Spring 6-2024

Talking Yourself Up: Multimodal Conversation Analysis of Status in an Improvised Setting

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by

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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

Applied Linguistics

Thesis Advisor

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Portland State University

2024

Abstract

A single-case analysis looked at two individuals performing a scripted exercise during an Applied Improvisational workshop. The analysis examined how performers modify their linguistic and embodied actions in order to perform an assigned status role. The analysis was undertaken to better understand how social status can be constructed in everyday talk-in-interaction. I first outlined the three major theoretical frames that are relevant to the analysis: Applied Improvisation as a pedagogical approach, the use of Conversation Analysis (CA) for the analysis of language in educational contexts, and the concept of status from a sociological perspective. I then present a single-case study, which employed multimodal CA to examine the linguistic strategies utilized in the construction of high and low status in a scripted exercise. The two performers seemed to have similar linguistic behaviors when performing status. Low status role assignments often saw performers producing more pausal phenomena, non-lexical markers, and restarts; and high statue role assignments often led to a greater frequency of creaky voice in utterance-final position. Gestural changes were also analyzed and their relationship to a given status assignment was examined. In the conclusion, the implications of these findings and the potential for improv as a context for future linguistic research are discussed.

Improv in Learning Contexts

In essence, improvisational theater (hereafter, improv) is the intentional performance of conversation. The medium relies on the same interactional resources and norms that individuals utilize to make sense and construct intersubjectivity in everyday talk-in-interaction (Sacks et al,. 1974). Improv is a well established medium of performance in the Western world. Its modern form was arguably canonized by theater director Keith Johnstone. His seminal text *Impro: Improvisation and The Theater* (1979) has been highly influential within the theatrical community, providing an outline for how improvisation is often taught and performed. To this day, many improvisational troupes in the United States structure their shows around formats derived from Johnstone's original performing improv program *TheatreSports (*Johnstone, 2006).

Outside of the theatrical and entertainment world, theater practitioners and educators have adapted Keith Johnstone's original theories, developing his methods into the relatively new pedagogical approach of Applied Improvisation (Dudeck et al., 2021). Applied Improvisation (hereafter AI) utilizes Johnstone's approach to improvisation theater and applies it for teaching outside of theatrical contexts. While traditional improv often focuses more on entertaining an audience, AI focuses on training participants to understand and improve their communicative repertoires, training which they can then apply to everyday contexts.

AI exercises are didactic in nature, and often employ an experiential approach to learning. A given AI exercise can be devised to make the resources of interaction more explicit, so that participants are able to practice and become more aware of the linguistic or bodily actions that they utilize to enact everyday interactions. AI exercises vary greatly in content and structure, ranging from rhyming games to dialogic role-play. Between iterations, participants are often

asked to reflect on their performances (either internally or in dialog with other participants), and consider how they can adapt their performance to meet their target interactional goals. Exercises are often repeated, so that performers can trial and refine what they learn through iterative exercise. Exercises are often observed by trained AI facilitators, who can provide guidance between each iteration of an exercise (Dudeck et al., 2020). Research suggests that AI is a useful pedagogical approach for teaching and improving interactional skills in multiple contexts. Previous scholarship has highlighted its utility for easing conversational hesitancy for a new teacher (Shem-Tov, 2018) and improving interactional competency in cases of behavioral and neurological difference (Alana & Ansaldo, 2018).

Given AI's success as an approach to teaching people to better play a social role in real-life contexts, it is possible that analysis of AI exercises would reveal how those roles are constructed through talk-in-interaction. AI as a teaching approach does not tend to prescribe a specific way performers need to play certain roles. While AI instructors do provide guidance and feedback, performers are generally utilizing their own perceptions of societally understood ways to orient to a given role. If for example a performer is asked to play a doctor character in an exercise, they are expected to pull from their own linguistic repertoire and social knowledge when choosing the lexis, prosody, and bodily comportment that goes into doing "being a doctor". Because of this, AI seems to be a useful setting for exploring how performers perceive certain societal roles, and what linguistic and paralinguistic behaviors they believe will index those roles for their interlocutors.

Conversation Analysis in Educational Contexts

Conversation Analysis (CA) seems well suited for unpacking the intricacies of what goes on in an AI exercise. CA is a methodological approach for examining the structure of everyday conversation. Initially developed to operationalize the Ethnomethodological approach (Sacks et al., 1974), the approach attempts to describe the process by which interlocutors co-construct interactions. CA focuses on the linguistic actions of talk, describing the actions that occur, as well as what kinds of actions tend to collocate in the sequence. Analysts often work with audio and/or video recordings of interaction, and begin the analysis by constructing a detailed transcript of the interaction. The transcription tries to capture the fine details of naturalistic talk, capturing nuances like prosodic patterns, length of sounds, pauses, restarts, overlaps in talk, gesture, and many more of the discursive resources that individuals rely on to enact everyday talk-in-interaction.

The performance of an improvised scene, much like real-world naturalistic conversation, is linguistically complex and intricate. Details like prosody, lexis, turn-sequence, and the interpretation of speech acts are all critical features that performers utilize when producing the fictionalized reality of an improv scene. Additionally, improv is generally a dialogic medium, where there is often more than one ratified participant making contributions to the interaction. CA can be a great methodological tool for capturing the intricacy of language and the interplay between performers in the transcript, which can then be examined to see what behaviors are enacted in a performance.

AI is an interesting and mostly unexplored context for CA research. As an educational context, AI is not so different from a classroom setting, where CA has a long history of use. CA

has previously been employed in analysis of classroom interactions, examining how individuals orient to the roles of "student" or "teacher", and how classroom discourse is organized textually (Mehan, 1979). CA analysis is well suited to help uncover how individuals orient to the roles relevant to the classroom through their language and actions. Individuals "doing" a student or teacher role may orient to these roles by making certain register choices. They might also orient by observing and adhering to the interactional norms of the context. Some observed norms in classroom are the asymmetries of teacher-student discourse, where people orienting to the "teacher" role are often able to take longer and more frequent turns, while also allotted greater control over topic nomination and turn allocation compared to students (Heritage, 2005).

The classroom immediately becomes less useful when analysts wish to understand other sorts of roles that individuals can orient to in other contexts. While individuals in a classroom may often orient to roles such as "mother"or "mechanic" in other contexts in their lives, the nature of the classroom does not often make them relevant. This limitation is generally true with any sort of interactional data. The context of interaction is a critical component to linguistic choices (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992), and any data that shows the behavior and routines of one context may not be observable in another.

Improv however, and by extension AI, is unique in this regard. The specifics of an AI exercise may make relevant identities and roles not often found in the context of an interaction. An exercise may prompt participants to perform an interaction between a mother and daughter, or between a boss and their employee (which we will see later in the analysis). AI exercises can show how individuals conceptualize the interactional work of doing "being a boss" or "being an employee", and what language and behaviors go into orienting to and performing those roles. In

this way, analysis of AI can provide insights into how people think about this orientation work. These conceptualizations may in fact *not* be indicative of how individuals would actually orient to roles in naturalistic contexts, but the interaction would at least show what individuals think goes into *performing* a role. The perception of what constitutes orientation work is not evidence of the actual work of doing a role, but the perception is still informed by an individual's cultural knowledge. And that cultural knowledge is at least somewhat related to the resources that individuals rely on when orienting to roles and presenting identity in everyday life (Goffman, 1959). Mismatches between naturalistic orientation and performances would be notable, and analysis could help determine how language differs between the naturalistic and imagined context.

Previous sociolinguistic research has used CA methods in more traditional improvised entertainment settings. Scholars have used sequential analysis to examine how improv troupes rapidly recontextualize previous talk in the creation of improvised language games (Trester, 2012) as well as how co-constructed improvised performances can often lead to ambiguity of the principal in Goffman's production format (Toye & Trester, 2014). However, there does not seem to be current research that applies CA methods to AI contexts. Given previous use of CA in the analysis of other educational contexts, it seems plausible that the method would be applicable here, given the educational nature of AI. And given AI's ability to make relevant different kinds of identities and the work needed to orient to them, AI offers a useful context to explore questions about role orientation that are not often observable in classic classroom settings.

Analyzing Status with CA

While I have thus far described the theoretical framework employed in my analysis as CA, it's important to discuss why some scholars in the field may take issue with using the methodology to answer a questions related to social status.

Conversation Analysis operates on the underlying assumption that the reality of a given interaction can be understood by examining how participants respond and orient to the talk of their interlocutors (Schegloff, 2007). Analysis relies on how interlocutors construct their turns and how they respond to one other's turn in order to understand the nature of the interaction and the intersubjectivity interlocutors co-construct. Speculation on the intentionality of interlocutors is discouraged, and analysts are discouraged from attempting to apply their own interpretations of "what people were thinking" to analysis. Additionally, it is common for analysis to begin from the perspective of "unmotivated looking" (Sacks, 1992), without bringing any pre-established sociological theories to the analytic process with the aim to test the validity of the theory. CA employs these epistemological guidelines with the hope that the resulting analysis will remain ontologically 'neutral', and that analysts will be able to describe the way that interlocutors interpreted the nature of the interaction, rather than the analyst's own interpretation of the meaning behind participants' actions. In this very traditional view of CA, pre-conditional aspects of status, like identity or context, would not be applicable. If analysts begin by assuming that someone orienting to a "boss" role would be assuming a higher social status, and then seek evidence for in the data, their preconceptions would potentially misrepresent the interaction. And if another analyst approached the data with a contrary assumption, they may produce a conflicting account.

This framework supposes that analysts can observe participant's interaction and interpretation of events as they unfold, and then describe the nature of the interaction as close to the participants' understanding of events as possible. This ideological stance in CA has both been lauded as core to the strand's success (Schegloff, 1997), and subsequently criticized by scholars who question the usefulness of CA data in answering critical questions about the roles and identities relevant to the interaction. Critics also cast doubts on whether analysts can truly be ideologically 'neutral' when examining conversation (Billig 1999a). The nature of CA as an neutral analytic tool is still frequently debated within the strand. And there is some conjecture regarding how strict the "traditional" approach to CA actually behaves in practice (Wetherell, 1998; Billig 1999b; Schegloff, 1999).

To avoid this epistemological conflict, CA researchers using Critical Theory commonly employ a two-part analysis. The sequential analysis should be completed first, and analysts should complete the detailed transcription of interaction without specific expectations of what they will find in the data. After the nature of the interaction is thoroughly described, the sequence can then be incorporated as evidence in a critical analysis. CA scholars have previously employed this approach with great success, transcribing the sequence of interaction with an "ontologically neutral" lens, then using the sequence as empirical evidence for a sociological argument (see Kitzenger & Frith, 1999). Applied approaches to CA (Antaki, 2011) often relax the epistemological guidelines surrounding "unmotivated looking" when conducting analysis. However, I would argue that this thesis adhered to the traditional approach. While all of the researchers involved in the initial development of the sequential analysis were interested in some aspect of status and how it might appear in the data, analysis was not conducted with

expectations of what kind of work would occur in the construction of status, and analysis of the sequence was completed before we began making connections between the data and established theories of social status.

Defining Status

The analysis focused on how performers orient to different kinds of roles in an AI exercise. Alongside orienting to a boss or employee social role, the exercise prompts performers to perform the exercise multiple times, each time with varying status assignments. Performers were asked to either perform the scene as ‘high status’ or ‘low status’. For our purposes, it’s important to define what status means in an AI context, as well as in a broader sociological one.

Status, or one’s relative power and authority in a sociocultural hierarchy, is a widely recognized social phenomenon. However, concise and universal definitions of status are difficult to find in sociological theory. Status is often associated with conceptions of social power. Some approaches consider power as it relates to individual agency, and is understood as the capacity for an individual to make certain choices, and the authority to influence the circumstances and choices of others (Weber, 1978, p. 53). That authority is sometimes thought to be bestowed upon individuals by the institutions of a given culture, but some theories assert that power is not necessarily created and held by institutions, but rather is a pervasive societal reality that is only operationalized by agents within a society (Foucault, 1977). Working on this definition, status could perhaps be thought of as the perception that an individual does or is able to operationalize power in context. For example, an employer may not have created the power structures that grant them authority over their employees, but if employees believe that their employer is able to act upon their authority, they may be perceived as a higher status individual. Other approaches to

power and status focus more on the construction of status through social action, and how power relationships are constructed and negotiated in everyday interaction (Ekström & Stevanovic, 2023). In this analysis, I found it necessary to understand how status is informed by the macro distribution of authority, as well as how the outcome of interaction shapes status relationships.

An individual's status is in part related to their identity, which is informed by both avowed and ascribed factors. Common identity factors like age, race, sexuality, gender, nationality, class, education, and career are just some examples of what plays into the perceived status of an individual. The specific value of an identity factor will differ between communities. One culture may place higher value on a certain gender role, but another community may value high education more when evaluating status. Linguists also recognize the role of linguistic repertoire in status. The specific language or variety someone speaks can often index certain identity factors and personality traits. Certain languages/varieties will be associated with the social group that uses them, and the social prestige of that group within the larger community will impact the status of the given language (Giles, 1979). For users of a lower prestige language or variety, language can often index lower perceived social status for its users (Lippi-Green, 2011). These aspects of status function as preconditions to interaction, as an individual's life experience determines which identity factors are relevant to them.

While not all of these identity factors will be relevant in every interaction, they can be made relevant through the nature of the interaction. Using the CA terminology, we can say that status is locally occasioned. The nature of a given interaction will make certain identity factors relevant, based on the specifics of the context (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992). In a given interaction, interlocutors will orient to certain norms, which will be determined by factors like the identities

of interlocutors, the topic of the interaction, or the context in which the interaction takes place. Additionally, individuals may or may not abide by the anticipated norms of interaction. For example, in an interaction between and an employee and their boss, the preconditions of their roles within the workplace hierarchy will be made relevant, and the nature of their social roles will in part establish their relative status relationship. There will be asymmetries in their respective authority in the workplace context, which will inform the expected status relationship of interlocutors. However, their actions and language can be incongruent to the "expected" social role. Employees in low status positions can temporarily take on a higher status, regardless of their relative authority in the workplace, and employers can likewise take on a lower status. This may be done intentionally, like in a case where an individual deliberately makes linguistic choices that defy the norms of a given context. Changes in status may also be unintentional, like when an individual fails to meet the expectations of their given institutional role. This aspect of status can be thought of as a descendant of interaction, as status relationships are shaped and negotiated as a result of everyday talk-in-interaction. AI provides its own definition of status that aligns well with this action-oriented perspective, as Johnstone defined status as "something someone *does*." (1979, p. 28). Johnstone also recognizes the co-construction of status, and proposes the See-Saw Principle, in which the performance of status often involves the endowment of status onto others. As someone performs a higher status, their actions also threaten to lower the status of their interlocutors (1979, p. 30).

So, the specific status balance between two interlocutors is informed by preconditions, like the aforementioned identity factors, but also forms as a result social interaction playing out. The goal of this thesis was not to better understand the social motivations that lead individuals to

orient to certain status roles, or what aspects of identity permit individuals to assume them. Rather, I attempted to understand what kinds of linguistic choices individuals associate with the performance of certain social statuses and roles. If the aforementioned boss does choose to orient to a lower status role in an interaction, how do they do so through their language and actions? And what kind of linguistic and communicative behaviors do they associate with a particular status role?

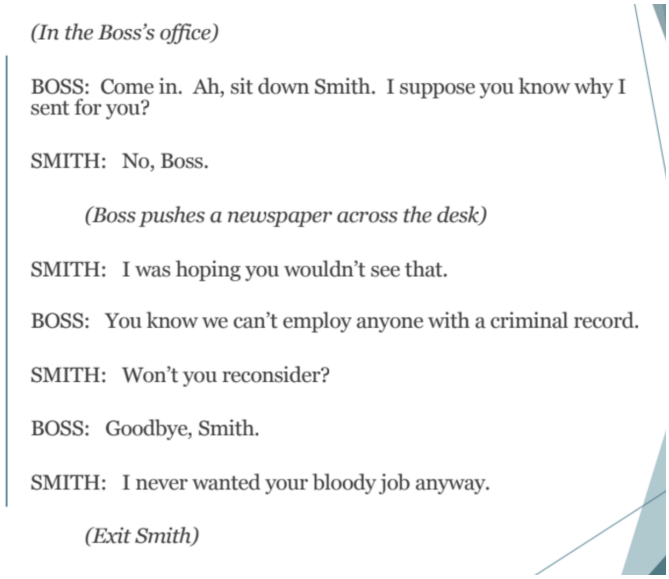
Research Design

The data analyzed come from a series of Applied Improvisation Workshops conducted at Portland State University between 2020-2023. The workshops were primarily focused on working with instructors in the fields of Linguistics, Speech & Hearing Science, Speech Language Pathology, and Second Language Education. The workshops intended to make instructors more aware of their implicit pragmatic awareness of everyday contexts, with the goal of both improving their ease in these contexts, as well as help performers bring their new awareness into their practice as educators. The research project has primarily focused on the use of AI to improve communication skills for students, with a focus on AI's utility in L2 teaching of Pragmatics. The ongoing project is headed by a multidisciplinary team of professors from the Applied Linguistics, Theater, and Speech & Hearing Sciences (Roberts et al., forthcoming).

The specific exercise examined is based on the "Keith Johnstone Status Script". In this exercise, two performers read from a prepared script, which depicts a scene where a boss fires an employee, as seen in Figure 1. This format is also commonly referred to as "Status Roulette".

Figure 1

Keith Johnstone Status Script from the AI workshop's powerpoint.



The performers were asked to perform four sequential readings of the script, each time with different configuration of status assignments. Each performer completed two readings of each status level. The sequence of status assignments is outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Sequence of Status Assignments.

I. High-Boss / Low-Employee (HB-LE)
II. Low-Boss / High-Employee (LB-HE)
III. High / High (HB-HE)
IV. Low / Low (LB-LE)

Before the exercise, performers were given a brief overview of the concept of status and some ways in which it can be performed, including suggestions on verbal and non-verbal strategies, and then given the scripted to perform.The guidelines and suggestions for performing status were presented very briefly in the workshop, and so this analysis assumed that linguistic

choices were still largely informed by the participant's own linguistic repertoire and sociocultural perceptions, rather than the prescribed guidelines alone. Performers were given very minimal guidelines on how the scene should be acted. Many of the specifics of the scene were left to performer's interpretation The exact nature of the boss/employee dynamic, such as where they work, what kind of work each one does, how well the characters know each other, etc. were all left up to interpretation.

Analysis was conducted on a video recording of the two performers completing the exercise. Analysts of the 503 Design Collective at Portland State University transcribed the recordings using Jeffersonian conventions (Sacks et al, 1974), augmented with images to capture multimodal aspects of performance (Goodwin, 2017). The analysis began as a group transcription exercise, and the data was chosen due to the quality of the audio and video. The exercise began without any specific goals for the analysis, and no expectations about what we would find in the data. After the initial analysis and transcription, I personally refined the transcripts for consistency across readings. Then, analysts worked together to note how performances differed between each of the four readings. We examined how performers deviated from the written guidelines, as well as how paralinguistic qualities and embodied actions changed for performers depending on a performer's assigned status.

Analysis

Extra Work

Here I am using the term "extra work" to refer to any linguistic or paralinguistic behaviors that occur in a reading that are not specified in the script. Extra work primarily refers to pausal phenomena, non-lexical markers ("ehh" or "um"), restarts, change of state tokens (ex.

"oh!") or the elongation of words. It also includes instances where words are emphasized (transcribed with underline) in a way that was notably different between readings. I found there was a notable pattern to what kinds of extra work occurred based on the status assignment.

In both readings, performers produced some sort of extra work. However, performers produced extra work far more often when playing low status. In low status readings, words are frequently elongated, pauses and restarts are more frequent, and non-lexical markers often appear turn-initial. Some examples of this are seen in Excerpt 1, where the performer playing the boss character produces more work when playing low status.

Note the syllable elongation and more frequent prosodic breaks highlighted in Excerpt 1 that are not present in Excerpt 2. A similar pattern is also present for the performer playing the employee character, where more work occurs in the low status reading depicted in Excerpt 3 compared to Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 1

Low Status Boss (LB) reading the line "Come in. Ah, sit down smith.".

```
02 B: oh! (.) come in! Uhh, please, ssit do:wn smith.
```

Excerpt 2

High Status Boss (HB) reading the line "Come in. Ah, sit down smith.".

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02 B: come  in.
03    (0.5)
04 B:  sit down smith,
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Excerpt 3

Low Status Employee (LE) reading the line "I was hoping you wouldn't see that".

07 E: .hhhh! (.5) I was hho:ping you wou:ldn't see tha:t

Excerpt 4

High Status Employee (HE) reading the line "I was hoping you wouldn't see that".

09 E: I was hoping you #wouldn't see that# ((unfriendly tone))

For analysts, this extra linguistic work contributed greatly to the perception of the epistemic stance of the characters in the script-reading. Lines delivered without extra work tended to seem more confident. For the boss character, lines delivered with extra work seemed to convey a greater epistemic distance between the upcoming termination of employment and the boss's stance on the firing. Conversely, a lack of extra work made the boss character seem more epistemically aligned with the upcoming termination.

Creaky Voice

One unique behavior for both participants was the use of creaky voice at the end of turns (transcribed with ##). Both performers produced creaky voice in both readings in some form, but both performers produced creaky voice more often in high status readings in turn-final position. Examples of this pattern can be seen for both the boss and employee in Excerpts 5 and 6 respectively.

Excerpt 5

High Status Boss (HB) Creaky Voice.

10 B: >|you know| we can't employ anyone with a #criminal
11 record.#< ((lips pursed))

Excerpt 6

High Status Employee (HE) Creaky Voice.

07 E: ((puffs air out of nose)) (1.0) I was hoping you wouldn't
08 see: #that.#

Creaky voice in English, sometimes known as vocal fry, is a well-documented linguistic phenomenon with an array of interactional functions and identity associations. It's common for creaky voice to function as a prosodic marker for the end of an utterance or at a Transition Relevance Place (Schegloff, 2007). Historically, its use in utterance-final positions has been associated with higher deontic authority. In some cases, its use was also associated with masculinity and male gender identity (Davidson, 2021). In recent years, creak has also become heavily associated with the linguistic repertoire of younger American women. Specifically, women in workplace settings who are rising into higher positions in their field (Yuasa, 2010).

Given the documented sociocultural connotations between creaky voice and social status, it's possible the use of creaky voice here is informed by the performers' associations between creak and perceived authority. This could explain why creaky voice patterns somewhat regularly for both performers across status roles. In high status roles, the usage aligns well with Davidson's description of how creak indexes authority when used utterance-final with falling intonation. A potential connection between gender roles, creak, and status is notable, but I caution to attribute these findings to the performers' association of creaky voice with a specific

gender role, and by extension a perception of a given gender's social status. Recent work on creaky voice has challenged the widely held notion that linguistic features like creaky voice can be so easily mapped to binary gender, and highlight how style and register seem to be a better indicator for the frequency of creak (Becker et al. 2022). All this said, there does seem to be a connection between the use of creaky voice and status for the performers, as both performers tend to use creak more when playing high status in similar contexts.

Pushing the paper

Another area where performers were able to augment the script to perform status was in their gestural and embodied choices. In interaction, language and the body are known to function as distinct but intertwined modalities working together in space-time to produce meaning as "Multimodal gestalts" (Mondada, 2018). Gesture, posture, gaze, and movement in these performances were highly influential in how analysts perceived the performance of status, and while this thesis only presents a single example of the role of this extralinguistic content, bodily routines seemed greatly informed by the status assignments.

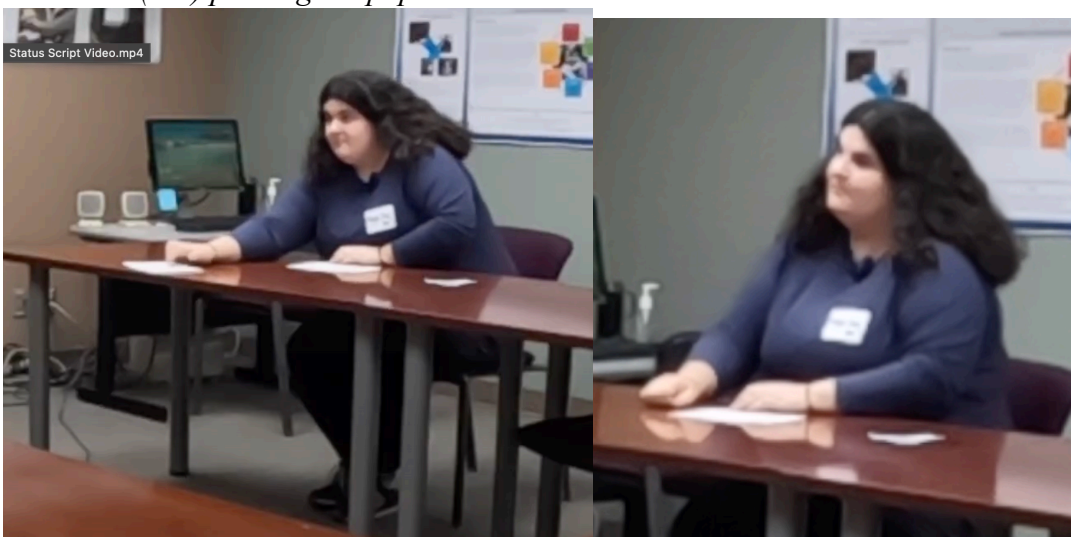
Take the singular stage direction present in the script: "*Boss pushes a paper across the desk",* a generally motiveless direction when taken out of context. In practice, the enactment of this direction proved critical to the perception of the boss's relative power and stance in this part of the scene. This is where performers were given the greatest freedom to augment the written text, and where we see great variations between high and low status readings.

In both high status readings, the boss leans into the table to begin the action, and keeps their gaze on the employee throughout the paper-pushing motion. In Figure 3, note the details of the performer's body language. They move the paper in a quick, sharp motion across the table,

then punctuate the motion by knocking 3 times on the paper. They then move their hand away from the paper, and reset their posture to their orientation before the action. They then maintain eye-contact with the employee throughout the employee's next turn.

Figure 3

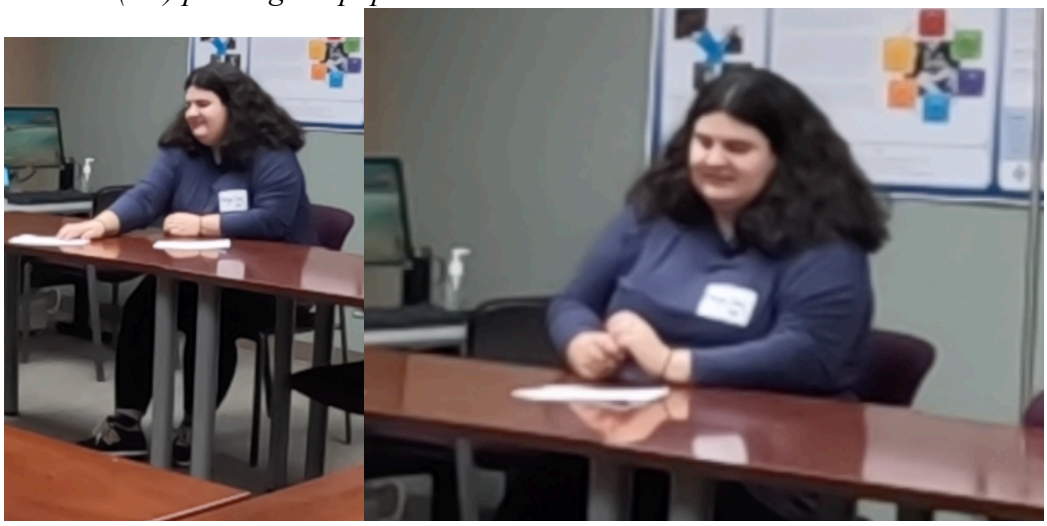
High Status Boss (HB) pushing the paper.



In contrast, we see a very different approach in the low status readings pictured in Figure 4. The low-status boss rarely has their gaze towards the employee during the action. The performer is either looking down and away from the employee, or looking at the paper as they push it. And the movement of the paper is slow and measured, taking much longer to complete than the high status readings. They do not punctuate the action with knocks on the table like they do in high status readings, and they complete the action by pulling their hands in towards their body in a rapid motion, once again averting their gaze until the employee takes their next turn.

Figure 4

Low Status Boss (LB) pushing the paper.



These different performances of a stage direction greatly contributed to analyst's perception of status. In all readings, the action of pushing the paper seemed to function as a directive, as the employee always followed the action by approaching the desk and reading the paper. But in high status performances, the directive seemed stronger, and more like a command. Conversely, pushing the paper in low status performances felt more passive, almost suggesting a disconnect between the boss character's stance on the decision to fire the employee. In all performances, the semantic content of the interaction was unchanged, but this gestural work greatly impacted how analysts perceived the boss's stance on the content and goals of the interaction.

Conclusion

This analysis provides one look at how, even when the content of an interaction is predetermined, changes in paralinguistic behavior, gesture, and gaze can dramatically impact the perceived status of an individual. Additionally, the status script exercise showcases how

individuals possess the ability to change their linguistic behaviors to conform to the different status assignments, pointing to some level of metalinguistic awareness on how status is constructed discursively. Performers are able to modulate an intricate array of communicative factors in order to perform their assigned status roles, and the two performers we observed seemed to modulate these dimensions in similar ways.

While it's possible that not every participant in this kind of script-reading exercise would perform status as explicitly as the pair analyzed here, it is notable that two individuals had similar patterns of usage for high and low status, suggesting that there is some sort of shared understanding of what constitutes "being high status" and "being low status" for these performers. Low status readings often saw greater frequency of pausal phenomena, non-lexical markers, restarts, and the elongation of words. And high status readings saw greater frequency of turn-final creaky voice. Additionally, status assignments influenced the gestural actions of performers, choices which conveyed very different epistemic stances, as in the differing interpretations of the direction of "pushing the paper" for the fictional 'boss' character.

This thesis is just one example of how CA can be applied to data from AI exercises, and I see good reason to explore the context further. AI provides a new context complimentary to previous research on classroom discourse. The context provides a similar educational context, but one where analysts can observe role and identity orientations that are not often made relevant in traditional classroom contexts. AI can also highlight how individuals conceptualize the linguistic work that underpins certain social roles and identities that are not a part of their own identity. It can showcase what individuals *think* constitutes the work of doing a certain role,

which may or may not contrast with evidence of what people actually tend to do in naturalistic contexts.

CA could also be a beneficial tool for the AI scholar. CA provides a refined analytic tool that allows for the examination of the discrete factors that make up interaction, which could be invaluable for scholars wishing to provide empirical support for the theories that underpin AI pedagogy. Much like I have done in this thesis, CA allows the analyst to identify discrete aspects of a performance as separately observable factors in the discourse. CA has been be a useful tool in the refinement of pedagogy and teaching interventions in language learning contexts (Wong & Waring, 2021), and that function could translate well to other educational contexts. If for example AI practitioners wanted to understand why a performer's choice are perceived as "better" or "worse" in an improvised interaction, sequential analysis could help untangle the myriad of linguistic factors that contribute to a positive or negative perception of a performance, and then offer suggestions to instructors on what linguistic factors to target in learning exercises.

Improvisers in theatrical settings already utilize an observational process for refinement of performance. Improv exercises in both theatrical and applied settings usually function on a model of Practice-Application-Reflection (Dudeck et al., 2018). Performers are taught the basics of a given exercise, either through instruction or observation of performance. After some initial practice, performers apply their experience by performing the exercise themselves. Other improvisers acting as observers will often give direction and comment on the performer's choices between iterations. This process is a very transparent and informal way of refining a performer's self-awareness, helping them align their intentions with how they are perceived on stage. In a way, an improv troupe is quite an idealized model for how a community of practice

regulates and defines the norms of the interaction, one where regulation is openly discussed as a part of the standard cultural routine.

For AI scholars and instructors, CA provides an analytic approach to the reflection phase of this process, which could provide granular insights into a performer's choices that would otherwise be difficult to describe in the context of an active rehearsal or workshop. This sort of analysis would also be easy to complete on a larger body of data, which would allow it to be more generalizable to a larger population of performers.

Limitations and Future Goals

This analysis is of course quite limited in scope. The analysis only looked at a single iteration of the full status script exercise. Analysis of a larger body of data would be useful for identifying more widespread trends in the performance of status within a given community. Another limitation in this analysis was the awareness of specific status assignments in each reading by the panel of analysts. Ideally, this aspect of the exercise would be obscured in some way during the development of the sequential transcript, so that analysts can approach data without preconceptions of which roles individuals are attempting to perform in each iteration. This "status agnostic" approach better aligns with CA epistemology, and would also make the analysis better equipped for evaluating AI instruction. Mismatches between an assigned status role and analyst perception of status roles would be more apparent, and analysts would then be better equipped to identify what factors contributed to a "successful" performance of the intended status role, and which ones did not. Additionally, future analysis of AI exercises should incorporate more focus on gesture. While this analysis touched on one feature of gestural and

embodied action, there were many nuances in this space that I could not touch on within the scope of this analysis.

Like previous research on improvisation from linguistic perspectives (Landert, 2021; Trester, 2012), as well as previous research on CA as a tool for pedagogical development (Hellermann, 2018), the question of how performers conceptualize the work of status could be better understood through analysis of a larger body of data, as well as through longitudinal analysis of a specific group of performers over a series of exercises. An ideal research project would follow a fixed group of participants over the course of multiple improvisation classes. A fixed cohort would allow analysts to examine a specific group's perceptions and choices, and how their language change over the course of repeated practice. While the AI workshops that these analyzed data come from did have returning participants, the nature of the workshops makes this comparative analysis challenging. The workshops occurred over the course of a few years, and through different mediums of delivery. The intermittent frequency of workshops makes it difficult to examine the behaviors and incremental changes in performance for a specific set of participants. Additionally, the initial workshops were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions. Virtual interaction often has different medium factors, and will often manifest differently that face-to-face interaction. This is especially true for gestural and embodied actions, as the nature of a video influences the perception of bodies interacting in space-time. This makes it quite difficult to compare the early workshops to those conducted face-to-face, which reduces the available data for comparative analysis.

Thinking locally for future research, multiple theaters across the Portland Metropolitan area offer improvisation classes that span 5-10 weeks with a fixed cohort. One such theater,

Curious Comedy Theater, already has sophisticated audiovisual equipment for live-streaming performances. Given the existing data collection infrastructure and ongoing classes, the financial barriers to such a research project would be considerably lower than developing, funding, staffing, and recruiting participants for an entirely new workshop and data-collection research project. Additionally, the structure of the classes (one 2-hour class per week) could provide a more focused look at how performers change over time. These sort of classes are not technically *Applied* Improvisation, but rather a more classic Improvisation theater context. However, I think that the ideas explored throughout this thesis are just as relevant in this context. Improv classes are still a kind of educational context, and the exercises performed in these classes would still provide examples of individuals orienting to social roles not often found in the classroom. Regardless of the exact plan for future research and data collection, I believe that improvisation contexts are an interesting area for the study of interaction and learning which warrant further investigation.

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