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: Douglas Maynard

Reviewer's report:

First of all, I've never done a review and outlined what the major, minor, and discretionary revisions should be. If that is to be done, it is an editor's and not a reviewer's job. My suggestion is to take account of all the suggestions in some manner.

Here is my review:

This is an important methodological paper. It took me awhile before I fully grasped what its purpose was—just what type of methodological paper it is, however—and I wonder if two matters could be clearer up front:

1. This paper is methodological in a very strict sense: it is about the methodology of reviewing literature in conversation analysis and discourse analysis. It's not about the methodology of doing either CA or DA with regard to data.

2. Also, it is about reviewing the literature systematically with regard to a relatively specific topic or in a specific domain. This could be added into the second paragraph of the paper.

That said, the paper is well done and organized and could be a useful tool for others who need to do a “systematic review” or CA literature with regard to some domain or phenomenon. I did have some confusion over where Table 2 would be (never found it; see below). Also accompanying the manuscript were three additional files. I may have missed something but I did not see where these additional files were referenced in the paper as such although they looked like they had useful and relevant information.

The beginning of the paper has an effective review of the main tenets of CA and does a good job of distinguishing it from DA. On page 6, I got confused, although as I read on I figured things out. I got confused because of this statement: “Whilst literature reviews of conversation analytic work have been published [29, 30], to the best of our knowledge there is only one published systematic review [31].” What would remove the confusion is a definition of what is meant here by “systematic review,” where it turns out that it refers to something very specific in terms of the methods for doing a review. I had not run across this method before so that is another source of my confusion, but it’s also the case that most people doing a review of literature figures they are doing so “systematically.” So it’s not
enough to refer to “literature reviews” and “systematic review” without defining the terms. There is a definition of systematic reviews on page 7 but this should be earlier, and “literature reviews” also needs defining. The problem with “literature reviews” is that the referent or referents are also unclear. The two citations (29, 30) that exemplify literature reviews are of quite different kinds of work. Depending on how you define literature reviews, there could be many more. If general reviews of CA are in point, then Clayman & Gill (2012) is relevant. If CA literature reviews in medicine were the target, then Heritage & Maynard (2006a &b) would be relevant. (The Communication in Medical Care introductory chapter and the Annual Review of Sociology piece.)

I also have a concern about references to the CA literature in the first 6 or so pages of this manuscript. Literature referencing is always a somewhat controversial issue but it seems like, this paper, there is a distinct bias toward British CA literature and some important U.S. pieces could be mentioned. (I’m sure that Brits usually see the bias going the other way—we Americans neglect relevant British citations.) But for what they’re worth, and also for the more general American as well as Anglo (and other) audiences, here are a few suggestions.

--On page 5, I think Angela Garcia’s work on mediation could be mentioned; it was earlier than Greatbatch and Dingwall’s, published in the same journal, and Greatbatch and Dingwall cite and address it prominently.


Some other concerns:

Page 7: what are “transparent procedures” (middle paragraph). Could you just refer to “procedures”?

Page 8: please define (a) what sorts of “data are ’extracted’” and what this means. Also, what is meant by “various non-statistical procedures”? We need a positive characterization, not a residual one.

Page 11 and elsewhere: I have no idea what a “bespoke” review approach is! I looked it up and the dictionary said “Chiefly British.” You want to consider revising this term for a more general audience.

Page 13 top paragraph is interesting; it might be worth referencing Stephen Levinson’s discussion of the Literal Force Hypothesis and what he raises as the “mapping problem” – how utterances perform actions. (Levinson, Pragmatics, 1983)

Page 13, towards the end of the page, reference is made to Table two, but I found no Table two with the paper. There is a Table one.
Pages 18-19 in regard to Stage 4. I wonder if here or elsewhere you could make use of Manny Schegloff’s article regarding “Single Episode Analysis.” He makes a fine distinction between investigations in which you work with a collection of fragments that instantiate a phenomenon and its variants: “a set of fragments … to explicate a single phenomenon or a single domain of phenomena;” and investigations in which past work on a range of phenomena and organizational domains are brought to bear on a single fragment of talk. You do a nice job of explicating the range of depth and detail in CA studies, and this could add just a little more to what you say.

It happens that I am conducting a relatively new project on End of Life conversations (or lack thereof) in cancer care, and I was intrigued that the illustrative basis for this paper on systematic review is a project on how people talk about sensitive future issues. Having looked at the available online materials, I would like to obtain any papers from this project.

**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.