

INSTITUTIONALIZED IDENTITIES IN INFORMAL KISWAHILI SPEECH: ANALYSIS OF A DISPUTE BETWEEN TWO ADOLESCENTS

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Introduction

In conversation, participants operate under the condition that they must demonstrate to each other what they assume to be the nature of their talk*. This happens on a sequential basis. Every turn in conversation is typically followed by another one, and therefore it is paramount for the second turn in line, for its own intelligibility, to make clear how it relates to the preceding turn. In this way, by tracing the interpretations that are made 'available' by the participants themselves as they assemble their talk, one can obtain a technical specification 'from within' of the procedures conversationalists use for co-constructing their encounter. This approach to the study of talk and interaction, heavily influenced by Harold Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological program, became known as Conversation Analysis (CA).

For a long time, conversation analysts restricted their attention to talk that had no further bearing other than being 'just talk'. The only identities that conversation analysts were concerned with were 'speakership' and 'hearsership' (e.g., Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974, Goodwin 1981). It was only later on that conversation analysts started to consider the impact of such presumed 'macro' features as gender, occupational roles, etc. In the early nineties, a number of publications appeared with interaction in institutional settings as their primary focus (Boden & Zimmerman 1991, Drew & Heritage 1992). The bottom line of these publications is that the institutional character of a stretch of talk lies not in the 'external constraints' exerted by the social-structural setting of the encounter, but in how the participants 'embody' the encounter's institutionality in their situated practices. In other words, participants literally 'talk an institution into being'. Another characteristic of these studies is their outspoken comparative orientation: the mechanisms of informal interaction are considered to provide the benchmark against which an encounter's institutionality is to be calculated or assessed. What lends, say, a stock-holders' meeting its characteristic institutional flavor is, first of all, a number of formal *restrictions* on who can say what at which moment, as compared to the speech exchange system characteristic of ordinary talk, and, second, the *elaboration* of certain

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practices (for example, specific question types) "which have their 'home' or base environment in ordinary talk" (Heritage 1984: 239) Institutionalality is thus simply equated with formality. In this paper, I challenge the formalist approach to institutionalality found in this current trend in CA. I will do so by showing that speakers also orient to presumed 'macro' features - such as religious identity - in their informal talk.

It was during fieldwork that I realized that the formalist approach to identity and institutionalality outlined above is untenable. I seemed unable to lay hands on any hard 'institutional' data, and everything that at first sight seemed remotely 'institutional' upon second inspection, much to my frustration, evaporated into thin air. The fragment reproduced here is typical for the sort of data I ended up with. It was recorded by my main informant, N, in June 1996, a few weeks after we had met, in Sinza, one of the many suburbs of Dar-es-Salaam. N (aged 19), who was equipped with a hidden tape-recorder, accidentally walked into an old acquaintance, E (Later N commented that E used to be a fierce *mhuni*, 'punk', but that he had just converted to Islam) While N approached E, the latter was talking to someone else who was trying to find a tenant for a vacant room. The tape-recorder was switched on immediately after the initial greetings. The first twelve lines of this encounter are reproduced below (see Table 1) When the recording was over, permission to use the materials thus obtained was solicited from all the participants involved¹

As I worked my way through transcripts such as these, it gradually occurred to me that I had been searching too hard, and that the influence of so-called 'institutional' features such as age, gender, etc is not exclusively limited to formal interaction, but that they may also be consequential for the way informal talk is carried on. Also, I came to realize that the 'institutionality' of a particular stretch of discourse is subject to continuous negotiation, and that institutional frames could abruptly be challenged by one of the participants, contrary to the tacit consensus over institutionalality that characterized the studies I was familiar with thus far (and can be found, for example, in the analysis of interaction between doctor and patient)

This paper, then, is an attempt to reconceptualize the notion of institutionalality in CA. At the same time, because it uses real conversational materials for doing so, it contains a substantive analysis of some of the procedures and situated practices the people in the sample resort to for accomplishing their interaction.

¹ An outline of the transcription conventions used here can be found in Atkinson and Heritage (1984). Here I only mention those that are used in the transcription of this particular fragment. (1) *Sequential features*. Overlapping speech is indicated by means of straight brackets. Latching of two turns onto each other is indicated by means of two equals signs (=), one placed at the beginning of the latched turn and another at the end of the preceding turn (i.e., the one it is latched onto). Lengthening of a vowel is indicated by one or more colons (:). (2) *Intonational features*. A question mark (?) indicates a rising intonation at the end of a syntactic unit (not necessarily a question), a comma (,) indicates a slight fall, and a period (.) a final fall. A single upward pointing arrow (↑) indicates a sharp mid-turn rise in intonation; two such arrows that enclose a segment (↑xxx↑) are used to indicate that this segment is delivered at a significantly higher pitch than the surrounding speech. (3) *Other delivery characteristics*. Boldface indicates regular emphasis. Two degree signs (°xxx°) indicate that the enclosed segment is significantly quieter than surrounding speech, CAPITALS indicate that the segment is significantly louder. Inward pointing sharp brackets (>xxx<) indicate that the enclosed segment is produced at a significantly faster speed.

- 01 N: mbona sikuoni oni ↑mashidini.
Why am I not seeing you in the mosque?
- 02 E: °ah° hunioni ↑WApi bwana w ɾewe unasalia wapi.↓
You don't see me WHERE mister? Where do YOU pray?
- 03 N: Laa:rh ↓
04: naswalia >hapa hapa< lakini siku↑o:ni mimi
I pray RIGHT HERE, but I don't see you
- 05: rafiki ɾyangu ↓
my friend!
- 06 E: Laa ↓ ↑we↑ unaswalia NJE wewe
You pray OUTside you!
- 07 N: ↑mi niswalie nje? mimi NDANI bwana =
Me praying outside? I am INside mister!
- 08 E: =mimi nakuwaga ndani bwa ɾna
ME I am always inside mister
- 09 N: Lsa mbona
Now why-
- 10: unatafuta ↑NINI hapa tena.
what are you searching out here?
- 11 E: ah tunapima habari ya chu:mba hapa.
We are looking at information about a room
- 12: bia-
Business-

Table 1

I contend that participants display not only an analysis of the immediately adjacent utterances, but that their talk also contains an analysis of the wider or 'distal' context (Mehan 1991). There seem to be two resources available to the participants through which they can shape their talk so as to fit into such a distal context. A first resource by which participants can accomplish the 'distal' embedding of their utterance is through jointly orienting to (a) presumed shared event(s) in their respective biographies (i.e., their locally accomplished 'co-biography'). The second procedure at their disposal for tying their talk to a wider context is to institutionalize that talk. Obviously, the equation of institutionality with formal restrictions on who can say what can no longer be taken for granted. An alternative way of conceptualizing institutionality can be found in Maynard and Wilson's (1980) work on the reification of categorial identities. Through reification, locally accomplished categorial identities, like [Muslim] in our data sample, can be fashioned as possessing a validity that extends beyond the limits of participants' mutual co-presence.² In this sense, the participants can mark their

² Throughout this paper, categorial identities like [Muslim] will be placed in straight brackets.

encounter as 'produced under the aegis of an institution' Of course, these two senses of distal context intersect inevitably Thus, I will show that the adjacency relationship between the two first turns of the data sample can only be characterized adequately if we examine (i) the ways in which the two protagonists orient to an event or a series of events in their co-biography, and (ii) how this is in turn mediated by the institutionalized [Muslim] identity of the two protagonists

Lines N01 and E02: What kind of adjacency pair?

One of the most fundamental mechanisms regulating the organization of interaction is probably what conversation analysts have come to call 'adjacency pair organization' (Schegloff & Sacks 1973) Stated in its simplest form, adjacency pair organization refers to the observation that utterances of one specific type are usually followed by utterances of another specific type: questions tend to be followed by answers, invitations either by acceptances or refusals, accusations either by denials or admissions, etc Of course, stating that a question is usually followed by an answer in itself hardly qualifies as a relevant research finding. A more important observation, however, is that conversationalists themselves attach *normative expectations* to these regularities When asking a question, a conversationalist *expects* his/her interlocutor to produce an answer in the next slot If no such answer is forthcoming, then the interlocutor will be regarded not as merely being silent, but as *deliberately withholding* an answer He/she will thus be held *morally accountable* for not meeting the expectations that were created by the preceding question There is no escape from this moral accountability, as *anything* the interlocutor does will be interpreted against the background expectations generated by the first pair part Adjacency pair organization thus comprises one of the most powerful resources participants have at their disposal for achieving intersubjectivity, in that it can be used to force one's interlocutor to display on the spot his or her understanding of what goes on.

The first two lines of our data sample comprise an adjacency pair that is difficult to grasp In the first turn, N01, we find a syntactic question (*mbona sikuoni oni mashidini?* 'Why am I not seeing you in the mosque?'). Surprisingly, this question is *not* followed by the 'appropriate' second part (an answer). Instead, in E02 we find a composite turn consisting of a trouble display (*ah*), a partial repetition of the initial question also modeled as a question (*hunioni wapi bwana?* 'You don't see me where, mister?'), followed by yet another question (*wewe unasalia wapi?* 'Where do you pray?'). Obviously, the partial repetition and the counter-question are intended as some form of reply to the original question in the first line. Equally obvious is the fact that N's opening turn in some ways poses a challenge to E. The question we are faced with here is: which are the features that 'warrantably' or 'accountably' turn N's first pair part into a challenge? If we want to find an answer to this question, we must look at how the adjacency pair is embedded in the distal context that is continuously created by the participants themselves as they accomplish their encounter

Distal context as co-biography

This section contains a discussion of the way the participants, through their joint orientations to events in the respective co-biographies they presume to share with one another, make their current conversation part of a distal context consisting of other events, remote in time and space. I will discuss the conflict that arises as they co-construct their co-biography and how this conflict is managed. To this end, I will briefly introduce the notions 'occasioned knowledge' (Pomerantz 1980) and 'reality disjuncture' (Pollner 1975).

A few caveats need to be inserted here. First, I want to stress that, in line with the phenomenological underpinnings of CA, what I understand under locally accomplished co-biography does *not* cover participants' entire shared interactional history but only refers to that segment of shared interactional history that is experienced as relevant to, and hence made to bear on, the interactional task at hand. In the fragment analyzed below, for example, the segment made relevant as co-biography only covers a small part (i.e., E's alleged recent absences from prayer) of a much longer interactional history spanning many years that is not alluded to here³. The second point is that I have tried to uphold a fairly strict separation between the two senses of distal context, although in real life they are interwoven in a multitude of ways. Thus, this section is restricted to a discussion of the interactional procedures through which the 'epistemological' debate over the relevant co-biography, i.e., whether E actually did attend prayer, is managed. The categorization practices that are carried out simultaneously (and that are implicated in the dispute) will be discussed in the next section.

Occasioned knowledge of remote events

In her paper on 'fishing devices' (1980), Pomerantz argues that in their talk conversationalists distinguish between remote events one is *entitled* to know and remote events of which one has *occasioned* knowledge only. Suppose I went to the beach on a sunny afternoon. In that case, I would know 'from the inside' what I did on that afternoon, because I was, and I still am, the 'subject-author' of my own actions. In case a friend had tried to call me that afternoon, however, he or she too would know something about my whereabouts (i.e., he or she would have found out that I did not pick up the phone and would probably have inferred that, therefore, I was not at home), but what they know would be no more than 'external' or 'partial' knowledge of my whereabouts. Such 'external' knowledge is not dependent upon being a subject-author but upon being occasioned to know (e.g., through being told, having

³ Of course, this remark should not be taken to mean that speakers can construct just any distal context 'out of the blue'. Later on in the same encounter, N challenges a 'distal context'/'institutional identity' introduced by E by pointing out an inconsistency between the identity claimed in the current encounter and behavior displayed by N on remote events. In this sense, remote events may (be made to) serve as constraints on what can be accomplished locally. This should be regarded as an antidote against the radical voluntarism characteristic of many phenomenological and hermeneutic strands of social theorizing (cf. the calls voiced by authors such as Giddens 1984 and Lave 1993 for a rapprochement between phenomenology and, respectively, structuralism and activity theory).

witnessed, having tried to call someone, etc.) Participants rely on these associations between types of persons and types of knowledge for the accomplishment of certain conversational acts. For example, by offering a piece of 'external', 'occasioned' information (*I tried to call you three times yesterday*), one can compel one's interlocutor to produce a corresponding 'internal' account (*I went to an art exhibition*). If one did not produce the corresponding 'internal' counterpart, this would be taken as a refusal, again, as if one is deliberately trying to hide something. This 'fishing device' is a technique typical of inquiries into delicate matters.

Reality disjunctures

In everyday life, people operate under the assumption that we all inhabit the same world and that, despite minor variations stemming from the different positions we occupy, we all have access to the same underlying reality. Pollner's work on 'reality disjunctures' (1975) is concerned with what happens when this assumption breaks down, that is, when people are suddenly confronted with evidence that other people's perception of reality is radically different from what they take for granted. Such a reality disjuncture emerges when the existence of a competing version of events in the world is revealed. Traffic courtrooms are one major site where such reality disjunctures can be found in abundance. If both parties in such a courtroom stick to their version of events, then this poses a problem for *both* parties involved: each defendant has to find a way to explain *why* the other's version of the world is radically different from his or her own. Usually this will be done by calling into doubt the validity of the other's perception of the world, for example, by claiming that the other was drunk or that he or she was hallucinating ('the ironicization of experience'). Of course, in doing so each side takes for granted the correctness of their own version of events, and this may generate an endless loop of mutual impeachments. At this stage, Pollner concludes, the question which version of reality should prevail as the ground for further action cannot be decided any longer on a strictly logical basis but has become a 'political' issue. Mehan's (1990) analysis of a discussion between a patient judged to be a paranoid schizophrenic and a board of psychiatrists is a telling example. Since both psychiatrists and patient start from the assumption that their version of the world is the (only) correct one, the question who is mad and who is sane indeed becomes a political issue, in that the members of the psychiatric board must use the real world power at their disposal to ensure that their version of events is acted upon as the only 'true' one.

Pomerantz' work offers some illuminating insights into what goes on in the first line(s) of the data sample. If one dropped the wh-word *mbona* 'why' in N01, the result (*sikuoni oni mashidini*, 'I am not seeing you in the mosque') would be a prototypical example of a fishing device, in which N offers a bit of external, occasioned knowledge of E's whereabouts (i.e., his repeated absence during prayer) so as to invite E to produce his own, internal version of his movements. (Note that N and E are young, 'newborn' Muslims who regularly attend prayer in the mosque in the vicinity of which the data sample was collected. *Mashidini* 'in the mosque' -

a nonce borrowing from Arabic *maṣīd* - thus refers to the mosque they both attend) However, contrary to the cases discussed by Pomerantz, the display of 'external' access (*sikuoni oni mashidini*, 'I am not seeing you in the mosque') is here accompanied by an account-elicitor (*mbona*, 'why') I will not elaborate on the role of this account-elicitor Here, it is sufficient to note N presents E with an 'external' version of E's own whereabouts.

E replies with a composite turn consisting of three components. The first component, the particle *ah*, spoken noticeably softer than the surrounding talk, indicates that its producer has encountered 'a problem', without, however, offering any specific clues as to what precisely he or she experiences as problematic

The second component consists of a partial repetition of N's initial question, *hunioni wapi* 'You don't see me where'. Let us consider some of the details of this repetition in order to find out what precisely it is doing here

- * Note, for a start, that it is only the display of 'external' knowledge (*sikuoni oni mashidini* 'I am not seeing you in the mosque') that has been repeated, and not the (immediately preceding) account-elicitor *mbona* 'why'
- * The locative noun phrase *mashidini* 'in the mosque' has been replaced by the wh-word *wapi* 'where'? Repetition of a prior segment accompanied by a replacement of one item by a wh-word is a frequently used technique for signalling that one has misheard the replaced item (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks 1977). This possible reading, however, is cancelled by the first component, the trouble-display *ah*, which signals that E encountered a substantial problem in N's talk, and thus indicates that E *already* made sense of the preceding utterance and what it amounted to. Therefore, the only remaining interpretation that can be assigned to the replacement of *mashidini* by a wh-word is to consider it as a technique for 'casting doubt' on the repeated segment, i.e., the display of 'external knowledge' *sikuoni oni mashidini*, 'I am not seeing you in the mosque'.
- * The selection of a locative wh-word instead of a 'neutral' alternative (like *vipi*, 'how', in *vipi hunioni mashidini?*, 'How you do not see me in the mosque?') might be interpreted as an orientation to the occasioned nature of N's knowledge, more specifically, to the fact that N's noticing presupposes a specific *locale* for doing so

E thus displays his understanding of N's prior turn as a display of 'external' knowledge (of E's own movements), but he does so in a way that simultaneously indicates the 'incorrectness' of N's observations. In this sense, the second component 'fills in' his interlocutor on the trouble that had been projected by the particle *ah*⁴

⁴ Other operations performed on the 'display of external knowledge'-part include:

(i) The switching of the pro-terms *si* (subj 1Sg, neg) and *ku* (obj 2Sg) into *hu* (subj 2sg, neg) and *ni* (obj 1Sg) respectively in order to preserve the identity of the referents across turns (while the negative polarity of the verb has been preserved). E thus demonstrates, *inter alia*, an understanding of the propositional content of the accusation.

Thus far I have shown that the second component marks N's display of 'external' knowledge offered in the first line as an inadequate version of reality. The move initiated there is perpetuated in the third component of E's composite turn (the question *wewe unasalia wapi?* 'where do you pray?'). At this stage, Pollner's insights on reality disjunctures become analytically relevant, as his observations provide a sequential link between the second and the third component of E02 (and provide an account for the subsequent trajectory of ensuing talk as well). Whereas the second component merely revealed the *inadequacy* of N's perceived version of events, the third component offers an *account* for that inadequacy (what Pollner referred to as the 'ironicization of experience'). As E asks N, in the third component, where the latter attends prayer, he *assumes* that N himself is not (or not any longer) praying in the mosque around the corner. In doing so, E offers *an explanation* for the inadequacy of N's 'external' knowledge: N was looking for E at the wrong place. (As E 'explains away' N's competing version of reality, he uses the correctness of his own version as an 'incurable ground' for demonstrating the empirical inadequacy of N's version. That E does so makes perfect sense, because he is the subject-author of his own behavior and thus entitled to a view 'from within'.)

In the next four turns, N and E persist in the ironicization of each other's experiences. In N3, N asserts that he is (still) praying in the mosque in their neighborhood (*hapahapa* 'right here'), by the same token indicating that he correctly interpreted *wewe unasalia wapi?* 'where do you pray?' as a challenge to the way in which his knowledge of E's whereabouts was occasioned. E06 initiates a new round in the (principally endless) loop of mutual impeachments. E concedes that it might indeed be the case that both are praying on the same spot, but in that case N must be praying outside. In line 7, then, N replies that he is never praying outside, and thus yet another reality disjuncture emerges. (If someone is obliged to worship outside, this means that probably that person arrived late, after the mosque had already filled up, which might be an indication or symptom of a lack of religious zeal. In this sense, the 'epistemological' debate of lines 2 to 8 also contains a number of tacit accusations of not taking religious matters seriously.)

In line N9, N abruptly shifts the topic to what E and his acquaintance were doing at the spot where he found them talking together (i.e., they were making drawings in the sand), without the reality disjuncture having been resolved, however. In the remainder of the encounter (not reproduced here), N made an allusion to it two more times. Actually, it was only resolved afterwards, in the course of a stimulate recall interview I had with N (in E's absence). When I asked him whether it is obligatory for Muslims to pray inside the mosque, he answered that this is not the case, after which he volunteered the following explanation (in the part rendered in italics) that reconciled N and E's competing experiences of reality:

(ii) The deletion of the original reduplication of the verb root, which iconically expresses that N *repeatedly* noticed E's absence. This too might be taken as a form of 'downgrading' of the external knowledge displayed by N, although this interpretation remains speculative.

Siyo lazima, inategemea na hali ya pale. Kama msikiti mdogo, watu wakijaa, basi hamna budi wengine mkae nje, kwa sababu hamwezi mka- mkarundikana, mkasongamana ndani. [S: mm] [N: mm]

(0 5)

Kwa hiyo ndo hali kama hiyo *Lakini kwa- kwa upande mwingine ni kwamba, huyu [E] yeye, anafanya kazi katika magari makubwa, yanayosafiri haya Burundi wapi wapi. Kwa maana hiyo inafikia kipindi, inakuwa saa ingine labda wiki hii, anakuwa hayupo maeneo hayo. Sasa labda hiyo hiyo ilipelekea mimi kutomwona msikitini.* [S: mm]

(0 5)

Kwa sababu ye, mara nyingi, huwa anasafirisafiri.

It's not obligatory but it depends on the situation. If the mosque is small and there are many people inside, then the others have no alternative but to sit outside, because you can't sit on top of someone else, you can't be pressed together inside. [S: mm] [N: mm]

(0 5)

That is what the situation (here) is like. *But on the other hand, [E] is working in the trucking business, the ones that travel to Burundi and elsewhere. Therefore it may happen from time to time that maybe this week or so, he is not around. So maybe that's why I didn't notice him in the mosque.* [S: mm]

(0 5)

Because he is traveling very often.

Note that N here contradicted earlier statements, made when we were transcribing the tapes, that being late is a symptom for lack of religious zeal. However, following authors such as Billig (1987), I do not regard such contradictions as problematic, since both explanations are part of interpretive repertoires that may be used for making sense of one's encounters (i.e., under the form of explicit secondary rationalizations). Which resource is actually being chosen may be influenced by the situation in which this *post factum* rationalization is carried out.

Distal context as institutionalization: The reification of categorial identities

In the preceding section, I outlined briefly how the two participants, N and E, orient to certain events in their respective biographies which they presume to share with one another. In this sense, they are constructing the current encounter in such a fashion that it can accountably be regarded as situated within a distal context comprising temporally and spatially remote events. As I said earlier, these temporally and spatially remote events should not be conceived of as something external to the ongoing encounter (i.e., 'talk-external'). The reality disjuncture in the data sample has illustrated the accomplished and negotiated (i.e., 'talk-internal') character of these distal contexts, despite the talk-external connotations of the term 'distal'.

This section, then, is devoted to participants' categorization practices and to the way in which these are implicated in the production and interpretation of the encounter. In the following paragraphs, I will show that the meaning of E01 (and of its subsequent utterances)

depends on the fact that E and N view each other as members of the category [Muslim] I will also show that E and N orient to this categorial identity in a 'reifying' fashion, and that this process, the reification of categorial identities, is also implicated in bringing about the sense of E01 as an accusation. In this way, we will find an answer to the problem set at the beginning of this paper: how to characterize the 'awkward' adjacency relationship between N01 and E02.

The analysis of categorization practices draws heavily on the notions of 'membership categorization device' and 'category-bound activity' that were originally developed by Harvey Sacks (Sacks 1972a, 1972b; Hester & Eglin, eds., 1997). A membership categorization device consists of a collection of categories that may be applied to the members of a given population. 'Religion' would be one such device. Its different 'members' (or 'categorial identities') would include [Muslim], [Roman Catholic], etc.⁵ The notion of category-bound activity (Sacks 1972b) refers to an activity that is usually or typically done by the members of a category. In the case discussed here, 'going to the mosque to pray' would count as an instance of an activity bound to the category [Muslim].

Reification refers to the practice of "*treating social forms not merely as real but as separable from the reflexive contexts wherein they are produced by, and are aspects of, acting, creating individuals - their inter-relations and their actions*" (Maynard & Wilson 1980: 310-311, emphasis added). We will see that, in the data sample, N and E treat incumbency of the category [Muslim] as the outcome of abiding by an abstract rule, which exists prior to the situated practices through which that categorial identity may be accomplished. In this sense, N and E are indeed 'reifying' the categorial identity [Muslim]. Because this categorial identity is 'lifted' out of the context in which it was produced, it acquires the status of an 'external', 'compelling' social force which transcends the individual. This process, the transformation (through reification) of a categorization that is locally accomplished into an 'external' social force, comprises the second sense of (occasioning a) distal context.

Let us now turn to the analysis proper. The initial question we are faced with is: *how* is the categorial identity [Muslim] oriented to - and thereby enacted - in the opening lines of our data sample, given that none of the participants is explicitly categorized as a member of the

⁵ Hester & Eglin (1997) point out that membership categorization devices should not be regarded as fixed, pre-existing cognitive structures, but as locally assembled devices whose meaning and content inevitably depend on the situation in which they are put to use. Thus, depending upon *when* a categorization device is used and *by whom* it is used, its relevant members may vary. 'Religion' proves a case in point. In an East African context, the relevant members may in certain cases be confined to the categories [Muslim] and [Christian], while in other situations the scope may be broader so as to include [Sunni], [Shia], [Hindu], [Roman Catholic], [Protestant], etc. The occasioned character of the device 'Religion' is also aptly illustrated by the observation that, in order to sort an ironic effect, participants may include an notoriously non-religious category, like [Communist] for example, as a member of the device 'Religion'. (The remark also holds for the relationship between categories and category-bound activities and other category-features that are 'conventionally' associated with them.)

category [Muslim]? The answer must be found in the observation that 'going to the mosque' is a constitutive feature (Jayyusi 1984) of the category [Muslim]. (Note that, in this capacity, the constitutive feature has even been subjected to explicit discursive formulation, as one of the 'five pillars' of Islam.) Harvey Sacks and his followers have demonstrated extensively that there exist certain rules that connect category-bound features (of which category-bound activities are the most prominent) to categorial identities. There is one rule which stipulates, for example, that when someone is a witness to an activity being performed that *can* be interpreted as conventionally bound to a particular category, he or she *should* indeed interpret the performer of that activity as a member of that category (Sacks 1972b: 338). It is through the operation of this rule that E can legitimately interpret the description of an activity as 'going to the mosque' as making inferentially available the category [Muslim].⁶

We still have to answer the question how the description of remote behavior 'E is not going to the mosque' (and the distal context thus created) feeds back into the current exchange. First, in order to witness someone's absence in a mosque, it is imperative that one goes there oneself. Since going to the mosque is conventionally associated with the category [Muslim], N can warrantably be seen as claiming membership of that category for himself. Secondly, asking one's interlocutor whether he visits the mosque presumes that that interlocutor is indeed a member of the category [Muslim], in that it is this categorial identity that provides the relevant framework against which either presence or absence become meaningful events and can thus relevantly be inquired into. (One cannot relevantly ask a [Christian] whether he attends prayer in the mosque.) Taking into account this categorial background, asking whether one *does* pray in fact amounts to informing about the *quality* of one's category-membership (does one really comply with all the obligations constitutive of the categorial identity?). Note, moreover, that the spatiotemporal continuity of E's membership of the category [Muslim] is presupposed by N. Informing E about his *distal* breaches of the norm constitutive of the category [Muslim] thus constitutes a challenge to his *current* membership in the category [Muslim]. That E's behavior is indeed assessed in this way (i.e., as a derivative of the pre-existing category [Muslim]) implies that [Muslim] is oriented to in a reified fashion. On this occasion, therefore, reification of the categorial identity [Muslim] indeed contributes to the sense of the utterance as an *accusation*, i.e., a morally implicative challenge of E's categorial identity.

Now we can also appreciate how the two sense of distal context - (i) describing presumed shared remote events and (ii) accomplishing one's exchange as 'produced under the aegis of a particular categorial identity' - intersect. First, it is because of the spatiotemporal continuity of

⁶ The canon does not stipulate specifically that praying should be done *in* the mosque. In principle, it could be performed anywhere. Nevertheless, throughout the fragment the participants orient to 'going to the mosque' as an activity constitutive of the category [Muslim]. This is evident, for example, in the third segment of E02, where E performs an 'activity analysis' on the locale 'mosque': through substituting *-salia*, 'to pray', for the locative noun phrase *mashidini*, 'in the mosque', found in N01, E demonstrates an understanding that 'mosque' is a locale specifically intended for carrying out the activity of praying. Performing such an analysis on an item offered in a prior turn comprises one major procedure for demonstrating one's understanding of that turn (cf. Watson 1997).

the categorial identity [Muslim] that a mere description of a remote event in fact becomes a challenge. Also, examining categorization practices allows us to reinterpret the (dispute over) entitlement of knowledge of remote events as being rooted in the categorial identity [Muslim]. Praying, in so far as it is practiced in a mosque, has a public character. It is the public character of praying, and the connotation of religious zeal it carries, that provides N with the ammunition for perpetuating the reality disjuncture, even if 'external' knowledge of one's interlocutor's movements is ranked lower than first-hand 'internal' knowledge based on the 'subject-authorship' of those very (i.e., one's own) movements. Inspection of categorization practices thus provides an answer to the question why N's assertion of partial knowledge should develop into a mature reality disjuncture, taking into account that E is the subject-author of his own behavior and that N has inevitably only limited, 'external' access to the latter's actions.

This allows us to reconsider some of the points on reification made by Maynard and Wilson in their (1980) paper. At one point, they talk about reification as

[the] outcome of specific interactional procedures that accomplish, in the kinds of conversational accounts that are collaboratively made to happen, the *removal* of individuals from their biographical contexts of interaction and activity and the transformation of those individuals and their activities into derivatives of the categories employed in such conversational accounts. (1980: 310-311, emphasis added)

In our data sample, too, the participants treat each other as as derivatives of an abstract category. However, the analysis suggests that the claim that reification actually *removes* individuals from their biographical contexts is overstated. Instead, it appears that the two senses of distal context, co-biography and institutionalization, intersect, in the sense that one is mediated by the other and vice versa. Participants look at their own past behavior through the filter of membership categorization. At the same time, it is reified categorial identities that provide a warrant for contesting, and thus for drawing into the current encounter, relevant features of each other's biographies in the first place.

Coda: Typically Swahili?

In this paper, I have outlined an alternative approach to the analysis of the way(s) in which conversationalists may accomplish the institutional character of their encounter, which focuses on the distal context(s) made available as the conversationalists assemble their talk. In doing so, I have deliberately avoided the tricky issue of how to connect interactional phenomena to typical traits of Swahili culture, Islamic identity, etc. Of course, this is not meant to downplay the existence of cultural differences or the sociohistorical specificity of the interactional processes observed during fieldwork. Let me therefore briefly explain the rationale behind this decision. One of the primary aims of the tradition this paper is part of (Lave 1993, Giddens 1984) is the description of situated practices and the way they are anchored in time and space. Of course, continuities of practices across time and space do exist, but these continuities cannot be put on a par with 'cultures' in the traditional sense, conceived of as functionally

integrated wholes with, at the core, a common language (Kiswahili), a common religion (Islam), etc. Instead, the analysis of the data sample suggests that communities of the latter type are created, negotiated, sustained (and, not to forget, contested) as a constitutive part of participants' practices. In other words, it is because lay participants themselves construe and interpret their behavior as [Muslim], that a 'Muslim' community is created and, hence, that the notion 'Muslim' obtains analytical relevance. It also follows that a label like 'Swahili' has no explanatory value outside those instances where people themselves account for their own behavior as informed by their [Swahili] identity. This paper, then, contains a substantive analysis of a single occasion on which such a community is locally enacted.

The fragment discussed here was something I came across accidentally, and for the participants themselves it probably passed unnoticed (except for N, with whom I had long discussions afterwards). The arbitrariness with which this datum was collected should not be thought of as problematic, however. Using such seemingly uninteresting scraps of data for analytical purposes could also be regarded as an instance of what Goffman (1974: 5) referred to as "*sociologist's alchemy*", the arcane art by which "*any patch of ordinary social activity [is transmuted] into an illuminating publication*".

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