Reviewer's report

Title: Systematically reviewing and synthesising conversation analytic and related discursive research to inform healthcare communication practice and policy: An illustrated guide

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Reviewer: Peter Nowak

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The reviewing method presented by Parry and Land is an important contribution to the much needed methodological discussion on how to make use of the large body of evidence on communication practices in healthcare provided by conversation analysis and related discourse analytic approaches. Communication is “the heart of medicine” as Epstein et al. (1993) phrased it in their seminal work. So synthesising conversation / discourse analyses is essential to a better understanding of doctoring and other communicative practices in health care. Especially the chosen aim of the research methodology presented in the paper to provide valuable information for healthcare providers, educators and policy makers can have great benefit for the future development of health care.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The paper (and the abstract) has one structural major shortcoming as it do not present “Results” as a heading. Being a methodological paper the “result” is the “step by step guide” (p. 11-26). What is actually missing is a clear explanation on how and on what other synthesizing approaches and considerations the authors developed their methodology (= a “Methods” section). The authors rightly define some specific challenges in reviewing conversation analytic evidence (p.8-10). But what are the methodological answers to these challenges? Why do existing methods not suite these challenges? Why did the authors define eight steps (not six, seven or ten)? What is the rationale behind each step? What are the specific features of each step that take the distinct challenges of conversation analytic evidence into account? I would suggest that the paper (and the abstract) is restructured in the following way: end the “background” section on p. 7; start the “methods” section with the already existing general explanations on “Systematic review and synthesis”; include a new chapter on the development of your own methodology and explain shortly for each step what are generally accepted aspects of synthesizing evidence and what are the specific features necessary for reviewing conversation analytic studies. It might be clarifying to compare each step with the “methods” section of the only to date published synthesis in the field (Nowak 2011). In the “step by step guide” are already some references and rationales that could go into this chapter (e.g. literature search).

- Minor Essential Revisions
1. The only published systematic review (Nowak 2011) is mentioned but was not described appropriately, as it also aims to inform practice (like this synthesis) and it developed its methodology by reviewing twelve approaches to evidence synthesis and used elements of six of these approaches. Please read the paper more carefully.

2. P.8: a word is missing: “However, there are other distinctive features” …

3. Step 3b) there should be a note that in strict literature selection processes there should be always two reviewers involved in deciding on exclusion of any paper (see Dixon-Woods et al. 2006 Ref. 41 of the paper).

4. In Section on step 3b) there should be a graph on the literature search and selection of studies. This provides a better overview for the reader and is a widely-used reporting standard (e.g. (Greenhalgh et al. 2005))

5. P. 19: “Studies also vary in terms of the extent to which analysis is grounded in previous empirical findings. Again, it is not logical to treat this as a simple matter of analytic quality, because earlier studies cannot of course refer to later findings.” This statement could be misunderstood as no references on prior work are needed.

6. P. 23: It is argued that to order the findings for reporting in the case of the “Review of Future Talk” in line with the interactional sequences. I very much support this view and suggest to state this as a general standard for the synthesis of conversation analytic studies (see also the result section of Nowak 2011). It is the nature of interaction to have a temporal dimension that allows the analysis of meaning.

7. P. 24: Something is missing in the following argument “…but in our sensitivity analysis, we assessed that we would have drawn the same conclusions in terms of implications [without these studies??].

- Discretionary Revisions

1. P. 22: In the discussion on the process of synthesis there should be added, that synthesis is more than an aggregation of the results of the primary studies, but involves development of new concepts (see also Dixon-Woods et al. 2006 Ref. 41 of the paper)

2. Conclusions: it would be helpful for the methodologically interested reader to sum up the specific features needed for the synthesis of conversation analytic studies and what is specific in this methodology to ensure the usefulness for practice, education and policy makers (e.g. discussing purpose and research questions with the audience; presenting and discussing draft results to the potentials users).

Cited literature:
Greenhalgh, Trisha; Robert, Glenn; Macfarlane, Fraser; Bate, Paul; Kyriakidou, Olympia; Peacock, Richard (2005): Storylines of research in diffusion of innovation: a meta-narrative approach to systematic review. In: Social Science & Medicine 61/2, 417-430
**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests. I bring much curiosity (and perhaps a bias) into reviewing this paper as I am the author of the only previously published paper in this methodological field.