



INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE *ARTYKUŁ WPROWADZAJĄCY*

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“HANDFULS OF WORLD”: SACKS STUDIES PART 2

Abstract

This essay is introducing the second part of the thematic issue on Harvey Sacks. The first part of the thematic issue was published in *Przegląd Socjologiczny* 74(3) in 2025. Both parts have been timed to coincide with the anniversaries of Sacks's birth in 1940, his death in 1975; and the publication of the single-volume *Lectures on conversation* in 1995. Across both parts of the thematic issue, we realize that Sacks's work is still radical, relevant and vital for ethnomethodological programmes (ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, membership categorization analysis), linguistics and sociology. In this essay we introduce the contents of this part of the thematic issue, and connections are established between the two parts of the thematic issue.

Keywords: Harvey Sacks, constructive analysis, ethnomethodology, membership categorization, studies of work

INTRODUCTION

An initial insight for sociologists reading this thematic issue is that Harvey Sacks demonstrated that language was a social institution *sui generis*. Although some theorists had acknowledged the importance of language, notably George Herbert Mead, language was treated as representational, e.g. signs, symbols, or a vehicle to administer power. As McHoul [2025] highlights in the first part of this thematic issue, Sacks framed his revolutionary work in contrast with Chomsky's "transformational grammar", which had set the terms for debate about the study of language at the time. When Sacks began delivering his lectures (now collected together as Sacks [1995]), sociology did not consider "language" to be a topic, as an institution in and of itself [Watson 2009]. Whilst sociologists studied social institutions such as power and work, they had yet to take the "linguistic turn", which enabled analysts to examine how social institutions were organized through language.

In the first part of this essay [Carlin 2025] we summarized Sacks's teachings on social theory and on social structure. Here we note that informed commentaries on Sacks's work have placed different emphases on Sacks's legacies. Writing for psychologists, Derek Edwards suggests "Sacks's legacy might be construed as anti-psychological, in that he focuses on talk as situated social action rather than a product of mind" [Edwards 1995: 593]. Throughout Jeff Coulter's review essay, Sacks is presented as a logician: readers "will find in these lectures an *abundance* of insights, arguments and, above all, logical demonstrations pertaining to the *sui generis* properties of human social conduct, whose rigor and originality are quite without precedent in the history of sociology" [Coulter 1995: 328; emphasis in original]. One of Sacks's students formulated his legacies as an "analytic mentality" which, in terms of procedural approach to phenomena, ran counter to prevailing methods¹ and entailed a strict adherence to what could or could not be considered as "eligible" data:

studies restrict their corpus of data to naturally occurring interactions; they share materials drawn from a wide range of circumstances [...]; they ground their analytic concerns in detailed observations instead of preferred models; they are oriented toward conversation as an essentially interactional activity; they focus on the sequential emergence of turn-by-turn talk; they offer conceptual schemes for characterizing the interface between local

¹ "The materials under study were not elicited, remembered, or invented to provide illustration for some analytic design, to exercise some research apparatus, or to examine some preferred hypothesis" [Schenkein 1978: 2]. Sacks's analytic mentality is returned to in this issue [Relieu, Félix, Watson].

context and abstract culture; they employ a standard transcript technology stimulating close attention to the productional details of conversational utterances; they share a commitment to building nonintuitive descriptions of the phenomena under study [Schenkein 1978: 6].

And more recently, an innovative presentation [Smith, Fitzgerald, Housley 2021] collected together a series of open-ended discussions on Sacks, affording contributors with opportunities to establish what Sacks’s legacies were to them, as individual scholars.² Contributors write to the questions: “What does Sacks’s work mean to me?” and “How has Sacks influenced my own work?”. These occasion a wide range of debating points and topics for what we are calling “Sacks studies”.³

We are using the term “Sacks studies” both to elevate Sacks’s status as a key thinker and to ask what has become a pertinent question. Beyond what some view as the reified fields of conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis, what now for scholars using Sacks? Hence, our editorial line takes inspiration from the following observation:

let us not eviscerate Sacks’s broader inquiries into social activities. His and Garfinkel’s original and generative horizons of inquiry need to be kept alive, and we should endeavor to retain the vital perspectives that are essential for ethnomethodological inquiries [Lieberman 2024: 467].

Formulating “Sacks studies”, then, seeks to raise Sacks’s visibility within conceptual, methodological and theoretical debate; to approach Sacks’s inquiries as a “grammar” for doing disciplinary work – whether this work is ethnomethodological or conversation analytic, linguistic, sociological, or any other disciplinary affiliation; and to move forward with Sacks’s radical agenda by treating Sacks’s legacies as dispositional, organizing principles rather than as conceptual and/or methodological constraints.

CONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS

Ethnomethodology hits different. As a form of sociology, it is different from mainstream European and US sociology in how it attends to crucial subject matters such as “social institutions” and “social structures”. Ethnomethodology

² See review [Czyżewski 2025].

³ Topics for “Sacks studies” include social structure – particularly structures of talk which, as Schegloff [1991] established, is an institution of sociological interest in itself. Both parts of our thematic issue contain empirical demonstrations of social structures incarnate in and through members’ practices, including talk.

is different also from the version presented in traditional textbook accounts of “breach experiments” [Garfinkel 1967], which may be the only exposure to ethnomethodological studies contained in sociology courses. Part of the difference in ethnomethodology is trivial, namely, as new technologies emerge there is an engagement with different topics, e.g. artificial intelligence and large language models (LLMs). The more significant differences, for our present discussion, are attributable to its founder Harold Garfinkel who, in later publications [Garfinkel 1991, 1996, 2002] would change the terms of the field, deliberately. Garfinkel’s objective in producing radically revised iterations of ethnomethodology was to ensure that ethnomethodologists proceeded untethered, i.e. not limited by the vocabularies or “logical grammars” of previous versions. Whatever it was that researchers were studying, Garfinkel was concerned that aspects of ethnomethodology were not being transformed into “methods” for doing research, or used as *a priori* frameworks for analysis.

Since Garfinkel died, in 2011, the internal terms of ethnomethodology as a distinctive analytic enterprise became “looser”, less critical perhaps. In a field-defining conspectus of ethnomethodology and its companion field, conversation analysis (CA) [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022], the authors return to an early paper that clarified distinctions between ethnomethodology and what became known as “constructive analysis”. That paper [Garfinkel, Sacks 1970] argued that the topics of ethnomethodology (people’s use of “indexical expressions” within natural language – whether the natural language was English, Japanese, or Polish) were elided by technologies (or methods) for sociological analysis, e.g. interviews and questionnaires; sociological methodologies, e.g. comparison and generalization; and the results of these methodologies, e.g. concepts and theoretical frameworks. These elisions were identified as “constructive analysis”.

As leading exponents of approaches within ethnomethodology, the authors [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022] have the expertise to evaluate current ethnomethodology and conversation analysis in the terms set by the distinction with “constructive analysis” [Garfinkel, Sacks 1970]. Yet the important feature of their analysis, which contrasts with Garfinkel and Sacks, is that they make assessments internal to ethnomethodology rather than between ethnomethodology and mainstream sociology. Their arguments have implications for how ethnomethodological studies are conducted from now on because they identify tendencies within ethnomethodology to “revert back” to constructive analysis, particularly in the adoption of aprioristic frameworks. This results in a homogenization of approaches to settings, and reiteration of what was found in previous studies. The gradual retreat into constructive analysis marks the terminus

of ethnomethodology, for its indifference towards constructive analysis has been the both the distinctiveness and *raison d'être* of its studies.

THE ANALYSIS OF WORK

Talking about Garfinkel's development of ethnomethodology is a necessary digression in a discussion about Sacks's legacies: to do otherwise falsifies the context of its emergence. As we are reminded [Matsunaga, Ikeya 2025] Garfinkel [2002] credits Sacks with one of the most significant departures from constructive analysis by allowing members to define phenomena of practical and professional interest. This was crucial for ethnomethodology's emphasis on *work*.

Whilst “work” appears to index a common theme for sociology and ethnomethodology, the way these approach work clarifies differences between them. Garfinkel [1986] formulated an ethnomethodological program as “studies of work”, which was distinct from the “sociology of work” in that the interest was not on secondary socialization, status, hierarchies, professionalization, division of labour, alienation, deviance and subverting work routines, or balancing personal interest from professional employment, etc., as typical concerns of the sociology of work. Instead, Garfinkel's “studies of work” program attended to the practical activities entailed in work per se, whether that work is classifying a death at a coroner's office, classifying a new book at an academic library, or driving an emergency vehicle up a mountain. Garfinkel [1986: vii] noted that the absence of “empirical specifics” in descriptions of work in sociology was one of its “identifying characteristics” – and in addressing this characteristic Garfinkel demonstrated that “work”, conceived ethnomethodologically, was not limited to paid employment but was constituted by the achievement of ordinary activities.

“Workplace studies” is a field that is informed by ethnomethodology. Workplace studies have a different orientation from Garfinkel's “studies of work” program, which is to look at the design implications of work practices that are witnessable within work settings, e.g. print rooms, traffic control hubs, financial institutions, museums and galleries. Workplace studies, as a coherent program, considers interactions between people and technology, such as photocopiers, user routines, the intended uses of materials, and software design.

Later in this essay we detail that studies in “contemporary CA” have been subject to extended critique. The capstone of these observations [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022] extends its critique to iterative “workplace studies” which, it is argued, have become self-confirming: corroborating findings that were already established in previous inquiries.

CATEGORIZATION

As Rockland [this issue] suggests, the study of conversation as members' in situ turn-taking practices was Sacks's most notable achievement, but his legacy and the study of conversation are not limited to turn-taking. Among Sacks's legacies for "ethnomethodological inquiries" is the study of members' categorization practices.

Ever since the 1970s, studies of membership categorization have sought to extend and refine Sacks's original approach [Atkinson 1980; Benson, Drew 1978; Cuff 1980; Drew 1978; Jayyusi 1984⁴; Lee 1984; Watson 1978; Wowk 1984], a theme distinct from those "remedial register" studies⁵ showing how membership category work was unexplicated by and incorporated within research methods [e.g. Atkinson 1978; Baker 1983⁶]. Gradually what emerged was a coherent, cumulative form of inquiry building on Sacks's radical writings. Indeed, one publication [Eglin, Hester 1992] heralded a new movement, membership categorization analysis (MCA), as the concerted attempt to expunge cognitivism in Sacks's categorization work. Yet parallel "underlabourer" considerations of categorizational phenomena [Coulter 1979; Sharrock 1974] and Wittgensteinian considerations of categorization [Coulter 1991; Lee 1991] went unheeded. What could have been a breakthrough publication [Watson 1997], suggesting that Sacks's most famous approaches to conversation analysis – categorization analysis and sequential analysis – were reflexively tied was derogated by claiming its upshot was merely that categories were incarnate within transcripts of talk [ten Have 2004, 2007]. And so it was that synthesizing texts distorted, through simplification, empirical inquiries that could have re-ethnomethodologized conversation analysis. Hence, with exceptions that moved MCA forwards [e.g. Smith 2017], the study of categorization faltered and stalled.

In celebrating Sacks's legacies, we consider that the return to constructive analysis critique [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022], which is levelled at contemporary CA and workplace studies, applies to studies of members' categorization practices, also. In this thematic issue these arguments are followed through by Andrew Carlin and Joana Marques, in their paper on the ethnomethodological

⁴ Within the trajectory of Sacks studies, when Schütze [this issue] refers to "force" or "obligations" he is returning us to the «strong» version of moral order identifiable in Jayussi [1984] and throughout Sacks's work, which was later refined as a praxeological gestalt, constituted by sequential and categorial aspects [Watson 1997].

⁵ This borrows a phrase from another context [Lynch 1991: 84ff.].

⁶ Baker's [1984] presentation of membership categorization as a self-contained approach followed later.

status of membership categorization analysis (MCA). However, at this point we alert readers that such considerations – that constructive analysis is the destination (and terminus) of MCA also – indicate and forewarn the direction of MCA towards “qualitative method” which, if followed, erase the achievements made through the move from MCD analysis to MCA [Hester, Eglin 1997], enabling incorporation into orthodox social science.

Among many others, a challenge for Sacks studies is to re-energize the study of members’ categorization practices. The coinage “Sacks studies” is tendentious, i.e. it is through reading the papers in the thematic issue that the usage of the term becomes clear: not to demarcate a new field, but to impart new life into enervated inquiries.

CONTINUITIES

The need for innovation rather than uncritical reiteration fits the editorial line taken for this thematic issue. As the salutary case of the “Goffman Industry” [Carlin 2025; Watson 2021] illustrates, we avoid erecting a protective shield around Sacks. In trying to insulate Goffman from criticism, and to advance readings of Goffman that were impervious to innovation, a coterie of scholars weakened Goffman’s legacies.⁷ Hence, as Coulter [1983: 7] says, “there is more at stake in this discussion than the production of a critique for the sake of critique”. Part of the way forward, editorially, is to find contributors who were prepared to move beyond standard lines, to produce studies liberated from current CA, orthodox MCD analysis or iterative MCA, to innovate and move Sacksian commentary forward. We think that through this thematic issue celebrating Sacks’s anniversaries, the corpus of scholarly commentary on Sacks’s work and the reach of Sacks’s legacies have been strengthened.

Unexpected continuities within the papers in this thematic issue underline the radical character of Harvey Sacks’s inquiries: “So just let the materials fall as they may. Look to see how it is that persons go about producing what they do produce” [Sacks 1995 I: 11]. In this issue, this “move” is manifested by prioritizing what members do rather than what analysts suggest are adequate approaches to members’ phenomena. These continuities have a “rhizomic” structure; these connect contributions across Parts One and Two of this thematic issue of *Przegląd Socjologiczny*.

⁷ Goffman scholars are not the only commentators described in these terms [McHoul, Wills 1990].

For instance, whilst Mlynář [this issue] appreciates the contributions of phenomenology and the resurgence of interest in gestalt-contextures, it is the phenomena that are contained in the data he is working with that lead him to his analysis. Likewise, in the first part of this thematic issue, Carlin and Kim [2025] resist being led astray by the requirements of iterative MCA, such as Devices and consistency rules. Following the data, which are constituted by recordings of a father and son talking about the son's activities at a childcare centre, the authors suggest a key feature of the father's responses to his son's stories, which is audible in the recordings, is unavailable to formulaic forms of MCA that are reliant upon invoking members' uses of rules of application and consistency, and thus loses the phenomenon. Again, in the first part of this thematic issue, Matsunaga and Ikeya [2025] identify time as one of the most immediate concerns for members of an emergency response team, yet this would have been unavailable for transcript-based analyses.

Each "handful of world" [Franz Kafka, quoted in Sacks 1963: 16] realize continuities within this celebration of Sacks.

STUDIES IN THIS THEMATIC ISSUE, PART 2

The format established in Part 1 of our thematic issue on Harvey Sacks is maintained in Part 2, a "Research Perspectives" section followed by "Articles". In the first of three Research Perspectives we are treated to glimpses of Sacks's teaching from one of Sacks's graduate students. Glenn Rockland knew Sacks at University of California, Irvine; was in the room as Sacks delivered his lectures between 1971–1974; and witnessed a parade of famous academics – including Aaron Cicourel, Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman, Adam Kendon, William Labov and Malcah Yaeger – drop in and sit beside undergraduate students registered on Sacks's courses. Yet what is also evident in Rockland's account is that the typescripts of lectures, which are collected together as *Lectures on conversation*, do not reflect either Sacks's enthusiasm – balancing the demands of the university together with the burden of leadership for a new field of inquiry – nor the exhaustiveness with which he sought to break down the minutiae of talk.

It may be a stretch to suggest that Rockland's account undermines our understandings of Sacks's programme – as articulated within Sacks's "introduction" to his ways of approaching his topic set out in Appendix I of *Lectures on conversation*

[Sacks 1992 I: 802–805].⁸ Yet in its entirety, Rockland’s biographical fragments problematize our readings of Sacks’s agenda.⁹ Rockland’s contribution moves on from discussing his time with Sacks at Irvine to comparing what *he* experienced as Sacks’s hoped-for programme, with what CA has become. Following his death Sacks’s vision was immediately diluted: according to Rockland, what conversation analysis looks like now bears little resemblance to Sacks’s objectives.

The next paper in the Research Perspectives section sets the agenda for “Sacks studies”: innovation and analytic disposition, focusing on data *simpliciter*. Marc Relieu, Catherine Félix and Rod Watson report an empirical study of a routine phenomenon: pedestrians holding doors open for others. This study develops a project report [Lee, Watson 1993], which had broken new ground by bringing Sacksian specifications of turn-taking and categorization work to phenomena of pedestrian locomotion in public spaces. Mobilizing Sacks’s “analytic mentality” [Schenkein 1978], Relieu, Félix and Watson intentionally constrain the terms of their analysis to what the recordings preserve as members’ actions in approaching doorways to a shopping mall. In other words, these data – and only these data – provide them with the “teachable details of an inquiry” [Bjelić 2025: 156] into members’ use of material contingencies (doors) via those members’ in situ production and configuration of pedestrian lines. Recorded data preserve the observation of embodied *walking lanes*, people walking alone or walking together in a particular direction, that narrow into recognizable *walking lines* as members within walking lanes arrange themselves in proximity of a door. What Garfinkel [2002: 66–67] calls the “corpus status” of their analysis, beyond these data that have produced this inquiry, is then open to observation and assessment in other public spaces, though of course for the production of non-iterative studies any future analysis should be based upon members’ configurations in each setting.

Scholars of what we are calling “Sacks studies” have been definite and strong on the matters of how Sacks’s work is distinguishable from “mainstream” sociology. Arguments that are less frequently aired consider the relevance of Sacks’s work for all sociologists – not just conversation analysts. Fritz Schütze provides an

⁸ One among very many of the significant aspects of this appendix is Schegloff’s footnote, which includes the detail that the appendix was originally the draft introduction to a book called *The search for help: Two studies in the formal description of the details of natural social activities*. We suggest that Sacks’s subtitle reveals how he regarded his programme.

⁹ Not only of Sacks’s original explorations but it problematizes also those efforts to redefine Sacks’s programme as “qualitative”.

evaluation of Sacks's work and its relevance to sociology.¹⁰ As Sacks recognizes that we inhabit a normatively organized world, Schütze's essay is redolent with future lines of investigation for sociologists using Sacks's work, including norms and mores, moral orders, time and temporality [see Matsunaga, Ikeya 2025].¹¹ Schütze's own work focuses, among other things, on the status of biographical accounts and the implications of a biographical sociology. Restricting his conspectus, Schütze details the benefits of Sacks's approaches – formally known as Membership Categorization Device (MCD) analysis and the study of turn-taking in conversation – for doing sociology. Concentrating on narrative analysis as a subfield, Schütze condenses Sacks's legacy as “single case analysis” and, in broader terms, works through some of the ramifications of single case analysis for doing adequate sociological accounts. This essay is more than a demonstration of how Sacks's work has impacted Schütze's own sociological research, as it constitutes an invitation to sociologists to explore Sacks's work for themselves.

There follow three papers in the “Articles” section. Carefully setting out the logics of linguists' interests in its priority topics, Kang Kwong Luke demonstrates that the radicality of Sacks's work is not just in its contrast with sociology. Referencing the Fall 1965 lecture series [Sacks 1992 I: 135–231], during which Sacks's radical take on rules becomes more apparent, Luke takes on three disciplinary problems with reading Sacks's work. First, just because Sacks may be seen as a sociologist does not mean that his work is irrelevant for linguistics. Second, what forms the main body of Luke's paper: the potentialities within Sacks's work for studies in linguistics, and the opportunities for new inquiries in linguistics contained within Sacks's *Lectures on conversation*. Third, that aligning Sacks's approach to topics into disciplinary configurations is unnecessary: sociology could take notice of Sacks's linguistic relevances with profit, and vice versa. Luke's paper is a demonstration of analytic reflexivity in that engagement with Sacks's lectures informs both disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Though there is much more within Luke's paper, which resolves the puzzle – a puzzle for “sociological” conversation analysis – why, beyond the passage of time, studies in contemporary conversation analysis generally do not cite Sacks.

However, there is another puzzle, for Luke, which is that despite the insights and affinities of Sacks's lectures with the professed topics of linguistics, and how

¹⁰ This complements discussion of the relevance of Sacks's work for linguistics – see Luke [this issue].

¹¹ Schütze's essay reminds us of arguments on the relevance of Garfinkel's work for general sociology: “[he] is still talking about the essential issues – but [...] the way in which [Sacks] takes them up is [...] unrecognizable to more traditional scholars” [Rawls 2005: 164].

Sacks provides linguistics with approaches that enable context-sensitive and thorough analyses of these topics, there continues to be a lack of engagement with Sacks’s work. For sociology, the move towards Sacks’s approaches to the analysis of social institutions has required jettisoning foundational suppositions; for linguistics, Luke suggests taking Sacks seriously involves a similarly fundamental repositioning in regards to what are still treated as foundational positions. Luke demonstrates that those structures that are not accounted for in ordinary conversation should be reconsidered for the study of language in its natural home or, to borrow Kjeld Schmidt’s [2018: 105] phrase, “to venture outside the disciplinary habitat”.

As we saw in the first part of the thematic issue, one of the ways that Sacks presented his analyses of socio-cultural phenomena was to introduce tendentious distinctions [McHoul 2025], e.g. “possessables” versus “possessitives” [cf. Matsunaga, Ikeya 2025] and “preservation” versus “transformation” [Sacks 1985]. Often, these would turn out to be the upshot of analyses presented close to the start of a lecture. These might seem to be binary opposites but Sacks’s gradual unpacking, illustrated by data, added more sophistication; not as opposites but as complements, two sides of the same coin. Through Sacks’s explication of his own cultural logic, readers (and, for those who were in the room when he gave the lectures, the overhearers) the full array of cultural logic becomes apparent. In this second section of the thematic issue, Jakub Mlynář addresses another of Sacks’s complementarities, between composites and constructives. Mlynář uses Sacks’s insightful observations to draw out a submerged issue for ethnomethodology, namely, between structured and unstructured objects; or, between parts and wholes. Examples from a classroom setting, in which students retrieve salient details for their team project from a video clip, and an informal conference during which participants engage in final edits to a collaboratively authored submission to a journal, clarify this distinction. Mlynář interweaves Sacks’s distinction with explicative, empirical analyses.

Mlynář’s paper contributes to current discussion¹² within ethnomethodology on Garfinkel’s interest in Aron Gurwitsch’s notion of “gestalt-contexture”. The added value of Mlynář’s work is drawing out Sacks’s oral comments from his *Lectures*, and threading these together as a hitherto unacknowledged source for ethnomethodologists studying “gestalt-contextures” in ways that complement Garfinkel. Whilst we regard Sacks as far more than a mere “adjunct” to Garfinkel, Mlynář’s analysis complements the renewed interest in gestalt-contexture

¹² For example, see Kim, Carlin [2022].

analysis and, in his words, ratifies “the enduring relevance of Sacks’s work for contemporary research”.

Under the subheading “Categorization” above we have provided a “Cook’s Tour” of the moves between Sacks’s categorization work and considerations of categorization subsequent to Sacks’s death. Whilst an objective may have been to establish MCA as a cumulative field, the effect has been the production of “more of the same”. The challenges to MCA laid down by Andrew Carlin and Joana Marques originate in recorded data of astronomy communication events, in which people observe objects in the sky using telescopes and talk about what they are able to see. Current studies in membership categorization show that the shift from a Device-based architecture (MCD analysis) to members’ use of occasioned Devices (MCA) did not resolve the problem of cognitivism, what Coulter [1979] calls an “explanatory fiction”, in Sacks’s teaching and writing. Carlin and Marques maintain that the remaining source of cognitivism in MCA is “omnirelevance”, in particular analysts’ assertions of members’ orientations to omnirelevant categories. Questioning the use of omnirelevance is not a controversy that is locatable in the MCA literature but emerged from the attempt to account for and characterize members’ actions in astronomy viewing sessions.

The studies included in this collection are followed by an open panel discussion on the work of Harvey Sacks, chaired by Barbara Markowska-Marczak. The occasion for the panel was to celebrate the anniversary year of the publication of *Lectures on conversation* in paperback. The panel discussants are Marek Czyżewski, Robert Frei, Bernardetta Janusz, and Jerzy Stachowiak (in Polish).

These proceedings are followed by a review essay by Marek Czyżewski, of a recently published book by Graham Button [2026] that engages deeply with Harvey Sacks’s innovations, his legacies, and the implications of these for ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and sociology (in Polish).

CONCLUSION

As a coherent document, this thematic issue on the legacies of Harvey Sacks provides unexpected continuities. In settings and activities as disparate as astronomy communication, childcare, classroom interaction, collaborative writing, emergency medical response, healthcare/physical therapy, linguistics, logical philosophy and sociology, Sacks’s preoccupations (including description, indexical expressions, recognizability) provide what Edward Rose [1992] called “basting threads” within a patchwork of inquiries. With foundational issues of description and disciplinarity explored, foregrounded, and problematized, this thematic issue

helps us to appreciate the usefulness of Sacks’s various approaches to analysis. As an international enterprise¹³, our thematic issues of *Przegląd Socjologiczny* support Liberman’s [2024: 467] assertion, “Many inquiries still lay ahead”.

According to Rockland [this issue], Sacks’s statements on developing a “science of conversation” were not rhetorical but encapsulate how Sacks had envisaged his new programme would develop. These insights seem to conflict with a sophisticated explication of Sacks’s conceptions of science [Lynch, Bogen 1994] until we recognize what Sacks, and later commentators, were drawing attention to:

Let me try to locate what I’m doing. When I started to do research in sociology I had this particular aim: I figured that sociology couldn’t be an actual science unless it was able to handle the details of actual events; handle them formally, and in the first instance be informative about them in the ways that primitive sciences tend to be informative [Sacks 1992 I: 621].

As the basic procedural warrant for Sacks’s observations is *description*, i.e. from the perspective of Sacks’s “primitive natural science”, the *Lectures* can be read, through and through, as expositions of his first published paper [Sacks 1963]. And the resonances of this paper may be found in its observation that the written descriptions of sociologists have a “peculiar” character [Sacks 1963: 1–2], one that in the *Lectures* is made regarding the written descriptions of natural scientists:

The doing of natural science ... was something which was reportable, first, and second, the reports of the activities of doing science did not take the form that the reports of the phenomena under investigation took [Sacks 1992 I: 804].

Commentators have used this quote in dissolving the “principled distinction between professional analysis and members’ intuitions” [Lynch, Bogen 1994: 66] which, in various forms, has been manifest as a thematic issue within ethnomethodological programmes [Dennis 2025]. For Sacks, conversation was a practice that demonstrated the distinction between members’ problems and analysts’ problems.

Still, a tension remains operative in our considerations of Sacks, which can be formulated as follows: on the one hand we suggest that allowing Sacks’s work to fall into desuetude impacts upon the teaching and learning of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA), in that students and early career researchers receive impoverished, partial or even no exposure to Sacks and his impact upon ethnomethodological programs. Yet on the other hand, does identifying deficits in Sacks’s work (as is represented by membership categorization analysis) suggest that teachers of ethnomethodology and CA reduce coverage of Sacks within their

¹³ Since the publication of a two-volume set of Sacks’s lectures we have seen translations of his work appear in Czech [Sacks 2016], French [Bovet, Gonzalez-Martinez, Malbois 2014; Sacks 1993], and Italian [Sacks 2017], to name but a few.

ethnomethodology teaching, or even omit Sacks's work from recommended readings? Do these reservations license those topic-specific studies which are distal to Sacks yet claim lineage to his work – even via a citation firmament that is affiliated with Sacks's work?

Our first response to this question is to remind readers that the word “ethnomethodology” has become a portmanteau term for a variety of study approaches [Lindwall 2025] including the institutional talk program, the studies of work program, ethnomethodological MCA¹⁴, and ethnomethodological CA¹⁵, i.e. study approaches and the myriad ways practitioners of these approaches treat phenomena. Indeed, the coinage “conversation analysis” is also subject to qualification. We can see how Sacks's work – both in its original lecture format, his early writings [Sacks 1963, 1972, 1997, 1999] and in how his colleagues, including Garfinkel, reformulated¹⁶ his work – continues to shape these study approaches.

Secondly, detailed and extended expositions of Sacks [Button 2026; Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022; Watson 2015] demonstrate that nuanced positions on ethnomethodological programs are available through direct engagement with Sacks's work. As Luke [this issue] shows, it is via carefully working through Sacks's work (particularly the lectures) that we appreciate how to realize Sacks's radical inquiries – whether these inquiries are alternates to sociology, to linguistics, or to other formal disciplines. Further than this, however, the nature of obsolescence is not as simple as no longer engaging with Sacks, e.g. not reading, citing or referencing Sacks. As our comments in the first part of this essay [Carlin 2025] on the “Goffman industry” indicate, allowing Sacks's work to fall into desuetude is accomplished also by restricting his work to CA and/or Membership Categorization Device (MCD) analysis.¹⁷ For reducing the scope of Sacks's work to these fields imposes limits upon the legacies contained within his lectures:

Reading bits and pieces of Sacks's work solely with regard to their substantive content will invariably convey the impression that it is a much less significant body of writings than it is, underestimating the extent to which it is a carefully considered and thoroughly worked

¹⁴ *Ethnomethodological MCA* as recognizably distinct from *constructive analytic MCA* [Carlin, Marques, Moutinho 2026].

¹⁵ *Ethnomethodological CA* as recognizably distinct from *linguistic CA* [Firth and Wagner 1997] yet crucially from *constructive analytic CA* [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022], whether a study in CA is linguistic, psychological or sociological in origin.

¹⁶ In particular the accounts of perspicuous settings and Sacks's gloss [Garfinkel 2002]; and the reflexive explication of Sacks's “commentary machine” [Rose 2003].

¹⁷ With regard to our previous comments [Carlin 2025] on the general relevance of Sacks to the social sciences, members' categorization practices are the “starting-point ... the methodical, operative groundwork by which social structures are created” [Coulter 1974: 112].

out alternative conception of basic sociological methodology to those which prevail in the textbooks and the overwhelming majority of studies [Sharrock, Button 1991: 161].

The limiting nature of judging Sacks’s work in quasi-content analytic terms returns us to the “divergence thesis” used to characterize the differences and relationship between ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (CA), which has been the subject of extensive consideration and debate [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022; Lynch 2002, 2019; Sharrock 2002] and indeed features in this thematic issue [Burns 2025]. As an “alternative conception of basic sociological methodology”, in the words of Sharrock and Button [above], it is not sufficient to explore Sacks’s “usefulness” for inquiries but also its ramifications. Fissures opened up in the “epistemics of epistemics” debate were exacerbated by the (plausible) assumption¹⁸ that “contemporary CA” was being singled out for sustained criticism by ethnomethodologists, but much broader re-assessments of ethnomethodological programs *vis-à-vis* constructive analysis were at stake. The outcome of these re-assessments [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022] was a fundamental and self-reflexive appraisal of how work done under the auspices of ethnomethodological programs, including the program of “workplace studies”, were departures from Garfinkel and Sacks [1970]. These endogenous critiques maintain the disruptions of forms of inquiry at risk of becoming constructive analytic.

When considered in terms of the “On formal structures of practical action” paper [Garfinkel, Sacks 1970], the “diversity of ethnomethodology” [Maynard, Clayman 1991] is limiting, as it lists and reifies a variety of approaches “under the banner of ethnomethodology” [Lynch 1993: 297]. Yet “diversity” is to be encountered within the phenomena for analysis [Jenkins, Lindwall, Carlin, Mair, Dennis 2025], suiting research approaches so as not to “lose” these phenomena [Garfinkel 2022], not the other way around. What we find in this thematic issue is the “continuity of ethnomethodology” rather than losing phenomena through pre-given frameworks¹⁹.

There are two sides to how subsequent researchers have attached themselves to Sacks’s legacies. Whilst some argue that there are regressive tendencies within research to identify ethnomethodology with cognitive and constructive-analytic entailments [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022; Lynch 1993], it is noticeable also

¹⁸ In our reading an earlier rupture was marked not by Sacks’s untimely death but the ownership and whereabouts of Sacks’s *Nachlass*, which became an ongoing source of dispute and the *raison d’être* for the Harvey Sacks Memorial Association.

¹⁹ We refer to those frameworks that are worded as “ethnomethodological” though these are returning to orthodoxy [Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022; Carlin, Marques this issue].

that Sacks's legacies are experiencing diminutions, such as being referred to as "qualitative" approaches²⁰, and as "methods". Describing ethnomethodological fields as "qualitative" is a gestalt move for purposes of disciplinary alignment, and effects a change in status. Readings of *Lectures on conversation* leave readers in no doubt that any accommodation with analytic orthodoxy is anti-Sacksian. Yet we remain positive about Sacks's legacies within ethnomethodological inquiries because, as previous discussions [Button 2026; Button, Lynch, Sharrock 2022; Carlin 2021; Coulter 1995; Watson 1994, 1997, 2015] and studies in these thematic issues of *Przegląd Socjologiczny* demonstrate, the relevance of Sacks's work extends beyond the boundaries of MCA and CA.

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²⁰ As noted elsewhere [Sharrock and Watson 1988], "qualitative" is a feature of constructive analysis. It is one of various dualisms that ethnomethodology eschews and to which ethnomethodologists remain "indifferent".

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„GARŚCIE ŚWIATA”: STUDIA AND SACKSEM CZĘŚĆ 2

Streszczenie

Ten esej stanowi wprowadzenie do drugiej części studiów nad Sacksem w *Przeglądzie Socjologicznym*. Część pierwsza ukazała się jako trzeci zeszyt czasopisma w roku 2025. Obydwie części zaplanowano tak, by ich publikacja zbiegła się z dziewięćdziesiątą rocznicą urodzin i pięćdziesiątą rocznicą śmierci Sacksa oraz trzydziestą rocznicą jednotomowego wydania jego *Lectures on conversation*. W obu częściach zaświadczaemy o tym, że dzieło Sacksa jest nadal radykalne, istotne i żywotne dla nurtów etnometodologicznych, a zatem dla etnometodologii, analizy konwersacyjnej i analizy kategoryzacji uczestnictwa (ang. *membership categorization analysis*), jak również dla lingwistyki i socjologii. W niniejszym esej przybliżamy zawartość prezentowanego zeszytu, a także wskazujemy na powiązania między obydwooma częściami studiów and Sacksem w *Przeglądzie Socjologicznym*.

Słowa kluczowe: Harvey Sacks, analiza konstrukcyjna, etnometodologia, kategoryzacja uczestnictwa, badania pracy