

# Ritual, aggression, and participatory ambiguity

## A case study of heckling<sup>1</sup>

Dániel Z. Kádár

University of Huddersfield

Sian Robinson Davies

Independent scholar

**Keywords:** heckling; performing arts; ritual; participatory ambiguity

### Abstract:

The present study explores the phenomenon of participatory ambiguity in ritualistic interactional settings that are associated with a specific pattern of aggressive behaviour. ‘Participation’ refers to Goffman’s (1979, 1981) notion of participation status, i.e. various ways in which individuals can position themselves in relation to producing, interpreting, and evaluating talk and conduct. We are interested in a specific aspect of participation, namely ratification – the assumed right to participate in an interaction. ‘Ambiguity’ describes forms of behaviour which deviate from participant and observer expectations of interacting in certain discursive roles, without clearly violating (un)ratified participation roles. We take heckling in performing arts as a case study.

### 1. Introduction

The present study explores the phenomenon of participatory ambiguity in ritualistic interactional settings that are associated with a specific pattern of aggressive behaviour. ‘Participation’ refers to Goffman’s (1979, 1981) notion of *participation status*, i.e. various ways in which individuals can position themselves in relation to producing, interpreting, and evaluating talk and conduct. We are interested in a specific aspect of participation, namely ratification – the assumed right to participate in an interaction. We examine the interactional co-construction of (un)ratified participatory statuses (see Goodwin and Goodwin 1990, 1992; Goodwin 1997; Goodwin 2007) in the context of ambiguity. ‘Ambiguity’ describes forms of behaviour, which deviate from participant and observer expectations of interacting in certain *discursive roles* (in a discourse analytic sense, see e.g. Haworth 2006; Walcott 2007), *without clearly violating (un)ratified participation roles*. In other words, we pursue interest in the scene of acting differently from someone’s discursive role without stepping out of this role, hence creating ambiguity and potential confusion for other participants and semi-participants (Kádár and Haugh 2013, 87). We use the notion ‘discursive role’ instead of ‘institutionalised role’ due to our interest in ritualistic interactions and role types (see the next paragraph), which are not

---

1. We would like to say thank you for Pilar and Maria for their insightful comments on the draft of this paper, which helped us enormously to improve the quality of this manuscript. We owe a big thank you for Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini and Rosina Marquez Reiter for their feedback on the framework of this research. Also, we would like to say thanks to Liz Marsden for correcting style problems in the text. Last but not least, we are indebted to the three anonymous Referees, whose insightful comments were very useful. It is perhaps needless to say that all the remaining errors are our responsibility.

necessarily institutionalised in a strict sense: we take heckling in performing arts as a case study.

As Kádár (2014) argues, heckling is an action that triggers aggression because it upsets interactional order and violates rights afforded by the interactional order. Furthermore, heckling is a ritualistic phenomenon, if one approaches it by combining Turner's (1969; 1982) anthropological framework with Kádár's relational ritual theory (Kádár 2012; 2013). Following Turner (1982), we define heckling as a 'social drama', which is evaluated by its watchers as 'judges': the watchers 'frame' the participants of the duel as '(un)successful', and so participation in heckling is a struggle for 'face' for both the heckler and the public speaker/performer. In the centre of this social drama is the heckled person, or group of persons, who is/are ratified to speak or perform on stage or to attend a performance without being disturbed, and potentially the heckler, who disturbs the public speaker/performer through unrated interruption of the flow of events. In terms of ratification, the participation statuses of both the public speaker and the heckler can also be observed/described as ratified, with the former having high ratified and the latter low ratified status. In the present paper we use this latter terminology due to the data type that we study: it can be argued that in experimental performing arts (see data below) heckling is expected (and welcomed) to some extent, and because of this the heckler has a ratified albeit low ratified participation status. In accordance with Kádár (2012; 2013; 2014) we argue that heckling is a ritual practice because a) it is a performance (see below), which is b) schematic as it is readily recognisable as a form of aggression to the participants, and c) it re-enacts claimed social or group values; the performance of heckling is inherently interactional as it operates in the adjacent action pair of the heckler's performance and the public speaker/performer/audience's counter-performance (response). Adopting Turner's terminology, heckling is a ritualistic performance of 'anti-structure' (i.e. it upsets the regular social – and consequently interactional – structure of a setting), and it implies "liberation from constraints"<sup>2</sup> (Turner 1982:44) for the heckler and those who are aligned with her or him. Successful counter-performance is a ritual of 'structure', which restores the normal structure of the event, as the public speaker/performer and/or the audience regain control over the interaction. Through the social actions of performance and counter-performance the heckled and the heckler aim to align (Goffman 1974, 1981) themselves with a virtual or on-site audience, who are possible 'meta-participants' of the interaction.<sup>3</sup> In cases when it is the audience that restores 'structure', audience members align with each other and potentially with the public speaker, i.e. joint audience action is a relationally constructive action chain (Collins 2004). Alignment is 'activated' as a performance begins (Clayman 1993), and in the data studied in the present papers it plays a key role in the renegotiation of participation status and legitimacy.

---

2. As Turner (1982) argues, ritual liberation from constraints can resolve real crises but it can also serve as a way to 'let off steam'. Indeed, the anti-structural ritual performance of heckling can operate as a way to resolve crises (e.g. opposing a politician) and also as a sort of outlet for people's energy (e.g. in the case of sport matches). Thus, following Turner (1982:28), one can argue that in heckling, disorder "gets its *raison d'être*".

3. We need to make this distinction between 'virtual' and 'on-site' because there is a possibility that a heckler attempts to align themselves with their group members who are not on stage. For example, a punk who heckles the presenter in a prestige event may not want to become aligned with the audience then-and-there (he may regard this audience as 'bourgeois', but rather with people who represent his own values).

It is perhaps not surprising that in terms of aggression heckling tends to be represented in the field in a straightforward way, as a non-ambiguous event; previous research portrays the discursive role of the heckler as an attacker whose participation status is low ratified, and the public speaker/performer's (henceforth: PSP) discursive role – and in certain cases that of the audience – is depicted as one limited to high ratified counter-attack (see e.g. Jacobs 1982; and Jacobs and Jackson 1993; McIlvenny 1996; Baxter 2002; Rao 2011; Stopfner 2013). This view is certainly valid: in the majority of cases it is the PSP who is attacked, and it is part of the expectations towards this role to be more restrained than the heckler. This is due to the fact that the PSP has much more to lose than the heckler, as a high ratified speaker on stage has to maintain their 'professional face' (Planken 2005) by handling the heckler in an appropriate way.<sup>4</sup> Empirical research (see Kádár 2015) shows that even in cases when the audience reacts on the PSP's behalf, participant reactions tend to be more restrained than that of the heckler, as the general aim of audience intervention (Kádár and De La Cruz 2015) is to restore normative order.

Notwithstanding the fact that participant roles in heckling scenes tend to be straightforward – the heckler's discursive role involves low ratified attack and the PSP's/audience's high ratified counter-attack – this is only a default situation. In the data studied, which is drawn from the world of performing arts (see Section 2), we could observe three scenarios in which ambiguity steps on stage as the heckler, the PSP, and the audience deviate from what is expected from them in their discursive roles, without clearly changing low/high ratified participation statuses:

- First, we have no reason to assume that heckling always upsets interactional norms, i.e. that the heckler makes the interruption from a clearly low ratified position. For example, what happens if a heckler of an art performance interrupts the PSP because he believes that he is the true author and interrupts the performer to make this claim? Would this situation still count as heckling? Once a 'heckler' turns out to hold a rightful claim to interrupt, he transforms from an low ratified heckler into a high ratified interrupter – but only in the eyes of those semi-participants and observers who accept that his position is rightful, and in this sense his interactional status remains ambiguous because it remains subject to be interpreted as low ratified by those audience members who want to participate in the performance event with no disruption. What further adds to the ambiguity of this situation is that 'heckling' which is interpreted as 'intervention' (Kádár and De La Cruz 2015) by the heckler is likely to differ in style from other forms of heckling, as usually the heckler makes the interruption with the fact in mind that interruption is not a ratified action, whilst intervention is (self-)ratified.
- Secondly, we cannot take it for granted that 'heckler' and PSP are institutionalised roles in any setting – this is why it is a key for the present study to distinguish the notions of 'institutional' and 'discursive' roles (see above).<sup>5</sup> In fact, there are situations in which discursive roles become ambiguous, e.g. when a stand-up comedian or performing artist provokes the audience. Such a provocation creates an ambiguous interactional situation

---

4. Having said that, there are also 'professional hecklers' (see e.g. Jackson 1987), and such personae may have professional identities similarly to PSPs.

5. Note that this conflict between institutional and discursive roles has been addressed in Zimmerman's (1998) work (see Garcés-Conejos Blitvich ed. 2010 for applications of the model).

because the PSP, unlike a ‘proper’ heckler, is high ratified to address the audience in many performance settings. However, as heckling is a ritualistic phenomenon, and so it is a recurrent performance which triggers expected forms of interactional behaviour, the PSP’s otherwise ratified behaviour manifests itself in a form of ambiguity from both the (meta-)participants’ and the observers’ points of view.

- Thirdly, although from a sequential perspective heckling is an attack and the PSP (or audience) reaction is a counter-attack, this designation of interactional moves applies only to those cases in which attack and counter-attack are in proportion. That is, if counter-attack is a) not simply about responding to the heckler but rather it aims to ‘destroy’ the heckler, and b) it is much longer than the attack, hence becoming a performance on its own it can become unclear who attacks whom. Whilst it is difficult to define what counts as ‘proportionate’ counter-attack, it can be argued that a counter-attack becomes disproportionate if it continues after the heckler has been silenced after the PSP’s initial counter-attack.

These types of ambiguity are bound together through the conflict between expected and actual participatory behaviour in these discursive role types and the negotiation of/struggle for low v. high ratified participation statuses vis-à-vis ‘conflict talk’ (Stein et al. 1997). Essentially, the first scenario represents a seemingly high ratified behaviour performed in the heckler’s low ratified status and the second and third ones represent cases when the PSPs goes beyond what is expected in their high ratified status. The second and third role changes are interdependent, i.e. in both of them the PSP transforms into a provocateur (who is nevertheless not ‘heckler’; see Section 3.2). However, there is a sequential difference between the second and third scenarios, in that in the former one the PSP goes into an offensive with no real precedent, whilst in the latter the PSP overreacts in response to an attack. Also, whilst in both the second and the third scenarios, it is the PSP who attacks, it is more likely that the audience (semi-participants) will evaluate the third scenario more positively than the second one, as targeting the heckler is more likely to trigger alignment than the act of provoking the audience.

### *1.1. Contribution to the field*

Our research has come into existence as a result of an interdisciplinary collaboration between a performing artist and a linguist, and both our research interests and data reflect this interdisciplinary background; we believe that the most effective way to capture phenomena such as heckling, which are strongly bound to on-stage performance, is to bring together understandings from the disciplines of linguistics and arts research. Furthermore, a rationale behind our collaboration is that Robinson Davies is an artist who participated at various ambiguous heckling cases, and could also introduce Kádár to a circle of performing artists in Edinburgh, with whom we conducted ethnographic interviews (see Section 2). Importantly, despite the fact that we come from different disciplines, our approach to heckling is predominantly language-based in scope, and as such it intends to contribute to pragmatics. That is, we approach heckling by looking into discursive behaviour of interactants, in particular the evaluative stances and reactions (Eelen 2001) that provocative utterances trigger. We examine ambiguous cases of heckling with two main objectives in mind.

First, we intend to contribute to existing research on rituals: from the pragmatician's perspective, ambiguous heckling is interesting because it represents a situation when ritualistic behaviour transforms into an ad hoc punctuated form of interaction. As Kádár and Haugh (2013:137) argue, rituals represent a specific aspect of time in interaction, namely, the re-evoking of there-and-then in the here-and-now by re-enacting interactional patterns that are recognisable to the participants. Accordingly, ritualistic behaviour as heckling involves anticipation in terms of discursive roles due to its recurrent nature<sup>6</sup> (Rook 1985; Collins 2004): putting it simply, since participants are aware of what is involved in the interpersonal dynamics of heckling, the behaviours of the PSP and the heckler tend to be 'framed' (Terkourafi 2001; 2005). As soon as such patterns are violated and the interaction becomes ad hoc, it ceases to be ritualistic, at least as long as the interactional order does not go back to 'normal'. Such an ad hoc conversation is punctuated, in a sense that the participants' aggression tends to be perceived and understood according to the trajectory of the interaction and perhaps not so much according to anticipatory frames. For example, whilst the ritualistic counter-performance of a performing artist to the heckler is most probably perceived as expected and normal if it is proportionate – and, indeed, its lack would be perceived as problematic; see Kádár (2014) – when it becomes disproportionate it is subject to be interpreted either positively or negatively, depending on how a) the interaction and b) the relationship between participants and the audience develop. Ambiguity

In sum, ambiguity as studied here provides insight into a yet unexplored real of ritual behaviour. Technically speaking, this ambiguity occurs from an audience perspective, as the PSP and the heckler are certain about their claimed participation statuses. As we argue in the Conclusion of this paper, irrespective of the above-discussed different causes of ambiguity, such audience ambiguity emerges as a transition takes place between

- ritualistic behaviour that is associated with low ratification (heckler) and high ratification (PSP) participation statuses<sup>7</sup> and the ritualistic behaviour that these statuses entail, and
- medium ratification (ambiguous role) participation status and the informal (ad hoc and unritualised) interaction patterns that this status entails.

The examination of this phenomenon adds to existing knowledge on rituals, in which the transition between ritual interaction and ad hoc punctuated interaction is rarely discussed (see an overview of ritual research in Bell 1997).

The examination of ambiguous cases of heckling also contributes to aggression research, as it adds to previous research on language aggression and ambiguity. In aggression studies, ambiguity and aggression are mostly discussed from the perspective of mixed messages; researchers such as Dynel (2008), Haugh and Bousfield (2012), and Culpeper and Holmes (2013) rightly point out that the ambiguity of a message greatly influences the way in which the participants of an interaction perceive it. A seminal contribution to this area has been written by Agha (1997) who examined communication ambiguity by looking at the phenomenon of tropes. Other studies have pointed out that certain (im)polite speech-acts are

---

6. This recurrent nature could be approached from the perspective of genre practices. We are grateful to Pilar for drawing our attention to this point.

7. Notably it is not only the PSP but also the audience which has a ratified participation status (see Section 1); however, as ambiguity emerges from the audience's perspective, the audience's participation status does not need to be mentioned here.

ambiguous by nature; see for example Sifianou (2012), and Sinkeviciute (2013). In this study, we draw attention to the ambiguous relationship between heckling and aggression by examining situational rather than linguistic ambiguity (and related participant perceptions) triggered by some change of the expected participation statuses in the discursive roles of the heckler and the PSP. In other words, ambiguity in such situations is not so much triggered by the form of certain utterances, but more by the interpersonal situation in which the interaction takes place, as one or both of the participants behave in an unexpected way from both (semi-)participant and observer perspectives.

## **2. Data and analytic methodology**

This paper examines 3 interactions, which represent the 3 main ambiguous heckling scenarios above (see Section 1). We have chosen these particular examples due to their complexity – compared to all other examples in our data, they reflect the intriguing nature of audience ambiguity in unconventional heckling scenes. Arguably, the phenomenon that we study is an exceptional rather than an ordinary one. Our examples come from the field of experimental performing, which is an important genre in ritual research (see e.g. Broadhurst 1999). By experimental, we refer to performances that stem from a tradition of changing traditional structural and behavioral norms in theatre, such as the audience-performer relationship; experimental performances therefore have a higher tendency to provide interesting examples of participatory ambiguity.

The exceptional character of ambiguous heckling can be illustrated by numbers: Kádár (2014) has examined 112 video-recorded interactions in English and Hungarian in a number of contexts such as politics and sports, and none of these interactions shows any of the ambiguous characteristics that we study in this paper. In other words, we pursue interest in ‘atypical’ rather than normative interactional behaviour; however, we agree with the discursive view (e.g. Linguistic Politeness Research Group 2012) that it is as important to study the violation of norms as the norms themselves. In addition, it can be argued that ambiguous cases of heckling are far from being unheard of in experimental performances.<sup>8</sup>

The 3 examples have been chosen from a small dataset of 8 interactions that we collected with the help of performing artists. Whilst no doubt that this is a relatively small amount of data, in our view the size of the data studied does not decrease the reliability of findings, considering that we intend to study exceptional rather than normative behaviour. In addition, a key feature of our research is its ethnographic characteristic: firstly, Robinson Davies is involved in the performing arts as both an audience member and an artist and has a direct involvement with two of the three cases to be discussed in this paper. And secondly, we conducted ethnographic interviews of roughly 2.5 hours with a number of performing artists who experienced unusual heckling scenarios (January 2014, Edinburgh). These interviews, in which we followed Saville-Troike’s (2008:100) ‘casual’ interview pattern, have confirmed that the 3 patterns of ambiguity we have identified in this paper tend to be present in the

---

<sup>8</sup>. In a sense, whilst ambiguity of heckling in the experimental genre is far from being a ‘tradition’, it is certainly something that audience members expect to happen, in particular when it comes to certain artists who are known as being provocative (see e.g. Mattin’s case in the present paper). Although such ambiguous behaviour and audience provocation is typical to experimental theatres, Kaegi’s (2014) noteworthy study shows that it can be observed in experimental settings outside of theatres. In addition, Kádár (2015) cites various cases of audience provocation in public speeches.

world of experimental performances. Note that in one occasion (the third example, see below) we could interview the performer about her experience of the event.<sup>9</sup>

The ethnographic approach is an important tool in the present paper's inquiry as ambiguity and ambivalence are crucial to the instances of performance excerpted. They are clearly breaching experiments, in the ethnomethodological sense (Garfinkel 1967): they rupture the social order and incite various procedures to repair accountability. Rupture as it is studied here is a recurrent issue in cultural sociology (Alexander 2003) and interaction studies (Buder 1991), and in a sense the present study fills an interdisciplinary gap between pragmatics, in which rupture is relatively understudied, and these other disciplines, vis-à-vis its ethnographic perspective.

The 3 interactions that we analyse are the following:

1. A video, which documents a live performance called *The Transmission*, performed by Diego Chamy and Mike Majkowski. *The Transmission* consisted of Diego describing another performance he had once seen to Mike, and Mike performing that piece according to the description he received. The original performance described to Mike by Diego was called *Banana*, by Orion Maxted, and it involved audience participation. Diego invited Orion to attend the performance, but did not tell him that Mike was going to perform a second-hand rendition of his work, which led to Orion interrupting the performance, claiming that the audience was experiencing a bad copy of his work. Robinson Davies has a collaboration history with Diego Chamy, which is how she became aware of the video and went on to write an article about the situation, informed by further discussions with Diego and Orion.<sup>10</sup>
2. A performance by Mattin, which took place at *Noise Fest* in 2007, in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Mattin's performance ended with him stepping off the stage and asking the audience questions, provoking them to engage with him. Mattin is known within the Noise scene for making provocative performances.<sup>11</sup>
3. A performance by Stacey Makishi that took place during the performance art festival *Performanssi*, Turku, 2011, where she was interrupted by an audience member. The interruption was mild and her reaction was disproportionate. Robinson Davies was in the audience during this performance, and has spoken to Makishi since.<sup>12</sup>

These performances took place in small venues, which inherently closed the gap between the audience and the PSP due to physical proximity, often there being no lighting difference between the audience area and the stage (see Livingstone and Lunt 1994). All three were performed without microphones, further equalising the ability of the audience and performer to be heard. These characteristics of the experimental settings, compared with for example formal performances, seem to significantly increase the likelihood for heckling interactions to develop in unusual ways.

---

9. Note also that a video was produced with interviews of the participants of the first example. Thus, although we did not interview the participants, an interview in which the discuss many of their reflections on the event is available.

10. The performance is available at: <<https://sites.google.com/site/diegochamy/selected-works/the-boy-who-cried-banana>>

11. The performance is available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0L3PC2uZhk>>

12. This video is not public.

There is an important contextual ambiguity factor (Thomas 1983:91) typical to the data type studied, which seems to further increase the behavioural ‘ambiguity’ discussed in Section 1, namely that arts performances in general tend to operate with an element of historicity (see Kádár and Haugh 2013), that is, it can be assumed that some people in the audience will know the past work of the artist. For example, Diego Chamy is known for using ‘plants’ in the audience in a number of his previous performances, and knowledge of this might have effected some audience members’ evaluations of Orion’s interruption; the post-event interview revealed that a number of meta-participants assumed that he was a plant. Mattin is also known within the noise music scene as doing performances that subvert the usual conventions of noise performances, which potentially might have led some in the audience to expect his provocation. Importantly, it is never the whole of the audience which is familiar with the performer’s work; therefore, historicity seems to further boost behavioural ambiguity in these settings. As the present paper illustrates, this characteristic of the data studied manifests itself in a diversity of audience reactions to ambiguous behaviour on stage.

It is pertinent to note, as a disclaimer about the quality of our data, that the extracts that we study are amateur recordings, and so the sound of the events is occasionally not fully reliable. As Kádár (2015) shows, this is a recurrent issue when it comes to heckling beyond the arena of political speeches, and we believe that we need to accept it as a ‘handicap’ the phenomenon that we study. An additional characteristic of the amateur recordings that we study is that the films do not represent the events from the professional cameraman’s ‘objective’ perspective (Huang 2013). For example, in extract (1) the recorder is a participant of the event. We do not regard this as a problem for two reasons: First, the recordings allow us to precisely follow interactions between the participants – the cameras in the examples studied continue to focus on the PSP. Second, due to our ethnographic interest in the participants’ perspective of the events, we juxtapose our analyses of the videos with interviews with the performer and/or audience members.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, any possible shortcoming of the recording is counterbalanced by the information that we get through conducting participant interviews.

In order to aid the reader’s work to visualise the physical settings in which the complex and ambiguous interactions studied occur, we provide a diagram or ‘interpersonal map’ below each excerpts.

### **3. Ambiguous heckling**

In the present section, we examine the 3 types of ambiguous heckling behaviour – triggered by the change of roles – which we briefly introduced in Section 1, that is cases when 1) the heckler transforms into a (potential high) ratified interrupter; 2) the PSP transforms into a (potential) heckler by attacking; and 3) the PSP transforms into a (potential) attacker by counter-attacking. ‘Potential’ is added in brackets above in order to emphasise the ambiguity that such interactions trigger from an audience perspective – the perception of changed role types can always be potential, as different participants/observers may have different perceptions as to whether a certain role type has indeed changed or not.

#### *3.1. Heckler vs. (high) ratified interrupter*

The transcript of our first example reads as follows:

---

<sup>13</sup> And so we do not strive to gain a fully ‘objective’ analysis, which in our view is a mission impossible anyway in social studies and humanities.



(1)

*The boy who cried banana: What happened during the Transmission*

As explained above, the Transmission was the performance by Mike and Diego, where Diego describes another performance to Mike for Mike to perform according to the description he receives, hence *The Transmission*. The piece Diego described to Mike was *Banana* by Orion Maxted. To understand the following transcript, a brief summary of Orion's *Banana* is given, as experienced on two separate occasions by Robinson Davies:

The artist stands in the stage area, holds up a banana and shouts "BANANA". This is repeated several times. Gradually different objects are held up, but always accompanied by the word "BANANA". Both times when Robinson Davies experienced this performance, the audience began joining in with Orion and Orion started to give objects to people in the audience and to bring them up onstage. By the end of the performance, all of the audience was on stage, holding different objects, shouting "BANANA".

In the transcript below, Orion Maxted interrupts Mike's performance of the piece in line one. This happens at the point in the performance where there are already several audience members on stage.

MK – Mike

OM – Orion Maxted

AM – Audience Members<sup>14</sup>

AM&O – Audience Member and one of the organisers of the event

1. OM: Ah, excuse me everyone.
2. MK: Banana
3. OM: This is erm, this is a bad copy of my work. And er, this is er, a performance er... This is my performance.
4. MK: Banana
5. OM: This is a copy of my work. And it's a bad copy of my work.
6. MK: Banana
7. AM: Banana
8. OM: Banana
9. MK: Banana
10. AM: Banana
11. AM: Banana
12. MK: Banana
13. OM: Erm, here you can see pictures of er, *The Banana Performance*
14. MK: Banana
15. OM: Er... Since 2007.
16. [Audience laughs]
17. OM: Here pass this around.
18. MK: Banana
19. OM: The real performance, the real *Banana Performance* is much better than this
20. [Audience laughs]
21. OM: It's much more exciting, er, less people leave the room
22. [Audience laughs]
23. OM: And er, it's, yeah,
24. MK: Banana, banana
25. OM: It's basically much better.
26. AM: Oooh, I want banana!
27. [Laughter and clapping]

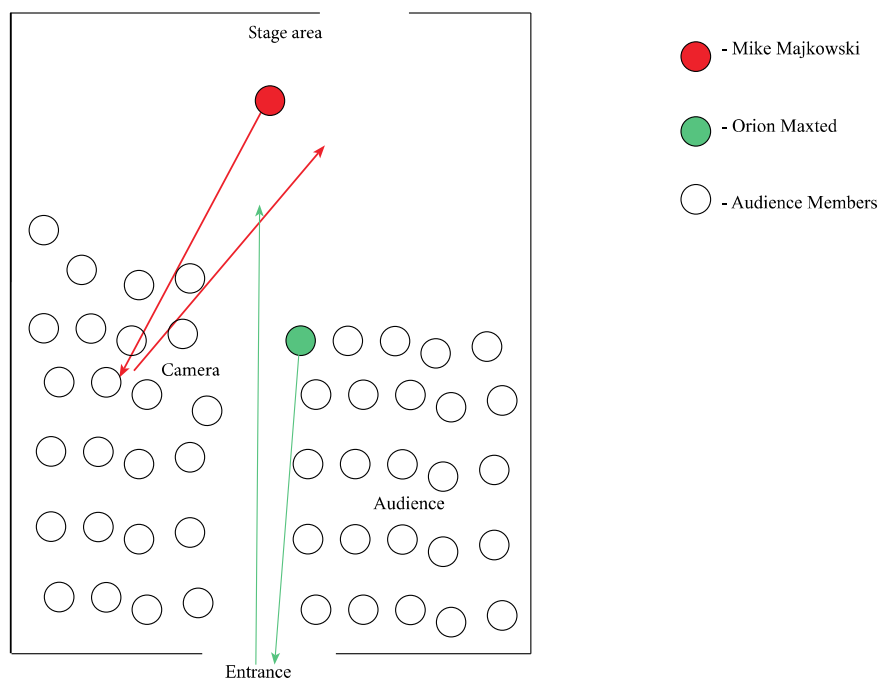
---

14. Note that we do not distinguish audience members as AM1, AM2, etc. in the excerpts studies, as often we could not discern who is speaking on the video recordings.

28. MK: Banana  
29. AM: Banana

[11 lines omitted, in which MK continues the banana performance and some audience members react with counter-banana cries]

41. OM: Would you...  
42. MK: Banana  
43. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
44. [an audience member sits down]  
45. MK: Banana? [looks at OM with a surprised face]  
46. OM: Thank you.  
47. OM: Would you mind sitting down? Please? Thanks.  
48. [another audience member leaves the stage and sits down]  
49. MK: Banana  
50. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
51. AM: Why?  
52. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
53. AM: No, I'm having fun.  
54. OM: OK.  
55. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
56. AM: OK.  
57. [That audience member leaves the stage and sits down]  
58. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
59. AM: I was sitting... [Points to the side of the room, away from where OM is trying to direct him]  
60. OM: Yeah of course.  
61. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
62. AM: [Inaudible, slowly leaves the stage]  
63. OM: Oh, I'm sorry, there are some seats at the back maybe you could use.  
64. OM: Would you mind sitting down?  
65. AM&O: Would *you* mind sitting down?  
66. OM: Oh, this is my performance  
67. MK: Banana  
[The remaining 17 lines omitted]



Notes:

Venu: A small room (stage not raised)

Lighting: Even lighting throughout space

Movements: **Mike Majkowski** starts performing at the front of the room, and then moves into the audience to encourage audience members to come into the stage area. He then continues to move backwards and forwards between these areas for the rest of the performance.

**Orion Maxted** starts sitting on the front row of the audience watching Mike perform, then leaves the room, then enters again going on stage to speak to the audience (by which point there are already audience members in the stage area). He then moves backwards and forwards between the audience area and the stage area for the rest of the performance as he tries to encourage the participating audience members to return to their seats.

**Audience** start in the audience area and then one by one they are brought into the stage area by Mike as they are invited to participate. At one point there is approximately fifteen audience members on stage, which appears to be approximately one quarter of the total audience.

*Diagram 1. The Transmission, performed by Diego Chamy and Mike Majkowski (Berlin, 2014)*

In line 1, the heckling incident happens, as Orion steps on stage and utters “Ah, excuse me everyone.” The ambiguity of Orion’s role as heckler is reflected by the style of this utterance: the attention getter filler ‘erm’, which supposedly indexes that Orion is aware that he is upsetting the expected flow of interaction (Tannen 1981), indicates that Orion is a non-violent interrupter. Note that the collective form of address ‘everyone’ (see Ilie 2010) indicates that Orion intends to communicate with the audience and not only with the performer, Mike. This attempt to be considerate to the *audience* ‘frames’ (in Goffman’s 1974 sense) Orion’s participation status in an ambiguous way: whilst his mitigated interruption indexes his awareness that his action upsets the interactional order and consequently it may trigger negative audience evaluations, addressing the audience operates as an implicit claim that the interruption is made from a low ratified status – as Kádár (2014) illustrates, a ‘proper’

heckler tends to interact with the performer on the audience's 'behalf,' rather than with the audience. Orion explicitly confirms his claimed high ratified stance as a performer in lines 3 and 5, as he claims that that he is the original creator of the ongoing presentation.

On the other hand, Mike frames Orion's role as that of a disruptive heckler, simply by not explicitly acknowledging his presence to the audience – although Mike's facial expression makes it clear that he is very much aware of the interruption (see Mogg and Bradley 1999).<sup>15</sup> What adds to the ambiguity of Orion's role in the given interaction is that several of the audience members implicitly frame him as a heckler, by participating in Mike's performance. The performance presupposes audience participation (the audience is supposed to come onto stage as the artist cries "BANANA"), and as certain audience members continue to participate in the performance by accepting Mike's invitation they (but not the others who do not accept the invitation) passively reject Orion's claimed high ratified position (on such 'passive' interactional actions see Kádár 2013). Therefore, although Orion's individual interactional behaviour runs counter to stereotypical heckler attitude, on the level of the interaction his behaviour is framed as that of a heckler and rejected by some in the audience. This is not surprising, if one considers that many in the audience have no way to confirm the validity of his high ratified status.

Furthermore, as the interaction unfolds in lines 13-42, Orion's intervention gradually becomes (re-)interpreted as part of the performance. As Kádár (2014) argues, in scenes of heckling both the heckler and the PSP engage into an indirect struggle to align with the audience through their performances, and this indirect struggle is what one can observe in this part of the interaction. Orion produces several utterances such as "The real performance, the real *Banana Performance* is much better than this", which generate laughter, but the audience does not give him any explicit support. Whilst one can only make tentative claims about the meaning of laughter here, it is pertinent to note that in many heckling scenarios the audience reward good heckles with laughter, and so the audience's reaction might as well be interpreted as support for Orion as a heckler as acknowledgment of his high ratified position, whilst some others in the audience may laugh because they suspect Orion to be a plant (see Section 2). In any way, laughter in this situation seems to an indicator of some degree of uncertainty (see Hatch and Erhlich 1993,505 on this function of laughter). Furthermore, Mike's performance also gets support from the audience, e.g. in turn 26 one of the audience members clearly ignores Orion's claim that his performance is much better than the ongoing one, by crying "Oooh, I want banana!"; this utterance in turn also generates 'supportive laughter' (Pickering 2009) from other audience members. In sum, what we can observe in this part of the conversation is largely identical to ordinary heckling scenarios, in which the PSP and the heckler compete with each other – in spite of the fact that Orion attempts to step out of the heckler's discursive role.

A significant change happens in line 43 when Orion asks an audience member "Would you mind sitting down?", i.e. instead of passively competing with the high ratified PSP for align with the audience he attempts to exercise the PSP's institutionalised right of controlling the audience. The significance of this utterance is shown by

---

15. Importantly, whilst Mike does acknowledge Orion by stopping to listen to him and then looking at his i-Pad, he does not make any explicit remark to the audience about his perception of Orion's behaviour. As Mike is the high ratified PSP, it would be his role to clarify Orion's participation status to the audience, and as this does not happen Orion's status remains ambiguous.

Mike’s reaction: he stares at Orion with a surprised face and utters ‘banana’ with a raising pitch, as if he was trying to communicate with Orion, as a kind of peace offering;<sup>16</sup> this reaction generates laughter from some audience members. From this point onwards, the ritualistic interaction between ‘heckler’ and PSP transforms into an ad hoc conversation between Orion and several audience members. Importantly, whilst some comply with Orion’s request, some others plainly refuse it, hence challenging the validity and high ratification of his action; perhaps the most noteworthy one of these refusals can be observed in line 51, in which an audience member bluntly asks “Why?”, and as Orion attempts to exert power by repeating the request (Vine 2004), the audience member clearly refuses to comply. Another interesting counter-challenge takes place in line 65, in which an audience member who is also an organiser repeats Orion’s request in a challenging way, as he utters “Would *you* mind sitting down?”.

In sum, the first example represents situational ambiguity caused by the interrupter’s claim that his status is high ratified. Such situational ambiguity can transform a ritualistic interaction into an ad hoc punctuated one, in which the interactants’ behaviour is different from what recurrently happens in such settings. For example, the ‘heckler’ does not attack the PSP but he attempts to communicate with the audience, as we could observe in Orion’s case. This defiance causes ambiguity, which is illustrated by several instances in the interaction, such as the audience’s laughter after Orion’s claim that he is the rightful owner of the performance. Ambiguity manifests itself in that some (meta-)participants revise their view of the dynamics of the situation – e.g. the interrupter’s behaviour is not necessarily perceived any longer, at least by some, as low ratified (e.g. certain audience members comply with OM’s request to sit down). In the eyes of these audience members ‘heckling’ transforms into a high ratified and outspoken form of ‘intervention’ (see Kádár and De La Cruz 2015, whilst it remains heckling to others).

### 3.2. PSP as ‘provoker’

Our second example is the following:

(2)

*Mattin’s rant*

M – Mattin  
 AM – Audience members

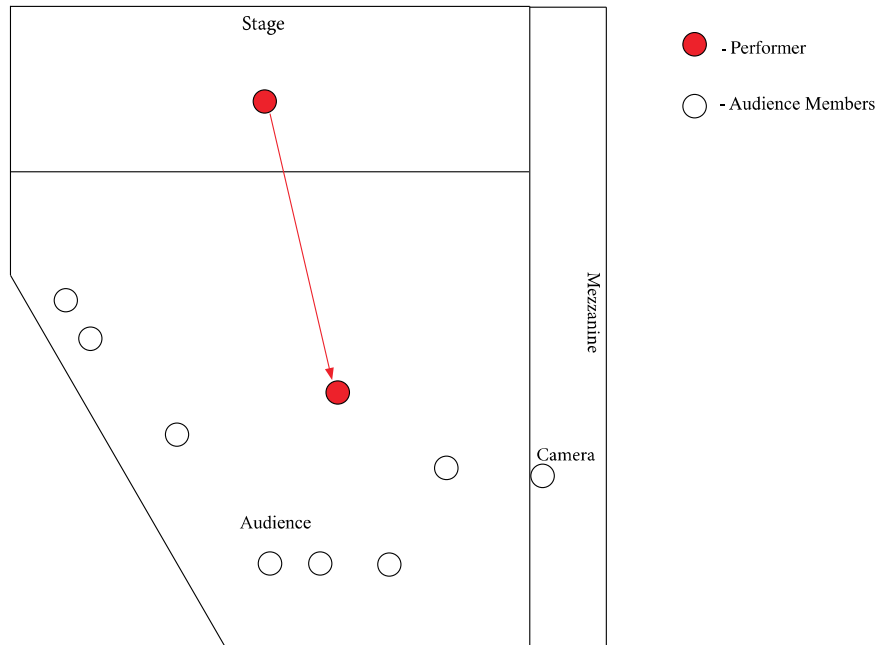
[Mattin is a renowned Basque performer; during a performance in Slovenia he heckles the audience.]

- [Sudden loud and dissonant noise and then silence]
1. AM: Hey!
  2. [Audience claps and cheers.]
  3. M: Why do you clap?
  4. AM: It was a nice sound.

---

**16.** In fact, we believe that this is only the most possible analytic interpretation of Mike’s behaviour and there are other interpretations, such as questioning Orion’s right to make this question. In addition, the participants themselves may have different interpretation of their actions (Kádár and Haugh 2013), although in the present interaction we have no evidence as regards Mike’s understanding/interpretation of his action here.

5. M: Why do you clap?  
6. AM: Because it's good.  
7. AM: More. We want more.  
8. AM: Where do you come from?  
9. [Music is played through the PA]  
10. [Music suddenly stops.]  
11. M: Who said it's the end?  
12. [Laughter.]  
13. M: Are you fascist or what?  
14. AM: [short pause] Marina Abramovic.  
15. AM: Sound check!  
16. AM: Sound check, you know!  
17. M: You think you know everything.  
18. AM: This is sound check, you know.  
19. AM: Who says this is the end?  
20. M: You clap.  
21. AM: Me?  
22. M: You clap to that piece of shit.  
23. AM: Where do you come from?  
24. AM: It's total shit.  
25. M: It was, wasn't it?  
26. AM: It was a masterpiece.  
27. M: But still many of you clap!  
28. AM: It's complete shit.  
29. M: It was. But you like it. You like it because you were standing looking at the stage, and you love to look at the stage. Don't you?  
30. AM: No that's not true.  
31. AM: I enjoyed it.  
32. [Laughter.]  
33. (inaudible)  
34. AM: You're not original, you know? Ay! Hallo! Where do you come from? Hey, hallo, you are not original!  
35. M: I can hear you.  
36. M: You are like robots. Fucking robots.  
37. AM: You are not original.  
38. AM: Oh hey...  
39. AM: We are the robots!  
40. M: You are so passive when you look at the stage, and now you start to talk. Now when I'm here you start to talk.  
41. AM: Hallo Hallo.  
42. AM: This is not good, this is terrible.  
43. AM: We don't need more (inaudible)  
44. AM: So what's your proposal?  
[Remaining lines are omitted]



Notes:

Venu: Nightclub  
 Lighting: The house lights are up (no differentiation between lighting on stage and audience)  
 Movements: Performer (Mattin) steps down from the stage onto the area in front of the stage, and walks around amongst the audience.  
 Camera: The camera is up on the mezzanine looking down onto the performer and audience.  
 Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0L3PC2uZhk>

*Diagram 2. Mattin's performance, Noise Fest, (Ljubljana, 2007)*

In line 1, one of the audience members cries “Hey” as a sign of surprise caused by the sudden loud and dissonant sound in Mattin’s performance and the following silence; however, this interruption may as well be a simple exclamation as heckling, and the audience in turn claps and cheers as they think that the performance has finished. In lines 3 and 5, Mattin asks the provocative question “Why do you clap?” Mattin’s behaviour could be interpreted as the PSP’s counter-performance following what he has interpreted as an interruption; the audience seems to make this interpretation, as several audience members attempt to restrain Mattin’s outburst: an audience member says “It was a nice sound” in line 4, supposedly in reference to the whole of the sound performance, and another audience member in line 6 utters “Because it’s good” as an acknowledgement of the quality of Mattin’s performance in general.<sup>17</sup> However, it does not seem to be Mattin’s aim to resolve the conflict and he continues to provoke: in what is denoted as line 9 and 10 in the transcript, he suddenly turns on and off a loud music; following this, he poses another provocative question “Who said it’s the

<sup>17</sup> One could argue that these audience members try to appease Mattin, but in our view the situation is more like that they know that Mattin purposefully made a bad sound to provoke them, and they simply refuse this provocation. Taking this train of thought a step further, it is possible that, as Mattin wants the audience to react aggressively, these audience members, by claiming that the performance as a whole was nice, refuse to play Mattin’s game and thus indirectly heckle him.

end?” Although some audience members still seem to perceive this question as humorous, his following utterance “Are you fascist or what?” is followed by a short pause and no laughter – silence in this context seems to signal that Mattin’s behaviour is dispreferred by the audience (see e.g. Nakane 2006; Berger 2011). The following utterances signal the audience’s refusal of Mattin’s behaviour: for example, one audience member shouts the name of the artist Marina Abramovic, a performance artist who is known for her confrontational performances, often involving audience participation. Another person utters “Sound check”, perhaps in reference to Mattin’s poor performance.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, what we can observe in lines 9 and 10 is a turning point in the interaction: the audience seems to realise that the PSP is not simply letting the steam off through countering an act that he interprets as heckling – what would be expected – but rather he takes up the discursive role of provocateur. We use the word ‘provocateur’ rather than ‘heckler’ in reference to Mattin’s ambiguous role in this situation because the PSP continues to have a high ratified role to speak on stage.<sup>19</sup> The audience’s perception of the situation in lines 14–19, in the form of a row of collaborative heckles. It is pertinent to note that Mattin at this point moves temporarily off the stage into the audience’s area (although there is relatively little physical divide between the stage and the audience in this performance). Mattin’s body language seems to be confrontational<sup>20</sup> and the fact that he physically approaches the audience seems to signify his attempt to take up the ambiguous discursive role of provocateur (Markel 1999).

The unexpected discursive role that Mattin adopts seems to operate in a similar way with what we could observe in example (1): the ritual interaction transforms into an ad hoc debate between the PSP and various audience members. In several lines, Mattin makes allegations about the audience’s complete lack of artistic taste, by accusing them for clapping when he provoked them with “that piece of shit” (line 22). As a noteworthy development, several audience members actually go defensive under Mattin’s attacks. For example, as Mattin utters “It was [a complete shit]. But you like it. You like it because you were standing looking at the stage, and you love to look at the stage. Don’t you?” in line 22, one audience member responds “No, that’s not true” (line 23), and another person adds “I enjoyed it” (line 24), supposedly to disarm the attack via humour.<sup>21</sup>

Arguably, certain audience members, who are familiar with his previous performances, might expect Mattin’s unusual behaviour to some extent and it might occur as clearly surprising to others (see below in this paragraph). This factor, which has the potential to boost the ambiguity of the already ambiguous situation, may explain why the audience is relatively slow to accept that Mattin is going beyond what is expected from an aggressive performer who aims to align with his audience in the end of the day. The PSP’s continuing provocation changes the dynamics of the situation in terms of participant perceptions. Whilst at the beginning of the interaction most of the audience members are supportive to Mattin, this attitude changes as the

---

18. We were unable to clearly interpret this utterance: the audience could also be asking for a sound check by the next performer, hence implying that Mattin should end his performance and the next performer should step on stage.

19. Acting in the role of provocateur raises the question as to whether the given act is heckling or something else – which is an important aspect of the ambiguity studied in this paper.

20. See a popular overview of confrontational body language in Reiman (2008).

21. Similarly to lines 4 and 6, these utterances may as well signal sarcasm.



interaction unfolds; for example, in line 34 one of the audience members openly criticises Mattin’s skill by uttering “You’re not original, you know? Ay! Hallo! Where do you come from? Hey, hallo, you are not original!” There are some other angry reactions, such as “We don’t need more”, in line 43. It is worth noting, however, that the audience does not react to Mattin’s behaviour in a uniform way – and this again might be due to the fact that some audience members expect, to some extent, some provocative attitude to take place. For example, in line 39 an audience member accepts Mattin’s accusation that they are “Fucking robots” (line 36) in a humorous way, by uttering “We are the robots!”.

The ambiguity of this scenario is related to the fact that during the clash Mattin is in control of the interaction as the high ratified performer; this controlling position can be captured on both non-verbal and linguistic interactional levels. In terms of non-verbal behaviour, whilst Mattin’s performance is an experimental one with no highly elevated stage, i.e. Mattin is close to the audience, he is nevertheless in the physical centre of the event and the audience forms a semi-circle around him. Although we have noted that he approaches the audience, it is also pertinent to note that in the course of the ad hoc interaction above Mattin retains his position within the circle and no audience member enters the circle, which shows that they continue to regard him as the person who is ratified to perform. On the interactional level, Mattin is not being interrupted, even though he makes some harsh criticisms of the audience (e.g. line 40).

In sum, the ambiguity of the situation is due to the fact that whilst Mattin goes beyond what he is expected to do as a performing artist, he still communicates from a high ratified position in a contemporary performing arts event, in which the audience is relatively ‘accommodating’ in the sense that unlike for example in a political scene such an ambiguous form of behaviour is appreciated to some extent as a way of self-expression. The situation would arguably be different if Mattin gave up his high ratified role, by leaving the circle or initiating personal interaction with a single audience member.

### 3.3. Targeting the heckler

The third example reads as follows:

(3)

*Stacy destroys the heckler*

SM	–	Stacy Maikishi
H	–	Heckler
AM	–	Audience members

[Stacy is a London based, Hawaiian, female performer known for her friendly behaviour, with her website stating: “Stacy Makishi has a way of transforming the mundane into the radiant, where everyday people speak their innermost thoughts.” However, when she was (relatively mildly) heckled on an occasion she became aggressive, persistently swearing at the heckler and inviting him for arm-wrestle.

1. SM: What are you waiting for? You’re this close!
2. H: (Inaudible mumble)<sup>22</sup>

---

22. Note that Stacy’s utterance in line 1 is a rhetorical question to the audience in general, and the heckling takes place in line 2. The fact that the heckler’s utterance is actually inaudible, and Stacy’s retrospective account of it to Robinson Davies, show how mild the

3. SM: Who's talking? Hey! Hey, you! What are you waiting for, huh?
4. H: (Inaudible)
5. M: Yeah? You want to come up here? You want to come up here and arm-wrestle me for the show? Come on! Come on!
6. H: You started it.
7. SM: Lets go, let's go!
8. H: You star...
9. SM: No, no, no, man, you started something with me!
10. H: You started, you started to ask the questions.<sup>23</sup>
11. SM: I am asking what are you waiting for?
12. H: (inaudible)
13. SM: No, what are you waiting for?
14. H: No, what are you waiting for?
15. SM: What are you waiting for?
16. SM: No, what are you waiting for?
17. H: Yeah, that's right, it's the same thing.
18. SM: So, you come up here and you tell me...
19. H: You started it. You, you definitely start...
20. SM: ...what you are fucking waiting for or get out of my gig.

[14 lines omitted]

35. SM: Either this asshole comes up here and arm wrestles me, or this gig...
36. H: Asshole? Is in a Black hole.
37. AM: Hey! Hallo! Maybe you should go and arm wrestle and ... (inaudible)
38. SM: (inaudible) arm-wrestle me and end this fucking gig or get out of my show, what's it going to be, huh?

[9 lines omitted; in these lines Stacy continues to attack the heckler and the audience cheers her]

48. SM: I can't fucking see you.
49. (Laughter)
50. SM: Yeah? I can't fucking see you. But you know what? Come up here and let's go. Either come up here and fucking arm wrestle me, you win you take over this gig. OK? Let/s go. Cos I ain't getting paid enough for this shit.
51. SM: You lie down on the ground. Put your glass down. Let's go. Lie down on the ground, let's arm wrestle. Lay down on the fucking ground.
52. SM: You want to be at the show, you are the show mister.
53. SM: Come on, right over this cake, lie down on the ground with me. Let's go.
54. SM: And I'm sorry, guys, this is the new show. You ain't ... you ain't getting your money back and this is the show. (inaudible) fucking start calling me an asshole and doing whatever the fuck. I don't fucking give a shit.
55. SM: You want left of right? What? What arm? What arm do you fucking want? You want this one up your ass?
56. SM: So fucking tired of this shit. I need some water... (inaudible)... I'm going to get some water.
57. SM: (inaudible)
58. SM: Let me tell you something, I've got more balls than you will ever have.
59. (Laughter)
60. SM: Let me tell you guys, I'm not fucking scared not this, this fucker. Uhuh.

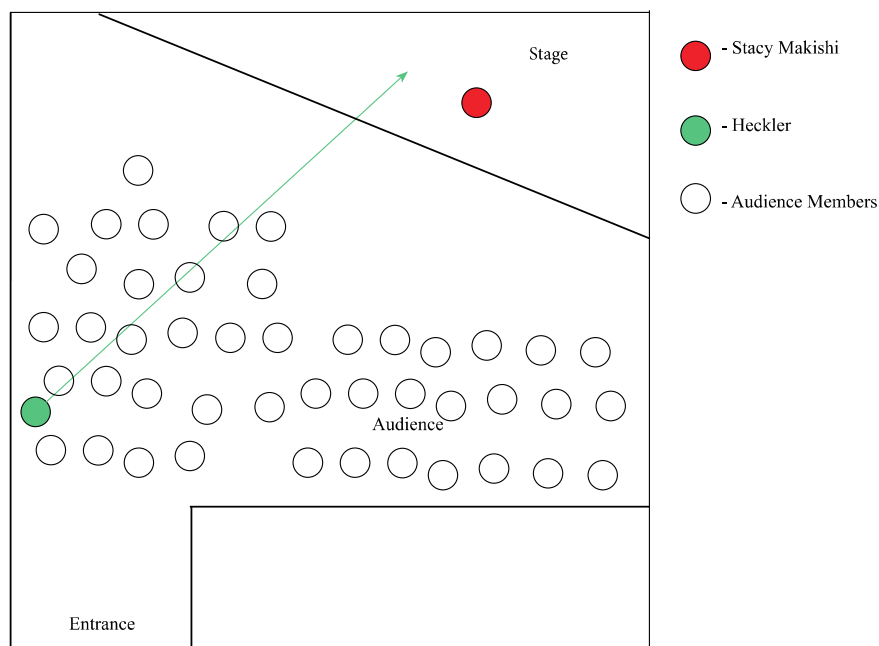
heckling was.

23. This line is referring to Stacy's rhetorical questions made to the audience at the beginning of the transcript (line 1).

61. SM: (inaudible)  
 62. SM: You ready?  
 63. H: Aaaaah.  
 64. SM: Get down. Let's go. Put your arm on that fucking cake and let's go. You ready? You better move your glass, honey. Because you don't fucking know what's going to happen. Let's go.  
 65. SM: And don't upstage me ever again. I'm going to be on this side and you're going to be on that side.  
 66. SM: Left or right what? Ok, ready? Fair is fair, everybody watching. Go.  
 67. AM: Go Stacy!

[8 lines omitted]

68. SM: I'm sorry, everybody.  
 69. SM: I'm sorry, I'm saying I'm sorry because I don't even fucking mean anything like I'm sorry. But that is the show. I shot my load for you, I threw my props at this fucker and that's it, so....  
 70. SM: I really hope you enjoyed... I don't even know what to do now, cause I'm uh, I did it. So...  
 71. SM: Wooo, get drunk, woooo!



Notes:

- Venu: Studio theater  
 Lighting: Stage lit, audience in the dark  
 Movements: Performer (Stacy Mikishi) remains on the stage for the duration of the performance. Heckler begins by heckling from the darkness at the back of the room, then goes onto the stage.  
 Video: Not public

*Diagram 3. Stacy Makishi's performance, Perfo manssi Art Festival (Turku, 2011)*

The interaction between Stacy and the heckler starts somewhat differently from a) what can one regularly observe in such interactions (see Kádár 2014), and b) the way in which Stacy is known to behave as a performer.<sup>24</sup> One can observe the ambiguous nature of this interaction already at the beginning of the transcript: the heckler only disturbed Stacy by mumbling in response to Stacy's rhetorical questions directed at the audience, and Stacy responds with a full scale attack, instead of simply responding with a joke or other forms of stereotypical PSP responses (on such responses see Kádár 2014). That is, in line 3 she challenges H by uttering "Who's talking? Hey! Hey, you! What are you waiting for, huh?", which is an aggressive invitation for the heckler to go up to the stage to test his power as a performer in open against Stacy. It seems that this invitation is unexpected, as in line 4 the heckler is only able to mumble again, instead of repeating the heckle in a more audible way. Stacy, however, does not seem to be satisfied with gaining the upper hand, as she continues the attack in turn 5.

As an audience member at this performance, Robinson Davies experienced confusion because although Stacy seemed to be angry about the heckler's interruption, her behavior seemed to suggest she wanted to encourage him to get involved further, rather than to regain control and move on, returning to her planned performance. This made Robinson Davies suspect the heckler might have been a plant. Because of this we interviewed Stacy, who clarified that the reason she made a big deal of the heckler's interruption was because she was not feeling positive about her planned performance: "I knew at the moment that he interrupted me that the performance that I had planned, just died... and that the opportunity that the heckling provided was all that I had to work with. The heckling and heckler was the show. [...] The heckler and I had a strange collaboration going on. It was as if we staged it. But I can assure you that we didn't."

In line 6 the heckler, somewhat reluctantly, takes the challenge by uttering "You started it [the fight by making the rhetorical question to the audience]". In the next few turns (lines 8-10) Stacy and the heckler engage into a debate about who started the aggression, just in order for Stacy to repeat the challenge "I am asking what are you waiting for?" (line 11) – i.e. she insists that the heckler should come onto the stage. The heckler is again reluctant to accept the challenge, and he mumbles something in response. When Stacy repeats the challenge in line 13, the heckler responds to Stacy's by repeating her question (line 14) – this is probably an attempt to reframe the challenge, but Stacy does not let the heckler go as she challenges him again in line 18. Although in line 19 the heckler attempts to redirect the conversation by interrupting her, she subsequently pushes the same invitation. In the section from line 20, which we omitted due to limitation on space, Stacy continues to challenge the heckler, and the latter makes powerless efforts to counter her. Even when Stacy calls the heckler "asshole" in line 35, the heckler attempts to turn the event into a humorous one, rather than responding with a similar swearword.

The ambiguity of the situation is indicated by the fact that the audience remains silent during the clash for relatively long (on non-committal silence see Agyekum 2002). As Kádár (2014) argues, audience members as meta-participants usually play an active role in heckling incidents, by supporting either the heckler or

---

24. Robinson Davies interviewed a group of audience members who participated at Stacy's performance, and who are also familiar with her work, and she was informed that these respondents were not expecting Stacy to go aggressive as she is known as a non-conflictive person. Furthermore, Robinson Davies sent an inquiry to Stacy as regards this event, and Stacy retrospectively evaluated her own behaviour as very aggressive.

the PSP via paralinguistic means such as shout and laughter, and occasionally by supporting the heckler/PSP through linguistic intervention, hence becoming participants themselves. However, the audience remains low-key until line 37, when an audience member shouts “Hey! Hallo! Maybe you should go and arm wrestle”, as a piece of ‘advice’ to the reluctant heckler to accept Stacy’s challenge. The audience’s relative reluctance to participate and give support to any of the participants for a while is understandable: whilst responding to the heckler is part of what is expected from the PSP to save their professional face, and such a response tends to be regarded as the performer’s impersonal ‘job’ to some extent, Stacy’s aggressive behaviour transforms the event into a personalised drama beyond the limits of ritualised heckling (Turner 1987).

The audience’s participation is a turning point in the conversation: a large number of audience members continuously cheer Stacy, which indicates that they are on Stacy’s side. The heckler supposedly perceives this, and from line 48 he does not even contribute to the conversation, which thus becomes a rant by Stacy, except a brief interjection in line 63.<sup>25</sup> It is also pertinent to note that Stacy’s monologue seems to be interpreted by the audience gradually more like part of the performance, as audience members begin to burst out in laughter on various occasions (see Kádár 2014, 19 on this role of laughter in ritualised heckling). Furthermore, Stacy also manages to frame her rant as a performance, as from the above-mentioned turning point she addresses the audience (rather than the heckler) on several occasions by apologising. Interestingly, for a one-off, in line 54 she even provokes the audience to some extent, as she utters

And I’m sorry, guys, this is the new show. You ain’t ... you ain’t getting your money back and this is the show. (inaudible) fucking start calling me an asshole and doing whatever the fuck. I don’t fucking give a shit.

Yet, this kind of provocation is clearly different from Mattin’s behaviour in example (2), as even in this outburst Stacy indirectly puts the blame on the heckler. That is, she makes it clear to the audience that they are not the ones who are targeted by her rant. To sum up, example (3) represents a case when the PSP’s counter-performance becomes disproportionate, as the PSP goes beyond what is expected in her discursive role – without clearly stepping out of this role and giving up her high ratified participation status (e.g. by leaving the scene; see Kádár 2014 on such cases).<sup>26</sup> Ambiguity in this conversation seems to dissolve after the audience takes sides and re-interprets the PSP’s behaviour as part of the show – e.g. in line 67, in which an audience member shouts “Go Stacy!” as an encouragement for Stacy to continue the rant. Framing the rant as performance results in the interaction gradually takes place between Stacy and the audience, rather than Stacy and the heckler, as in ‘ordinary’ heckling cases (Kádár 2014). This becomes particularly visible in lines 69–71, in

---

25. Thus, in a sense the interaction is not longer heckling, but a different type of genre practice, and the ‘heckler’ is not ‘heckling’ Stacy any longer. We are grateful to Pilar for pointing this out.

26. Note that whilst example (3) appears to be unusual for this performer, we do not intend to claim that excessive responses to heckles in stand-up performances as well as audience involvement are unusual, especially in a performance space which is known to have an active and aggressive audience. What makes example (3) unusual, however, is the heckler’s minimal heckling interruption and participation as the event unfolds – we could rarely observe this behaviour, which provides the real ambiguity to the interaction, in heckling interactions.

which Stacy frames her own behaviour as part of the show, and aligns herself with the audience by proposing to “get drunk” together after the show. From a ritual perspective, the fact that the interaction changes back to its regular scheme illustrates that once ambiguity dissolves the ritual order of the interaction can be restored.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present paper has provided a case study (or, more precisely, a deviant case study; Orum et al. 1991) for the ambiguity caused when the behaviour of interactants – whose discursive role types are associated with certain patterns of aggressive behaviour – changes. As we have argued, such changes can trigger ambiguity from the audience’s perspective, which attempts to frame the events and look for alternative frames if needed. This is particularly the case if the interactants’ behaviour becomes/remains associated with what is regarded as low or high ratified in the case of the given discursive role, i.e. if the interactants do not to completely abandon their pre-conflict roles. An interrupter may manage to get some control of the performance event if they can prove that they are high ratified to interrupt, and a PSP can attempt to provoke the audience or the heckler as they are high ratified to speak. This relationship between ambiguity and ratification is illustrated by the following figure:

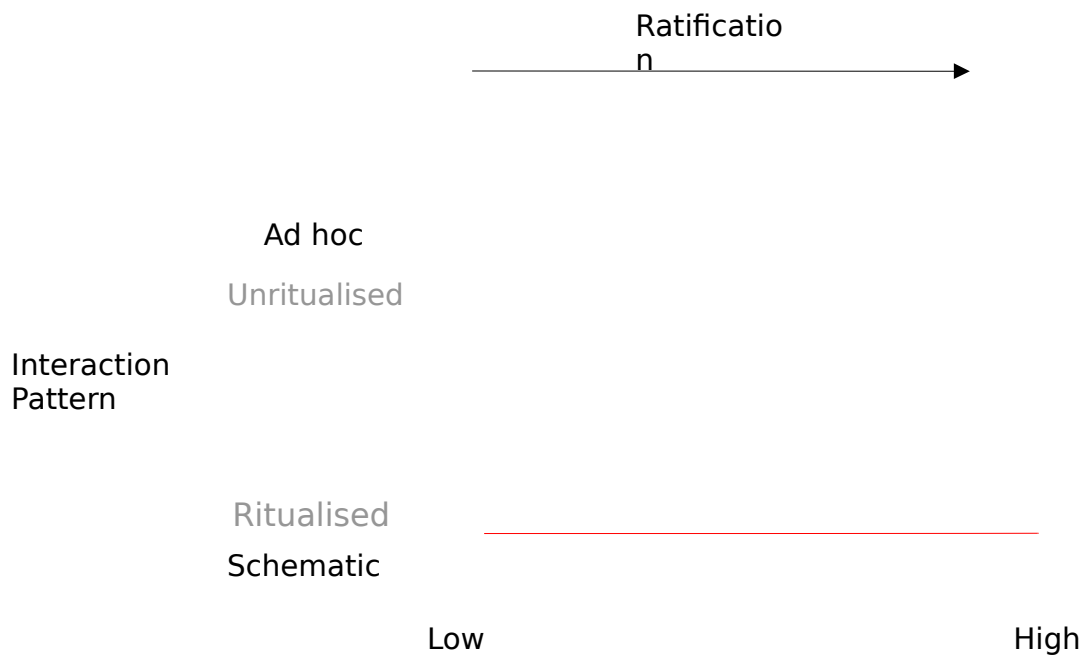


Figure 1: Ambiguous behaviour, rituality and (un)ratification

The realm of ritualised behaviour correlates with cases when the heckler and the PSP behave according to their expected low/high-ratification statuses. (Meta-)participant audience ambiguity emerges as they move away from such statuses, either by acting in an unexpected high-ratification pattern (as in example 1), or vice versa (examples 2 and 3). Their status in such ambiguous roles can be referred to as medium ratification (ambiguous role), and this status triggers informal (ad hoc and unritualised) interaction patterns. Note that pre-conflict participant status influences the interaction pattern, with the interaction pattern influencing post-conflict participant status. That is, pre-conflict participation status seems to be influencing various audience members' evaluation of interactional statuses. This is why the heckler in example (1) cannot fully step out of the frame of being a low ratified participant, and also the PSP in example (2) manages to retain his high ratified status in spite of his provocative behaviour. Yet, post-conflict participants statuses seem to be different from pre-conflict ones: by merit of the action of conflict, the heckler's or the PSP's status evolves in some form from the audience's perspective. In sum, the discussion of ambiguity should focus on audience perceptions of ambiguous interpersonal scenarios.

As the present research data represents a deviant case study, the data type studied in the paper is exceptional in a sense. Yet, we believe that the interactional behaviour studied here is potentially present in other settings, such as public speeches, in which audience provocation can take place. However, in our view the paper not only adds to the field by presenting empirical research on yet unstudied data is important, but also by contributing to relational ritual research (e.g. Collins 2004; Kádár 2013) and language and aggression vis-à-vis the model of ambiguity and ratification presented above. As our research has shown (see Kádár 2015), this model is replicable in the examination of contexts of interpersonal aggression and conflict in which ritual behaviour emerges. For example, whilst ambiguity may not be as much expected in 'ordinary' heckling scenarios as it is in the experimental theatre, it can emerge in other heckling scenes such as when a heckler attempts to 'hijack' a performance and take up the role of the PSP (Kádár 2014).

In addition to contributing to ritual research, the present paper has provided a more nuanced understanding of ratification, hence contributing to pragmatics in the context of language and aggression. The situational ambiguity studied here represents the interactional negotiation of participation statuses in a different way from what has been previously studied in the field. Furthermore, the paper has contributed to the understanding of how language and discourse shapes and constitutes the aggression and conflict that emerges or erupts in performance settings. We believe that this is a key data type for future research on language aggression and conflict to explore.

We hope that the present research generates further research on the interface of pragmatics and performing arts studies. Future research should address a number of areas, such as the relationship between the genre and contextual features of a performance and the heckling type that it triggers, and the history of development of heckling practices in the arts world. Heckling in the performing arts is a fascinating area, which is a hidden treasure house for the researcher of language aggression and conflict.

## References

- Agha, Asif 1997. Tropic aggression in the Clinton-Dole presidential debate. *Pragmatics* 7(4): 461–497.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2003. *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Agyekum, Kofi 2002. The communicative role of silence in Akan. *Pragmatics* 12(1): 31–51.
- Baxter, Judith 2002. Competing discourses in the classroom: A post-structuralist discourse analysis of girls' and boys' speech in public contexts. *Language in Society* 13(6): 827–842.
- Bell, Catherine. 1997. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berger, Israel 2011. Support and evidence for considering local contingencies in studying and transcribing silence in conversation. *Pragmatics* 21(3): 291–306.
- Broadhurst, Susan 1999. *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Buder, Eugene H. 1991. A nonlinear model of social interaction. *Communication Research* 18(2): 174–198.
- Clayman, Steven E. 1993. Booing: The anatomy of a disaffiliative response. *American Sociological Review* 58: 110–130.
- Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Culpeper, Joannathan, and Oliver Holmes 2013. (Im)politeness and exploitative TV in Britain and North America: *The X Factor* and *American Idol*. In: Nuria Lorenzo-Dus, and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (Eds.) *Real Talk: Reality Television and Discourse Analysis in Action*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 169–198.
- Dynel, Marta 2008. No aggression, only teasing: The pragmatics of teasing and banter. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 4(2): 241–61.
- Eelen, Gino 2001. *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Pilar (ed.) 2010. *Impoliteness across Cultures*, Special Issue of *Intercultural Pragmatics* 7(4).
- Garfinkel, Harold 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Goffman, Erving 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Free Press.
- Goffman, Erving 1979. Footing. *Semiotica* 25(1): 1–29.
- Goffman, Erving 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goodwin, Charles, and Majorie Goodwin 1990. Interstitial argument. In Grimshaw, Allen D. (ed.), *Conflict Talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goodwin, Charles, and Majorie Goodwin 1992. Context, activity and participation. In Peter Auer, and Aldo di Luzo (Eds.), *The Contextualisation of Language*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 77–99.
- Goodwin, Marjorie Harness 1997. Byplay: Negotiating evaluation in storytelling. In Gregory R. Guy, Feagin Crawford, Deborah Schiffrin, and John Baugh (Eds.), *Towards a Social Science of Language: Papers in Honor of William Labov, Volume 2*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 77–102.
- Goodwin, Charles 2007. Participation, stance and affect in the organization of activities. *Discourse & Society* 18(1): 53–73.
- Hatch, Mary Jo, and Sanford B. Erlich 1993. Spontaneous humour as an indicator of paradox and ambiguity in organizations. *Organization Studies* 14(4): 505–526.



- Haugh, Michael, and Derek Bousfield 2013. Mock impoliteness, jocular mockery and jocular abuse in Australian and British English. *Journal of Pragmatics* 44(9): 1099–1114.
- Haworth, Kate 2006. The dynamics of power and resistance in police interview discourse. *Discourse & Society* 17(6): 739–759.
- Huang, Shu-Hui 2013. What do you see and why? A look into the perspective of documentaries. *GFTS International Journal on Media & Communications* 1(1): 90–97.
- Ilie, Cornelia 2010. Strategic use of parliamentary forms of address: The case of the U.K Parliament and the Swedish Riksdag. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42(4): 885–911.
- Jackson, Keith 1987. *The Dilemma of Parliament*. New York: Allen & Unwin.
- Jacobs, Scott. 1982. *The Rhetoric of Witnessing and Heckling: A Case Study in Ethnorhetoric*. PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Jacobs, Scott, and Sally Jackson. 1993. Failures in higher order conditions in the organization of witnessing and heckling episodes. In: Frans H. van Eemeren, Scott Jacobs, and Sally Jackson (eds.) *Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 140–169.
- Kádár, Dániel Z. 2012. Relational ritual. In *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, edited by Jef Verschueren and Jan-Ola Östman. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1–48.
- Kádár, Dániel Z. 2013. *Relational Rituals and Communication: Ritual Interaction in Groups*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kádár, Dániel Z. 2014. Heckling: A mimetic-interpersonal perspective. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 2(1): 1–35.
- Kádár, Dániel Z. 2015. *Ritual, (Im)Politeness, Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kádár, Dániel Z., and Melvin De La Cruz. 2015 (in press). Rituals of outspokenness and verbal conflict. *Pragmatics and Society*.
- Kádár, Dániel Z., and Michael Haugh 2013. *Understanding Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kaegi, Stefan 2014. Provoking audience. *TDR* 58(3): 2–3.
- Linguistic Politeness Research Group (ed.) *Discursive Approaches to Politeness*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Livingstone, Sonia M., and Peter Kenneth Lunt 1994. *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate*. London: Routledge.
- Markel, Sherry 1999. Gendered voices: Provocateur in an on-line virtual conference course for in-service teachers. In: J. Price (ed.) *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 1999*. Chesapeake, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education, 332–336.
- McIlvenny, Paul 1996. Heckling in Hyde Park: Verbal audience participation in popular discourse. *Language in Society* 27: 27–60.
- Mogg, Karin, and Brendan P. Bradley 1999. Orienting of attention to threatening facial expressions presented under conditions of restricted awareness. *Cognition and Emotion* 13(6): 713–740.
- Nakane, Ikuko 2006. Silence and politeness in intercultural communication in university seminars. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(11): 1811–1835.
- Orum, Anthony M., Joe R. Feagin, and Gideon Sjoberg 1991. Introduction: The nature of the case study. In Joe R. Feagin, Anthony M. Orum, and Gideon

- Sjoberg (Eds.), *A Case for Case Study*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1–26.
- Pickering, Lucy 2009. Intonation as a pragmatic resource in EFL interaction. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6(2): 235–255.
- Planken, Bridgette 2005. English as a lingua franca in international business contexts. *English for Specific Purposes* 24(4): 367–80.
- Rao, Sameer. 2011. “Joke’s on You!”: *Stand-up Comedy Performance and the Management of Hecklers*. Masters thesis, [online] Available at: [http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/7385/2011Rao\\_S\\_thesis.pdf?sequence=1](http://triceratops.brynmawr.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10066/7385/2011Rao_S_thesis.pdf?sequence=1)
- Reiman, Tonya 2008. *The Power of Body Language*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rook, Dennis W. 1985. The ritual dimension of consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research* 12(3): 251–264.
- Saville-Troike, Muriel 2008. *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*. New York: Wiley & Sons.
- Sifianou, Maria 2012. Disagreements, face and politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics* 44(12): 1554–1564.
- Sinkeviciute, Valeria 2013. Decoding encoded (im)politeness: “Cause on my teasing you depend”. In: Marta Dynel (ed.) *Developments in Linguistic Humour Theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 263–288.
- Stein, Nancy L., Ronan S. Bernas, and David J. Calhiccica 1997. Conflict talk: Understanding and resolving arguments. In T. Givon (ed.), *Conversation: Cognitive, Communicative and Social Perspectives*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 233–267.
- Stopfner, Maria. 2013. *Streitkultur im Parlament. Linguistische Analyse der Zwischenrufe im österreichischen Nationalrat*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Tannen, Deborah 1981. New York Jewish conversational style. *International Journal of The Sociology of Language* 30: 133–149.
- Terkourafi, Marina 2001. The distinction between generalised and particularised implicatures and linguistic politeness. In: Kühnlein, Peter, Hannes Rieser and Henk Zeevat (eds.) *Proceedings of the Fifth Workshop on the Formal Semantics and Pragmatics of Dialogue*. Bielefeld: ZiF, 174–188.
- Terkourafi, Marina 2005. Beyond the micro-level in politeness research. *Journal of Politeness Research* 1(2): 237–262.
- Thomas, Jenny 1983. Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics* 4(2): 91–112.
- Turner, Victor 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New Brunswick and London: Transactions.
- Turner, Victor 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Turner, Victor (ed.) 1987. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications.
- Vine, Bernadette 2004. *Getting Things Done at Work: The Discourse of Power in Workplace Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Walcott, William H. 2007. *Knowledge, Competence and Communication: Chomsky, Freire, Searle, and Communicative Language Teaching*. Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Zimmerman, Don 1998. Identities, context and interaction. In: Charles Antaki and Sue Widdicombe (eds.) *Identities in Talk*. London: Sage, 87–106.