds); work groups and teams; or even strangers in some situations (e.g., formal adversaries such as lawyers or political opponents, labor negotiators, juries, buyers and sellers in bargaining situations, or partisans at sports events). Fiction or published correspondence may also provide already complete data.

Ways of Obtaining Conflict Data

We have seen that conflict can be successfully role-played by participants. Rausch, Barry, Hertel, and Swain (1974) have formalized this for marital

conflict in their "Improvisation Scenes." Or, if "real" conflict is desired, it can be found by selecting relationships and situations such as those suggested above (distressed couples, political campaigns, ritual insults or conflicts, situations involving bargains, complaints, blame).

In addition to enacting and finding conflict, we can deliberately elicit it by experimentally arranged circumstances. The task itself may elicit conflict, as did Camras' (1977); some of Watzlawick's (1966); the "Color Matching Test" (Goodrich & Boomer, 1963; Ryder & Goodrich, 1966); the Prisoners' Dilemma paradigm (Rapoport, 1970; Terhune, 1968); the "Acme–Bolt Trucking Game" (Deutsch & Krauss, 1962); SIMFAM game technique (Straus, 1968; Straus & Tallman, 1971); the "Inventory of Marital Conflict" (Olson & Ryder, 1970); or even watching a film (Hall & Williams, 1966). Most commonly used, because of its naturalness, is discussion of a topic on which disagreement is known to exist, for example, by "Revealed Differences Technique" (Strodbeck, 1951); by unrevealed differences (Ferreira, 1963; Ferreira & Winter, 1965); or by asking the couple to indicate problem areas of their relationship for discussion (e.g., Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Millar & Rogers, 1976; Twentyman & Martin, 1978; Weiss, Hops, & Patterson, 1973).

Media

Although spoken conflict has appropriately dominated research, it may be that other possibilities have been thus neglected. Consider the nonverbal aspects of face-to-face (or telephone) interaction, and especially written material, such as notes, letters, memos, and newspaper or periodical dialogues in a series of letters to the editor, rebuttals, and so forth.

Research Methods

The full variety of methods recommended by, for example, Labov (1975) have been used and should be further explored: Interviews with and judgments of native users (although these may be less satisfactory for interpersonal than for individual linguistic events); induction from observation on an ad hoc basis; induction using established coding systems with emphasis on generalizability; and hypothesis-testing experiments when the state of our knowledge, based on earlier stages, justifies. The pay-off of each method will of course differ, from purely descriptive categorization to rules analysis to system structures. Used to supplement rather than to compete with each other, a combination of such methods—especially in multidisciplinary efforts—would enrich not only the topic but the investigators.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We wish to acknowledge the financial assistance of the University of Victoria and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the bibliographic assistance of Sandra Kades and Brad Dishan.

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