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A Critical Review of Methodology

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Conversation Analysis and Family Therapy: A Critical Review of Methodology

Abstract

This article critiques the use of Conversation Analysis (CA) as applied to the study of family therapy. Searches of relevant databases and journals as well as citation searches were conducted in April 2018 for relevant articles. Inclusion criteria included the explicit use of CA either solely or in combination with discourse analysis and discursive psychology. This resulted in the inclusion of 25 articles that were reviewed against a guideline for the evaluation of qualitative research to which 5 items specific to CA were added to ensure a specific and balanced evaluation of the studies. Articles generally had a good application of quality criteria although there was a variation in detail of transcription, application of sequence analysis, and a limited use of validity testing. CA has the potential to complement existing research on family therapy but requires a rigorous application of process and quality criteria. The article provides recommendations for future CA research into family therapy.

Introduction

Conversation analysis (CA) seeks to describe the structural components of everyday, spoken interaction and the particular normative expectations for how it is conducted (Have, 2007; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013). For example, CA has described how talk is divided into turn constructional units followed by transition relevance places where speaker change may expectedly occur (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Speakers also utilise particular resources for selecting the next speaker, extending turns, or suspending talk to repair problems of hearing or understanding. CA has shown how systems of talk are flexible and are

imbued with normative expectations that are utilised and modified by participants in their particular context.

From early in its development, CA has been concerned with both everyday conversation and institutional talk. The latter involves particular institutional-specific goals, objectives and trajectories, such as in psychiatry and GP consultations (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In psychotherapy (Peräkylä, 2012; Peräkylä, Antaki, Vehvilainen, & Leudar, 2008), CA research has explored the different purposes served by formulations, interpretations and questions by therapists, and how they are rejected or accepted by clients. CA has also demonstrated how clients can show affiliation or shifts in understanding, and how therapists show recognition or empathy to client emotions. Through a detailed description and analysis of talk, CA has offered a unique perspective on psychotherapy and holds substantial potential for demonstrating how therapeutic concepts and techniques are actually applied, both successfully and unsuccessfully (Georgaca & Avdi, 2009; Madill, Widdicombe, & Barkham, 2001). This provides a sound basis for novel recommendations on therapists' micro-level choices in conversation, including word selection, prosody and intonation, which can support improvements to the implementation of therapeutic interventions.

CA research into psychotherapy has tended to focus on individual therapy, with less attention to family therapy interactions. A recent review by Tseliou (2013) has made a significant contribution to understanding CA and family therapy (FT) research. Tseliou (2013) took a broad approach that reviewed CA and discourse analysis (DA) research in both couple and family therapy. This review focussed specifically on methodology, particularly examining types of research questions, data/sampling processes, types of analyses, epistemological perspectives, knowledge claims, and quality criteria. Tseliou (2013) revealed a number of methodological shortcomings in CA/DA research. For example, there were a limited number of original studies, with authors often publishing multiple articles from the same study. There were also many case study designs, with 17/28 studies analysing only one therapy session. Despite this, 13/28 articles made attempts at generalisations. In relation to quality criteria, articles made most frequent use of reflexivity and exemplars (8 instances of both) and 10 articles made no mention of quality criteria. Deviant case analysis and next-turn proof were less frequent, with three and two examples respectively. Tseliou (2013) concluded that, with careful attention to methodological consistency and rigour, CA and DA have the potential to improve our understanding of therapist and institutional influences on clinical practice and to

bridge the gap between family therapy research and practice through improving therapist reflexivity.

The Tseliou (2013) review combined both CA and DA research and critiqued them against the same methodological standards. While CA and DA both study discourse and language there are significant substantive and methodological differences between them (Wooffitt, 2005). Substantively, CA focuses on interaction; particularly how social actions are achieved through moment-to-moment sequences of talk, and the normative expectations underpinning them. DA examines language from a broader perspective, utilising passages of talk, looking at what functions are served by that talk, and how discourses constrain, oppress and shape talk and interaction. Methodologically, CA has an analytic process that utilises collections of a phenomenon, sequential analysis and the incorporation of normative expectations. CA's analytic claims are grounded in the observable behaviours of the participants through use of the next-turn proof and deviant case analysis. DA does not necessarily employ these analytic processes. Analytic claims are, instead, routinely evaluated through the presentation of data for reader evaluation (Wooffitt, 2005). DA's use of passages of talk makes the use of next-turn proof or deviant case analysis less essential. This distinction between CA and DA is complicated by one strand of DA research called discursive psychology (DP). Like CA, DP studies naturally occurring conversations using Jeffersonian transcription conventions and sequential analyses, often using and citing CA techniques and research (Have, 2007). These similarities can at times make the distinction between CA and DP difficult (Potter, 2012). However, DP retains an interest in how discourse influences psychological as well as social structures (Potter, 2012), topics that extend beyond the scope of CA (Have, 2007; Madill, 2015). DP (and DA) research is thus likely to make additional analytic claims about social and psychological influences beyond CA's focus on the observable conversation. Considering these significant substantive and methodological differences, CA research warrants a review against CA-specific methodological standards.

As well as including both CA and DA, the review by Tseliou (2013) encompassed both family and couple therapy. While there appears to be similar therapy skills employed in both family and couple therapy, there has been a differentiation between the approaches through the development of specific therapeutic models (Jacobson & Gurman, 2015; Lebow, 2013). This review will proceed on the basis that there is a difference of focus, technique and therefore conversational sequences between couple and family therapy, and will therefore

focus exclusively on FT research. While this inevitably reduces the number of articles appropriate for this review, it also provides a more focussed and concentrated examination of family therapy practices, and the application of CA techniques to it.

In summary, this review will aim to provide a more directed and focussed methodological critique of CA research on family therapy than has previously been completed. By highlighting areas of stronger analytic practice, the outcomes of this critique will provide researchers with recommendations for conducting and evaluating CA research and hopefully encourage further use of CA in studying family therapy.

Methods

Evaluation Criteria

In determining appropriate evaluation criteria for this review, we will employ general criteria for qualitative research and criteria specific to CA. Although a number of different evaluation criteria have been proposed for qualitative research, there does appear to be some convergence of recommended items (e.g., Blaxter, 1996, 2013; Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Russell & Gregory, 2003). These criteria generally cover appropriateness of the qualitative approach for the research question, connection to the literature, selection of data, analytic processes, clear presentation of findings, and position of the author(s). For the current review, we employed the 20-item criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research as reported by Blaxter (1996, 2013). This decision was based on its convergence with other reported criteria, the analytic detail required by the 20 items, and the authors' previous experience with the tool. The Blaxter criteria contains items covering aims and connection to the literature, methods, analysis, presentation of findings, and ethics (see Table S1 in supporting information). Each item takes the form of a yes/no question, for example "Is reference made to accepted procedures for analysis?" or "Have measures been taken to test the validity of the findings?" The criteria does not provide a definitive 'score' or rating of the quality of articles, but is instead designed as a guide for evaluating qualitative research.

The Blaxter (1996, 2013) criteria has a number of items for reviewing analytic practices, but it was necessary to supplement them with criteria specific to CA. This is because research from different epistemological perspectives need to be reviewed against quality criteria appropriate to each perspective (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000; Willig, 2013). Because

there is not an agreed set of criteria for the evaluation of CA research (Tseliou, 2013), we created a set of criteria through a consideration of CA's epistemology and recommended CA research practices. We acknowledge that Tseliou (2013) produced a set of reported quality criteria, but these items were generated from the studies themselves, and may not necessarily reflect criteria appropriate for CA specific research.

CA is considered a constructionist approach (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015), partly due to the primary role of language in constructing social reality (Potter, 1996; Tseliou, 2013). Potter (1996) proposed a set of reliability and validity criteria for constructionist approaches including deviant case analysis, displays of participants' own understanding through next-turn proof, coherence or integration with past research findings, and readers' evaluation through presentation of adequate data. These criteria have previously been applied to CA research (Madill, et al., 2001). A review of introductory writings on CA research processes (Have, 2007; Pomerantz & Fehr, 2011; Schegloff, 1996; Sidnell, 2013; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013; Wooffitt, 2005) points towards a generally accepted set of procedures common to CA. These procedures include: data in the form of video or audio recordings of naturally-occurring interactions, use of Jeffersonian transcription conventions (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013), collecting instances of a phenomenon of interest, and an analysis of the phenomenon with reference to sequence organisation, grounded in the orientations of the participants via next-turn proof and deviant case analysis.

There is thus a high degree of convergence between CA processes and the validity and reliability criteria for constructionist approaches, with both including deviant case analysis, the orientation of participants, and presentation of adequate data examples. We will therefore apply the following five quality criteria to the present review:

- Does the study utilise naturalistic data in the form of audio or video recordings?
- Does the transcription follow Jeffersonian conventions?
- Are analytic claims supported by data extracts?
- Are analytic claims grounded in the orientations of participants and demonstrated through sequential analysis, next-turn proof and deviant case analysis?
- Are the results discussed in connection to prior CA research?

It is worth noting that Madill (2015) argues that CA makes realist claims about knowable, objective phenomena that through proper analysis emerge from the conversational data. CA thus seems to inhabit a unique methodological position between realist and constructionist epistemologies. CA's epistemology thus requires further exploration and discussion but, due to the current convergence on a constructionist perspective, the above criteria will be maintained for the current review.

Literature Search

A literature search was conducted by the first author in April 2018 using the databases PsycINFO, PubMed and CINAHL due to their coverage of clinical practice and family therapy. If a database did not include the controlled search terms "family therapy" and "conversation analysis", they were searched as free text search terms. This strategy appeared to provide an acceptable level of precision and recall (Harter, 1986). Screening was initially by reading the article title, abstract and keywords, and if unclear by reviewing the article's method section.

Inclusion criteria were original empirical research, published in peer-reviewed journals, exploring family therapy and specifically stating the use of CA exclusively or as part of a wider analysis. Only articles in English were included and there was no limit on age of articles. As explained above, articles exclusively on couple therapy were excluded.

The search in PsycINFO retrieved a total of 30 references, and 10 articles met the inclusion criteria; PubMed retrieved 9 references, and 4 articles met criteria; and CINAHL retrieved 2 articles and 1 met the criteria. After duplicates were removed, this resulted in a total of 11 articles. Searches of individual journals in the family therapy and linguistics fields using the same search terms added a further 9 articles. Using the citation index in Scopus, each article's reference list, citing articles and similar articles were reviewed to find other relevant articles meeting the inclusion criteria. This process was repeated for each of the included articles retrieved and added a further 5 articles. The literature search identified a grand total of 25 articles for inclusion (see Prisma diagram, Figure 1).

(Insert Figure 1 here.)

Evaluation of Identified Articles

As stated above, each article was reviewed against Blaxter's set of criteria that provide guidelines for evaluating qualitative research (see Table S1 in supporting information). Further, these items were supplemented with five items specific to CA. As each article was read, the authors recorded their justified assessment of the article in light of each of the review criterion. To ensure the rigor of the evaluation process, two authors reviewed each paper. The first author reviewed all articles and the other authors were allocated half each. Authors reviewing the same articles then met in pairs to discuss and compare their evaluations against the quality criteria. Similarities and differences were discussed in the pairs until consensus was reached, referring back to the original articles as necessary. The authors' combined comments were synthesised by the first author and the key conclusions are presented below. Two articles were also initially reviewed by all authors and discussed as a group to ensure consistency in the application of the review criteria. As previously stated, the aim of this review was to critique the application of CA research on family therapy and to therefore highlight areas of stronger and weaker research practice and to identify areas that require particular attention for future research, rather than to order individual articles along a continuum of strongest to weakest.

The literature search retrieved a number of articles reporting the use of CA in combination with other approaches such as DP, DA or grounded theory. The breadth of approaches within DA and the realist epistemological perspective of grounded theory would necessitate the inclusion of different quality review criteria to that of CA and DP. This review, however, is focussed specifically on the application of CA. Each article included in this review has made some specific statement about the use of CA in the analysis and we argue that they therefore make themselves accountable for the application of CA processes, and are open to critique in relation to specific CA research practices. As a result, we have opted to retain the same evaluation criteria for each article, acknowledging that our critique applies only to each article's application of CA and not to the quality of other aspects of their analyses.

Some details about the first author may also help readers to situate this review and consider potential biases. The first author is a research student, psychologist and family therapist interested in understanding the details of dialogical conversations in family therapy. This review was originally conducted to understand how CA has been applied to family therapy interactions and the major findings of such research. A further aim is to understand what

constitutes rigorous CA research and how it can be consistently applied in future studies. The authors have no bias against DA, DP or other qualitative approaches, but we are particularly interested in CA's focus on observable, naturally occurring data, and analyses grounded in the orientations of participants.

Findings

For ease of presentation, the findings will be grouped according to the sub-categories used by Blaxter (1996, 2013) rather than a description of each of the twenty items. CA specific criteria included for each category are noted in parentheses. The presented sub-categories are: 1. Research aims and connection to literature; 2. Methods and data collection (use of video or audio data, Jeffersonian transcription); 3. Analysis (next-turn proof and deviant case analysis); 4. Presentation (use of data extracts and coherence with previous CA findings); and 5. Ethics. General findings will be presented under each sub-category. Supporting examples were chosen due to their ability to clearly illustrate the findings. Table S2 (see supporting information) summarises the findings in relation to each article.

First, however, we should note that the use of CA to understand family therapy interactions is relatively new, with more than half of the identified articles published in the last 10 years. Similar to Tseliou (2013), we found a small number of published researchers, with two authors involved in a combined total of 16 of the 25 articles. Couture (five articles) appears to have published from a single session, while O'Reilly (11 articles) uses one dataset.

Research Aims and Connection to Literature

The research questions for all articles were appropriate for CA through a focus on describing interactions. The majority of articles (n=21) also had a clear statement about aims, focussing on a particular issue concerning family therapy, such as impasse, blame, or the use of reflecting teams. Examples included: “[W]e focus on the discursive resources through which the therapist is able to repair alliance ruptures occurring between the therapist and family members...” (Muntigl & Horvath, 2016, p. 104). And, “We investigate how parents seek to build alignment between themselves and the therapist, simultaneously distancing themselves from their child's behaviour.” (Parker & O'Reilly, 2012, p. 459). Four articles had unclear aims, instead describing a general area of investigation. For example, O'Reilly (2006) described the general concept of interruptions and the less-than-full member status of

children which inform the study, but these ideas do not culminate into a clear aim for the study. While a clear statement of aims is recommended for qualitative studies (Blaxter, 1996, 2013), a more exploratory approach tends to be employed in CA. Conversation analysts are encouraged to start with an “unmotivated” look at the data by “bracketing” existing assumptions or goals, and approaching the data open to new discoveries (Have, 2007). It was unclear if researchers started with unmotivated looking, but had to adapt their reporting of aims in terms that are generally accepted for research publications. The literature reviews focussed on theoretical concepts related to their area of investigation, rather than specific past CA research. Presumably, this was due to a lack of current CA and FT research.

The articles therefore provided a good orientation to their area of investigation and generally provided a clear statement of aims. However past CA research in the area of investigation did not feature in the article introductions.

Methods and Data Collection

Data collection was undertaken using availability or convenience sampling, which is not inconsistent with CA. All articles utilised data from naturally-occurring FT conversations and utilised either video or audio recordings, as expected for CA. The sole exception was Friedlander, Heatherington, and Marrs (2000) who in addition to video and audio data also utilised a session that had previously been transcribed and published and they therefore had no access to the original recording.

Stated analytic approach and number of studies are listed in Table 1. Seven articles reported using CA exclusively, with the rest using CA in combination with another type of analysis. While the articles tended to provide a good conceptual overview of CA, there was little description about how CA was actually conducted. This is not unusual practice for CA articles despite some clear guidelines on conducting CA (e.g., Have, 2007; Pomerantz & Fehr, 2011). Only Hella, et al. (2015) made specific reference to CA concepts in the methods. For example, “...we have scrutinized how the turns are allocated, who is taking the turn after whom, what gaps (or pauses) or overlaps there are in turn-transitions, to whom talk is addressed, which lexical choices are made, especially as regards person pronouns, and whether there are aborted utterances, pauses, or other signs of hesitation.” (Hella, et al., 2015, pp. 27-28).

(Insert table 1 here)

All articles utilised Jeffersonian transcription procedures, with the exception of Friedlander, et al. (2000) who did not present any data samples. Eight articles did not provide a high level of detail, missing features such as prosody and intonation. The transcription practices were therefore not utilised to their potential, with prosodic elements largely absent from the analysis.

In summary, consistent with CA, the articles overwhelmingly made use of video or audio recordings of naturalistic therapy sessions. They also made use of accepted Jeffersonian transcription conventions, however there was a wide variation in the level of prosodic and intonational detail in these transcriptions.

Analysis

The articles in this review employed a range of analytic approaches (see Table 1), thus making direct comparison and evaluation difficult. This review will instead focus specifically on the application of CA and not on an article's analysis as a whole. Overall the analyses were presented systematically with appropriate supporting examples. But, guided by Blaxter's criteria, this review revealed four main issues. These issues centred around: 1. Sequential analysis, 2. Validity testing and deviant case analysis, 3. Additional analytic claims, 4. Statements beyond presented data.

1. Sequential analysis.

The sequential organisation of conversation is a unique and central idea in CA (Stivers, 2013). Utterances are not analysed in isolation, but in relation to what has come before and what follows. A related idea is the next-turn proof, where the proposed actions of a speaker are interpreted by reference to how they are responded to by the next speaker. The next-turn proof serves to ground an analysis in the orientations of the participants.

Sequences of interaction were a major focus with the majority of articles (n=20), describing behaviours with some reference to sequential context. The extent to which the sequential context was incorporated into the analysis varied greatly, however. Articles with particular

attention to sequential environments included ways that a family member and client spoke in relation to symptoms (Hella, et al., 2015), the position and responses to children's interruptions (O'Reilly, 2006), and how families responded to vulnerability (Pote, Mazon, Clegg, & King, 2011). In these studies, the sequential context was essential to the analyses. For example, Pote, et al. (2011, p. 111) describe how a successful topic shift is achieved: "After the father's initial short bid for a topic change in L5 [the original data extract not presented here], there is a brief pause; as nobody challenged his bid, the father held onto the turn and continued to introduce his own agenda. This is a successful bid for topic switch because everybody else shifts onto the content of the father's turn and abandons the previous topic...". This analysis does not just look at the father's turn (i.e. the initial bid for a topic switch) in isolation but also incorporates the responses of the other participants (i.e. a pause and shift to new content). The analysis thus involves the sequential position of the utterance and uses the following turns as supporting evidence for the analysis.

Another example is from O'Reilly (2006, p. 560), "Lee makes several attempts to draw attention from the therapist and take the conversational floor. He interrupts by addressing the therapist by name on two occasions [the original data extract not presented here] ... The family members treat Lee's potentially interruptive turns in a negative way with Steve telling him to 'Shut up' ... and his father telling him to 'shut up' ... Lee persists in his attempt and Lee's turns are treated as interruptive as Mr Niles acknowledges that the therapist's turn is incomplete: 'He'll talk to you in a minute when he's finished'". Lee's talk is analysed as interruptive because of the responses of the other participants, not by analysing Lee's talk in isolation. Again, the utterance is not analysed in isolation, but is given meaning through the responses by the other participants.

Although most articles made reference to sequences, the level of detail of sequential analysis varied. Rather than employing a detailed analysis of sequences, many articles (n=13) focussed on identifying, describing and grouping behaviours into categories. For example, Friedlander, et al. (2000) coded and categorised various ways that therapists responded to blame in FT sessions. They provide detailed descriptions of these categories but focus solely on the responses of the therapist without reference to the preceding or following talk. The therapists' talk is therefore analysed in isolation from its sequential context. Another example comes from O'Reilly and Parker (2014) who describe how talk is constructed as inappropriate for children. In this example the authors are presenting evidence to support the

analysis that talk can be cast as inappropriate due to temporal factors: For example, , “Dad: = they do it <at the wrong time> when the kids are there and that ↓lot” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2014, p. 295). Here the authors present only one turn of talk by a single speaker as evidence. The analysis is therefore focussed on the description and categorisation of the actions of talk rather than on analysing talk in reference to its sequential context with evidence from the following turns (i.e. the next-turn proof) to support the interpretation.

In summary, the majority articles in this review acknowledged the importance of the sequential context in the analysis of talk. However, there was a variation in the extent to which sequences were included in the analysis. This ranged from the grouping and categorising of single turns at talk to analyses where multiple turns and the sequential context were essential parts of the analysis.

2. Validity testing and deviant case analysis.

Validity tests were explicitly mentioned in five articles. Congruent with Tseliou (2013) these took a variety of forms. In Pote, et al. (2011), two of the authors were the clinicians in the studied sessions, and provided feedback on their thinking in the sessions; Viaro and Leonardi (1983) used observations of family therapy sessions to confirm their proposed rules of family therapy; O’Reilly and Lester (2016) report having discussions with a clinical team about issues that were raised in the analysis; and Couture (2007) and Sutherland and Couture (2007) had reflective discussions with readers of a draft of the analysis.

Deviant case analysis is a validation technique in CA that involves identifying instances of talk that do not fit described patterns or proposed expectations (Sidnell, 2013). If participants orient to these unexpected departures, this lends further support to the normative reality of the proposed expectation. Two articles (Couture & Sutherland, 2006; Sutherland & Couture, 2007) reported using deviant case analysis, although only Couture and Sutherland (2006) provided an example. Their application of deviant case analysis differs from that usually applied in CA; they state that “a deviant case increased the validity of our claims by demonstrating how alternative practices led to alternative outcomes” (Couture & Sutherland, 2006, p. 338). They provide an example where, in contrast to their proposed model, the therapist did not use certain techniques before offering advice, and this advice was

subsequently rejected. While their example fits their definition of deviant case analysis, it does not concur with that generally accepted in CA.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of deviant case analysis is premised on having a sufficiently well-defined practice and a collection of those practices for comparing and contrasting (Have, 2007). Eight articles studied only a single session while the remaining seventeen utilised a corpus of at least 4 sessions. The majority of articles using larger collections suggests that deviant case analysis would be more common in the articles under review, but the only example comes from a study of only a single session. Similarly, the presentation of alternative interpretations was a rare occurrence, with three articles (O'Reilly, 2008; Pote, et al., 2011; Stancombe & White, 2005) making mention of other possible analytic interpretations.

3. Additional analytic claims.

One application of CA to FT interactions is scrutinising and critiquing accepted institutional practices (Tseliou, 2013). A series of articles achieve this through highlighting how children are responded to regarding interruptions (Hutchby & O'Reilly, 2010; O'Reilly, 2006, 2008). In these studies, the analyses indicate that children can be ignored or interrupted without comment but when therapists interrupt adults there is some recognition or apology. These findings draw attention to interactions that may conflict with FT ideals of giving equal voice to all participants. But these studies also add additional analytic claims; namely that parents answer for children because they are responding to the moral implications of the therapist's questions (Hutchby & O'Reilly, 2010). These interactional patterns are interpreted with reference to an overarching concept of moral implications that, while plausible, are difficult to demonstrate within CA's focus on structures and sequences of actions. Other similar interpretations concern protection and vulnerability talk (Pote, et al., 2011), membership status of children (O'Reilly, 2006, 2008), and blame and responsibility (Parker & O'Reilly, 2012).

A strict application of CA would avoid additional analytic claims beyond the observable orientations in the conversational data. However, as discussed previously, DA and DP approaches maintain an interest in the intersection between conversational practices and psychological and social processes. Therefore, interpretations through psychological and

social mechanisms were consistent with such approaches. Issues around the combination of CA with other analytic approaches will be considered further in the discussion.

4. Statements beyond presented data.

Tseliou (2013) noted that, despite a post-positivist epistemology and single case studies, many articles made generalisations (13/28) or realist claims (17/28). A similar finding arose from our review. In 13 articles, we found the presence of claims that were outside what the data could provide. These included statements about frequency using general descriptors without supporting data, interpretations and conclusions that were not supported by the presented findings, and over-generalised recommendations for practice without sufficient sequential context to evidence its effectiveness. For example, O'Reilly (2007, p. 238) states that "I have demonstrated two central points: that (1) parents can and do work to construct the child as naughty, and (2) there are various ideas about the cause of naughtiness". In the presented examples, parents describe behaviours but do not directly construct the child as "naughty" (this is done by siblings and the therapist). As for the second point, the presented data do not demonstrate a variety of ideas about naughtiness, as only one example of a proposed cause is presented (i.e. a "nervous problem"). The stated conclusions are thus not supported by a strict reading of the presented data.

Other overstatements involved recommendations that were extrapolated from, but not directly consistent with, the presented data. For example, Parker and O'Reilly (2013, p. 504) state that their data "illustrates that validation...has potential to circumvent disengagement or facilitate re-engagement". They presented three supporting examples; two are of only the therapist speaking (which did not demonstrate how these validation attempts were received), and in the other example the child showed no signs of re-engagement. On the basis of the presented data it remained difficult to recommend validation as a tool for engagement due to the limited demonstrated evidence of its effectiveness.

The remaining 12 articles made conclusions that were consistent with the scope of the presented data. For example when describing the use of vocalised noises, O'Reilly (2005a, p. 760) concluded that "Children use an active noise that is in some way derived from or representative of the conversation that is taking place. This serves a simple short way into the interaction... When the adults use active noising, it serves to graphically illustrate a narrative,

analogy, or argument, strengthening and authenticating a sense of experientially grounded accurate recall and reporting”. The conclusions were a close fit with the presented data and did not include interpretations beyond the data.

About half the articles in this review contained some form of statements beyond a limited interpretation of the presented data. This varied from overstatements about frequency of behaviours to recommendations for practice without directly supporting evidence.

Presentation of Data

This section includes reader evaluation, coherence or integration with previous research, and reflexivity or statement of the author’s position.

The quality criterion of reader evaluation involves the presentation of data extracts for verification of findings. The articles, overall, provided good supporting evidence for their analytic claims with appropriate data extracts. The two exceptions were Friedlander, et al. (2000) who presented no data, and Williams and Auburn (2015) where the majority of their data was presented in a separate document in supporting information.

The criterion of coherence involves the integration between a study’s results and past research and provides a means of checking the validity of claims (Potter, 1996). This criterion was evaluated by reviewing each article’s discussion section for the author connecting their current findings to past research. Evidence of integration with existing research is difficult to achieve considering the small number of current CA and FT studies. The authors connected their studies to past research in two main ways; firstly, through connection to existing CA research (n=8), including more general CA findings on interaction or specific CA and FT research. For example, Parker and O’Reilly (2013, p. 177) connected their research on therapists exiting a session to consult with a reflecting team to previous CA research: “Linguistically and nonverbally effective terminal sequences can be established by attention to closing down the topic and using closed rather than open utterances (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). White, Levinson, and Roter (1994) found that in the vast majority of visits to the doctor, it was the doctor who initiated the closing of the session with patients generally displaying agreement with that closure. This also seems to be the case of temporary closing within sessions, for example, nonverbally the therapist may stand at an ERP [exit relevant

place] and indicate leaving the therapy, or verbally could ensure that sentences are completed with final intonation and no invitation for further contribution.” In this example, the authors are connecting their results i.e. that therapists can temporarily close a session by verbal and nonverbal means, to earlier CA research on closing topics via terminal sequences, and evidence that in doctor consultations, it is the doctor that tends to initiate the closing of the consultation.

Secondly, authors connected their findings to similar topic areas from outside CA. This generally occurred through reference to psychotherapy concepts or other discursive research. For example, in his discussion, Stamp (1991) connected his interpretation of the family’s talk to Minuchin’s assertion that a family is a system that regulates and shapes the responses of its members. Stamp also connects the analysis to Liang’s ideas about social selves and the formation of identity through stories. The remaining nine articles presented their results independently without a discussion of their connection to previous research.

The role of reflexivity in CA research is unclear. It is a recommended feature of qualitative research but is not typically discussed in relation to CA processes. In nine articles the authors made mention of either their professional background or theoretical position in relation to family therapy but included no discussion of the potential impacts on their research findings. Two studies (O’Reilly, 2005b; O’Reilly & Lester, 2016) included a brief discussion on reflexivity but these took a confirmatory rather than critical perspective on how authors’ perspectives may have impacted on the analysis.

Ethics

The articles report a range of responses to ethics. Only two articles make explicit mention of receiving ethical approval. Ten articles reported following ethical codes or principles, seven reported obtaining consent or anonymising data. Five articles made no statement about ethics.

Discussion

This review aimed to provide a detailed methodological critique of CA and FT research and to highlight potentially problematic research practices in order to guide the evaluation of CA articles and to support sound research practices in future studies. The articles under review

were critiqued against a guideline for evaluating qualitative research and five CA specific quality criteria.

The articles under review had a number of strengths. The aims and research questions were appropriate for the use of CA and the articles presented their arguments clearly and systematically with appropriate supporting extracts from the data. Appropriately for CA, the articles made use of naturalistic video or audio data and directed attention to the analyses of sequences as well as utilising Jeffersonian transcription conventions. However, this review also raised a number of concerns, including varying levels of detail in the transcriptions, differing attention to the analysis of sequences, and a lack of validity testing. Some articles also included additional analytic claims such as reference to internal states or moral order, or focussed on the categorisation of behaviours without further analysis of how these behaviours achieved certain actions.

CA's focus on interaction and avoiding analysis or accounts of internal processes can be both a strength and criticism of the approach (Madill, 2015). CA's agnosticism towards the psychological reality of certain phenomena and its position outside FT theory may allow CA researchers to make observations not previously countenanced by accepted FT theory or research. Conversely, CA may not provide the type of analysis of interest to researchers and clinicians concerned with conversational themes and internal processes. This may partially explain the number of studies combining CA with other analytic approaches that can encompass these broader issues of psychological and social processes. CA thus risks being subsumed by DP in areas such as psychotherapy and FT where internal processes can be of central importance. CA researchers could, and perhaps need to, utilise current psychotherapy research to direct investigations into areas of interest to therapists in order to make it mutually beneficial to themselves and psychotherapists (Madill, 2015; Stiles, 2008). A return to CA's roots in ethnomethodology and the principle of unique adequacy or acquired immersion (Have, 2007) may help align CA with the interests of family therapists, and highlight the importance of therapist involvement in research.

The tendency in the articles to group behaviours into different categories may reflect assumptions about social actions. Enfield and Sidnell (2017) argue that by categorising an action the categoriser makes relevant and accountable a particular interpretation. The analytic ascription of action may also serve a purpose for researchers. For example, describing the

less-than-full status of children, identifying family members using protection talk, or the therapist constructing a relational explanation, may reflect the theoretical positions of the authors. Categorising of behaviours or the ascription of actions are not necessarily problematic, but due to their potential implications their use is best acknowledged and discussed. This speaks to a broader point that while CA may be seen to make realist claims (Madill, 2015), an analysis is still an interpretive construction and therefore necessitates some form of reflexivity by the authors (Tseliou, 2013). A solution suggested by Enfield and Sidnell (2017) is that rather than beginning with the notion of definitive actions, analysts should instead consider the details and tokens of talk that are attended and responded to in their sequential context. For FT research this may involve attention to which parts of an utterance therapists respond to, how participants show their orientation and understanding of previous turns and how sequences develop.

The application of quality criteria is also an important outcome of this review. While most studies used appropriate types of data and transcription methods, there was a lack of validity testing, concurring with the review by Tseliou (2013). This is a striking omission considering the range of literature on criteria for good qualitative research. While there are a number of recommendations for conducting CA (e.g., Have, 2007; Pomerantz & Fehr, 2011; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), they have, as yet, not been incorporated into a single, widely-accepted set of criteria, thus making reviews of CA studies potentially less systematic. Ambiguities about CA's ontological and epistemological positions are also likely a factor. As discussed, there is some disagreement about whether CA has a realist or constructionist perspective (as well as whether these classifications are relevant for CA at all), potentially creating some confusion about appropriate validity criteria. As a discipline, CA remains quiet regarding these issues, remaining resistant to polar categorisation (Madill, 2015; Stiles, 2008). Future CA and FT research could benefit from paying closer attention to adhering and reporting quality criteria to justify and support its findings.

This review highlighted that in FT research, CA was often combined with other analytic approaches, with only 7 out of the 25 articles included in this review stating the use of CA exclusively. This use of multiple analytic approaches combined with a lack of details about how the analyses were conducted creates confusion around the analytic process. For example, this review noted the presence of additional analytic claims that were outside the analytic capabilities of CA, but still consistent with a DA or DP approach. Without a clear description

of the analytic process, and the respective scopes of their claims, it becomes unclear if authors are applying CA inappropriately or utilising other analytic approaches. It is therefore incumbent upon researchers to be more specific about the analytic processes they are applying rather than stating the use of a general approach that is open to interpretation. Similarly, when using a combination of analyses, a clearer description of how they were variously applied and combined seems necessary in order to both assure the reader of the application of analytic rigor and to avoid the perception of a haphazard application of qualitative methods.

This review also points to the complexities of using CA with FT. FT involves multiple participants with different perspectives in an institutional setting with institutional tasks, in a heightened emotional environment, in lengthy conversation, with the possibility of incipient blame, accountability, suspicion and defensiveness. The conversation analyst is faced with a difficult task of describing and analysing these long and complex interactions. The studies in this review highlight the potential applications of this approach but also the difficulties associated with developing a detailed and rigorous analysis. CA also makes use of prosody and intonation because these are important resources for interaction utilised by participants. As noted above there has not been much attention placed on these elements of talk in FT, making them a still unexplored area of interaction.

Our interest in conducting this review has been to set out how CA has been applied to FT and also to see what may constitute rigorous CA research in the FT context. We find CA's focus on observable behaviour, using only the talk that is available to the interactants (without needing to posit internal states), and the importance of grounding an analysis in the orientations of the participants, a refreshing and respectful way of researching interaction. Our experience of this review has been mixed. We see the potential of CA to inform FT practice in new ways but also clearly recognise the lack of a consistent application of CA's methods. This review may therefore be affected by our interest in maintaining particular standards for CA.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review we propose the following recommendations for future CA research into FT as a guide for both researchers and readers of this research. Rather than

a definitive list we hope to elicit further discussion and refinement in order to maintain high standards in CA and FT research.

1. Include previous CA research in the introduction of the study to better situate it in conversation analytic traditions
2. Be clear on what analytic approaches are being utilised and provide details on how they are conducted
3. If multiple analytic approaches are being utilised provide details on how they interact (or not) and contribute to the research findings
4. Provide appropriate data extracts to support the analysis with appropriate level of transcription detail for the analysis undertaken
5. Support the analysis through reference to surrounding talk via the next-turn proof, and work to account for possible alternative interpretations
6. Utilise validity checks, and deviant case analysis
7. Avoid collecting categories of talk without further analysis of how that talk achieves its proposed action/s
8. Confine the analysis and conclusions to within observable data and avoid interpretation through social or psychological motivations
9. Discuss coherence and disagreements of results with previous CA research
10. Include some reflective discussion of the author's position and possible impacts on the analysis
11. Include information on ethical approval or procedures.

Limitations

The search methods for this review only focused on published peer-reviewed papers in academic journals, thus excluding grey literature, dissertations and book chapters. Articles were only included if they made specific reference to using CA, either alone or as part of a larger analysis. This review could therefore be critiqued for only including a subset of the work on CA and family therapy.

Two independent authors were involved in a majority of the articles (n=16) including collaborations with other authors. This review could therefore be critiqued as a review of the work of two particular authors rather than the research approach as a whole. It is still important to highlight the restricted number of authors as it reflects the developing state of

CA and FT research and the need for greater diversity in the field. Despite this limitation, the current review still highlights the potential pitfalls when using CA that future researchers could avoid.

Conclusion

CA promises to make a unique contribution to the understanding and practice of FT. This includes describing therapy as it actually happens, thus potentially providing clinicians with greater insights into applying therapeutic principles in real-life situations, alerting clinicians to micro aspects of conversations that may improve or impede the therapeutic project, and critiquing accepted practices and understandings about family therapy, thereby promoting therapist self-reflection. CA thus has the potential to provide clinicians with specific practice recommendations on the micro-level of conversation including word selection, intonation and prosody.

The application of CA to FT is a relatively new endeavour, with a limited number of authors and research articles. This body of work has explored a number of issues of importance to family therapy but CA's focus on observable behaviours may not fit with clinical interest in psychological processes. The application of CA to FT is also a complicated task considering the complexities of multi-party interactions in FT, and CA's standards for analytic claims. The findings of our review suggest that future research has a solid base on which to build, but should proceed with careful attention to rigorous analytic processes, and a critical, reflective awareness on the part of the researchers if CA is to fulfil its potential usefulness for FT.

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Stated method	Number of studies
CA	7
CA + DA	5
DP + CA	8
CA + other qualitative approach	2
CA + other (unclear)	3

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