

Within the framework of this thesis, membership categorization - classifying members of the population by describing images of selves and others - is investigated as a specific resource for achieving topical work.

The methodology of Conversation Analysis has been applied to study the instrumental role of categorization for organizing topics in oral communication, taking Harvey Sacks' (1967, 1984b, 1992) relevant research as a starting point.

The data base of the thesis has been collected for the purpose of the PARADYS research project to study, and provide empirical evidence for, social roles manifested in the images of self and others, as formed by speakers, which emerged in discussions about permission procedures in the field of genetic engineering. The data encompass oral discourses - three interviews and an informal discussion - anchored around the Hungarian legal and public circumstances of plant biotechnology experiments; ca. 230 minutes on minidisks and transferred to CDs.

Keeping in mind the basic conversation analytic methodology, the empirical investigation has focussed on membership categorization and topical organization as communicative processes that have to be analyzed turn by turn incorporating each participant's contributions. The core of the thesis lies in the empirical investigation of *members'* categorization processes and *members'* organizing topic in talk. The thesis is concerned with the construction of categories and conversational topics as a collaborative work. Authentic non-manipulated conversations fixed in the form of transcripts - a 133-page-transcript in the GAT transcription system (Selting et al. (1998) - are investigated. The empirical analysis seeks to find routine methods and regularities in everyday data of how people (inter)act to bring about social reality and order. Conversation Analysis believes in the pragmatism of conversations therefore the analyses have explored communicative tasks which participants use in categorizing and in organizing topic.

The empirical sequential analyses reconstructed

- I. the ways of how categorization facilitates topical organization,
- II. displayed linguistic forms interlocutors employ to categorize one another and to organize topics, as well as
- III. explored membership categories within the topical setting of plant biotechnology.

I. Six communicative tasks have been identified for speakers' categorizing themselves and others: Introducing a category, Invoking a category, Ascribing features to a category, Evaluating a category, Strengthening the category-bound features and Concretizing a feature. The reconstructed communicative tasks of speakers' topical organization are the following: Introducing a topic, Expounding on the topic, Shifting the topic, Renewing the topic, Changing the topic and Ending the topic.

The answer to the research question "How does categorization serve as a vehicle for topical organization?" has been addressed by concentrating on the relation of the communicative tasks of categorization and topical organization reconstructed in the data analysis. It has been proved that categorization serves topical organization in a delicate manner. As the most frequently applied routine method of participants, it was reconstructed that the communicative task of ascribing features is a vehicle for the communicative task of expounding on a topic. The findings can be summarized as follows:

1. Introducing a category is a conversation-guiding factor by assisting topical development. As we could observe, the introduction of a category can initiate the first topic within talk.
2. Expounding on a topic is clearly the most frequent topical task by far that oscillates with categorization. Speakers expound on the topic by introducing a category, ascribing features, evaluating categories, strengthening features, and invoking a category.
3. Shifting the topic can be instrumented by ascribing new features to a category, and by strengthening category-bound features.
4. In order to renew a topic, it is precisely categorization that can be the vehicle: by ascribing further features to a category, by strengthening features, by invoking a category.

5. Changing the topic is assisted by ascribing features to a category, or by strengthening category-bound features.
6. Appropriate tools that assist in ending a topic are strengthening features, and concretizing features.

II. Based on the data we could observe that there is a correspondence of the linguistic forms (examples, episodes, quotes) applied for assisting communicative tasks (ascribe, evaluate, strengthen) at expounding on a topic. A frequently employed linguistic form for renewing a topic is repetition. In connection with the assisting categorizing tasks of strengthening a feature and ascribing features to a category, it could also be reconstructed that repetition is a typical linguistic form. Shifting a topic is served by examples, just like one of its assisting communicative tasks, that of ascribing features to a category via examples.

III. Based on the communication of the interlocutors, there have been the following membership categories together with associated typical characteristics and features reconstructed within the database: 'the consumers', 'the multinationals', 'the companies', 'the public', 'the environmentalists', 'the farmers', 'the biotechnology researchers', 'the scientists' and 'the experimenters'.