Midterm Paper

The participants of the study are myself and my friend. My name is Aiden and my friend's name is Alex. We have been friends together for roughly around 2 years. The conversation took place during us having lunch together within a district-wide summer internship program that we are both a part of. Over the course of this program, which takes place at a high school in our district, we have regularly been having lunch together discussing our time in the program and other relevant topics. The conversation is centered mostly around us talking about our own internships as well as other aspects of our high school experience, where, for context, we are each serving an internship for two different organizations/local businesses in our city. We are talking outside within a particular cafeteria area where students might normally eat lunch, sitting on different seats at the same table. We are positioned so that my face is directly facing his, but our bodies are located more closely to one side of the table, so we are not directly across from each other. We don't move throughout the conversation except for when parts of my lunch fly away from the table, at which point I get up, throw the trash away, and return to my original position, while he turns his head away to look at the unfolding event.

Throughout the interaction, I in particular am most focused on looking towards my friend's right. This happens in three distinct cases: when I am thinking of what to say as I am saying it or in response to some question, thinking of something to say to fill in some sort of awkward silence, or waiting for him to continue talking. In the first scenario, where more active, thoughtful thinking is occurring, I tend to look sort of upwards, while in the second scenario, when I am just trying to grasp at anything to ask or tell my friend to get rid of the silence, I glance down towards the table that we are eating on. In the third scenario, I simply lose the interest in maintaining eye contact with him, sometimes glancing at my burger or down at the table while he takes a brief

moment to pause during his sentence and think about what he needs to say next, immediately gazing at him again after he resumes talking. All scenarios involve me looking to the right of my friend, never too much to my own left. Other times I may look down at the table or somewhere else could be due to the mention of some awkward topic. For example, my friend mentioned the name of a high school that I had never heard of, to which I questioned and intentionally tried to made humor out of the fact that I did not know. He responded with “It’s for the kids who drop out,” to which I let out an extended “oh” in realization and slight shame at making fun of the topic, leading me to gaze down to my burger. Another thing to note is that both of us often reverted to looking at the food in our hands whenever we did break off eye contact or looking at each other. In terms of attention span, I look at him the longest whenever I deliver a complete, uninterrupted sentence or whenever he does the same (both are never more than a few seconds long).

Shifting the focus to my friend, I believe that his gaze does not necessarily indicate his level of attention span. Unlike myself, he does not look at me the entire time I am saying a complete sentence, instead making brief glances at me indirectly, not even making eye contact. However, he is clearly shown to be listening to me whenever I talk throughout the whole conversation, despite not making full-on eye contact the entire time, based on how active his eye movements are and how alert he seems to be. His gaze flits wildly, often looking to his own right or my own left as he processes what I am saying, a lot more eye movement then what I was expressing. Similar to me, he also looks to his side, usually to his own right as he thinks about what to say next. His glances are also particularly reactive to what he is feeling in the moment, most primarily humor, where, for example, he glanced to the right often as he was telling me about the high school mentioned above.

In terms of resources we utilize to direct attention to ourselves or other objects, occasionally we each use stutters, repeating certain words to reestablish our sentences to capture the other's attention. For example, after an interruption that made me halt the initial recording, my friend started our refreshed conversation with a repetition of the word "I'm," which successfully got me to glance at him after originally making eye contact and then shifting focus to my burger. Similarly, my friend also attempted to gather my attention back to him after looking at me directly but noticing that I was focusing on putting a tomato on my burger through a kind of swallowing sound, relying on the noise made by his throat, following the movements I was making with my burger. Most of the time, I believe I am just kind of looking at his actions, not really trying to get him to look at me because he is still talking to me. As I have previously established, his lack of eye contact does not mean a lack of attention. One consistent instance of this that I can identify is when I will occasionally make a pointing gesture when I am talking to indicate that I am talking about him, glancing at him despite him not returning eye contact and not saying anything of his own (often when he is eating his own burger). So mostly the resources used seem to focus on directing attention away from our other behaviors (most primarily eating) and towards whoever is speaking, especially when we are not sure if we are heard or being paid attention to.

Anthropological Theories:

There definitely are points where second-order phenomena could manifest within our conversation, especially when we answer the other's question regarding an aspect of our internships, in which case we can respond with a level of expertise and react to that response with mutual respect. In those instances, seeing how those phenomena may appear micro-interactionally is entirely possible. It might be slightly more difficult to observe how

certain social categories manifest within the conversation above due to us talking primarily about our summer internship experiences, which have little or nothing to do with our gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or other particular personal factor. However, Goodwin's approach to a more interaction-heavy perspective on linguistics can definitely apply to our conversation, as well as Harvey Sacks' accompanying theories regarding turn-talking, where there are several instances my friend and I adjust our speaking or vocal action in reaction to gaze, attention, or some other factor (such as the use of a phrasal break), and many more may exist. Peirce's theory of signs or semiotics may also be entirely representable throughout the conversation, where something that one of us says may conjure a particular statement about ourselves that we come to interpret and take into account in our own way, perhaps even resulting in an infinite semiosis, although because parts of our conversation do come to a definite end that is most likely not the case. Barrett's detailing of authenticity may definitely arise in the specific words that my friend and I use while describing our internships to present ourselves as being a part of those professional worlds that we have been introduced to (in this case IT and museum work). Peirce's definition of indexicality as relayed by Barrett can most certainly be applied to our conversation, where the language forms utilized can point to our own identities and social contexts, supported by Ochs' definition of index as a particular language structure that can change depending on the situation, and by Silverstein's definition of indexical orders.

Difference from formal linguistics:

Language's capacity for meaning and effecting social action is largely understood as being based on concepts such as felicity, which determine whether a performative is considered successful or not in its ability to bring about some form of social change. Although my own anthropological research does not take place in a formal setting and therefore does not feature any performative

statements that have any official impact on the real world, anthropological research seeks to relate how language forms and sentence structure, things that formal linguistics focus purely on, can impact people's social lives and influence social context. Next, the relationship between control and creativity is largely understood from an anthropological perspective as having control or agency within a given social context can result in unrestricted, limitless creativity, while in formal linguistics, creativity might be thought in terms of the words used and not necessarily the social contexts they come from and have a subsequent effect on. My own anthropological research shows how both my friend and I are able to take control of the conversation to propose our own ideas to impose onto one another, where essentially more agency means the stronger of an effect our creative actions have on each other and ourselves. For example, there is a specific moment where I encourage my friend to join another club (specifically one that I am involved in) to improve his extracurriculars in preparation for college applications, where my control over the conversation allows me to exert my own desires for my friend onto him, thanks to the freedom my creativity has to come up with these requests. The focus on indexicality, when viewed through an anthropological lens compared to formal linguistics, where language may not be thought of as referring to something specific about someone or some social environment, can showcase how speakers are able to use language to cleverly refer to the things or people around them, including, in particular, the use of humor and how certain words may give off entirely different levels of appropriateness depending on the social context in which they are used. For example, there is an instance in the conversation where I light heartedly refer to the work I have done in my internship as "child labor," eliciting a short chuckle from my friend and a smile from myself.

Citations:

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