Accountability as a general function of language

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The article discusses the concept of accountability. The general assumption is that accountability is a primal concern in language and language use. The point of departure is Harold Garfinkel’s definition in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* establishing accountability as a key notion in a pragmatist understanding of social life. The term designates the observation that social agents achieve their sociability by acting so that their doings display their own meaningfulness in a social context – thereby creating such a context (Garfinkel 1967). The concept is discussed in three distinctive areas of language study. First, it is demonstrated through an ethnomethodological approach that any form of communication is critically dependent on participants’ mutual recognition of each other’s accountability. Second, some key notions of conversation analysis are demonstrated to be functional in such a perspective. The aim is to demonstrate that the turn-taking mechanics of talk-in-interaction may be conceptualized as methods of constructing accountability. Third, it is demonstrated in a functional linguistic framework how speakers’ accountability is fronted in Danish sentences by such means as word order and the use of a particular paradigm of sentence adverbs.

Filtering and packaging data: The problem of representation

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This article discusses some of the challenges involved in textual representation of audio-visual data for discourse and micro-analytic purposes. Today it is more important than ever to pay critical attention to this issue due to the widespread, but often relatively untheorized, use of video data in Conversation Analysis and related fields in the social and human sciences. The article presents a critical discussion of the relationship between audio-visual data, the researcher’s impression of these data, and the textual representation generated through representation practices. The discussion highlights the challenges involved in representation of spoken language and of other types of (non-verbal) information, as well as the complications that emerge when researcher and research participants have different linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds (using research on children as an example). The article argues that representation of research data constitutes an analytic step in the research process, and that it therefore needs serious and critical reflection. In addition, it is argued that the representation is not just an analytic tool but also a way for an intended audience to gain insight into the analytic process. These different functions need to be carefully balanced and considered when transforming audio-visual data into textual representations.