Week 10: Establishing Shared Understanding Through Grounding- Part 1

Introduction

We have now spent nine weeks going over the definition and some applications of microanalysis. We've looked closely at topic choice, questions and formulations and how they influence and transform what clients say.

Building on an analogy from Weakland (1993), we propose that these three tools of therapists, as well as the clients' responses, are the *bricks* that contribute to building a therapeutic dialogue. But what is the *mortar*--what holds them together? How do we know that a therapist and client are coming to a new, shared meaning or understanding about the client's life?

The noted sociologist, George Herbert Mead, had a simple, behavioural answer

> It is not necessary, in attempting to solve this problem [of the meaning of meaning], to have recourse to psychical states, for the nature of meaning, as we have seen, is found to be implicit in the structure of the social act, implicit in the relations among its three basic individual components; namely, in the triadic relation of [*an utterance] of one individual, a response to that [utterance] by a second individual, and completion of the given social act initiated by the [utterance] of the first individual*. (1934, p. 81, italics added)

Following several authors since Mead, we have adopted a three-step micro-sequence that participants in a dialogue use to co-construct meaning. In other words, this is the mortar that brings the individual actions together:

The basic sequence is:

a. The speaker ***presents*** new information.
b. The addressee ***displays*** that he or she understood the new information, did not understand it, or is not sure.
c. The speaker ***confirms*** the addressee's display of understanding as correct or incorrect.
d. At the successful completion of a sequence, some new information has been ***grounded*** between them.

For example, at the beginning of a session:

Therapist: "So, is it OK if I call you Katy?"
[new information: a polite request to call her by her first name]
Client: "M-hm" and nods
[Her assent implies she understood his request]
Therapist: "OK" and smiles
[He displays that her assent is sufficient to show that she had understood his request]

She showed that she understood his request, and he showed that her understanding was correct. At the end of this sequence the therapist and client have grounded that it is okay for the therapist to call the client Katy.

This process also detects misunderstandings or mistakes. This excerpt is at the beginning of an interview with a young boy:

Therapist: "Now, let's see. I understand you are six years old?"

[Introduces information not yet established in this dialogue.]

Child: "Five and a half."

[Displays understanding of what she has said by correcting it]

Therapist: "Five and a half! I'm sorry."

[Confirms that his correction means he had understood what she said]

Again, they establish a common understanding of his age. At the end of this sequence they have grounded that the therapist is incorrect, the child isn't six years old.

Bavelas, De Jong, Korman, & Smock Jordan (2012) call this process *grounding*. In the first example, the therapist requested new information, the client responded and the therapist showed that the client's response was appropriate. In the second example, the therapist introduced new information, the client's response (a correction) indicated that he had understood the information presented and the therapist confirmed that the client's response was appropriate. We propose that this process is the "mortar" that puts the pieces of the dialogue together.

Learning objectives

Learning to analyze three-step grounding sequences and identify what is grounded, that is:

- Identifying when and how new information is presented by the ***therapist***.
- Identifying whether and how the addressee displays understanding.
- Identifying whether and how the speaker confirms the addressee's display of understanding.
- Learning to create descriptions of what is grounded at the end of each grounding sequence.

Readings

- Bavelas, De Jong, Korman, & Smock Jordan (2012). Beyond back-channels: A three-step model of grounding in face-to-face dialogue.
- Bavelas, De Jong, Smock Jordan, Korman (2015). The theoretical and research basis of co-constructing meaning in dialogue. *Journal of Solution-focused Brief Therapy*.
  (The name of the file in the dropbox is "Bavelas, De Jong, Smock Jordan, Korman (2015). The theoretical .pdf")
- Grounding rules for the On-line course 2017.pdf
  You need to read through them quickly and then keep them open or printed when you do the analysis. Particularly pages 5-9 with the definitions.

Optional reading

- Clark & Schaeffer, 1987 (Herbert H. Clark and Edward F. Schaefer, *Language and Cognitive Processes, Vol. 2, No. I,* pp. 19-41.)

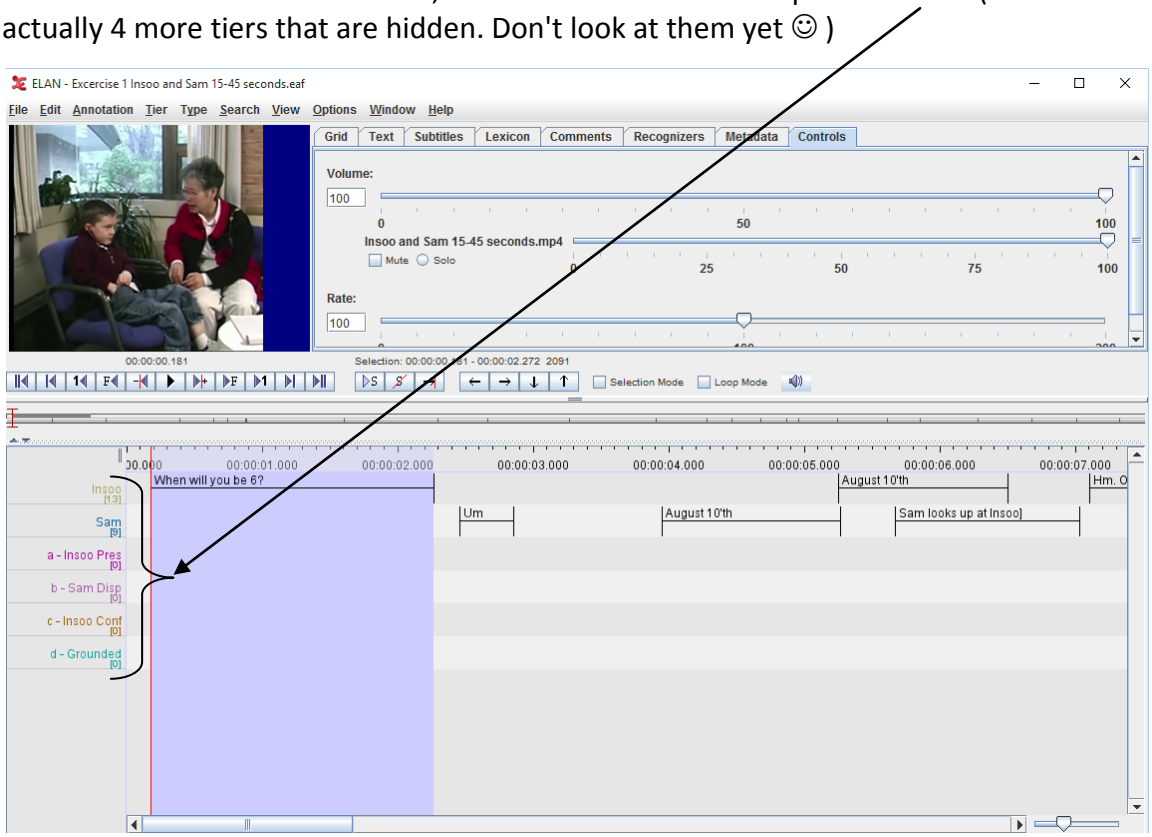
Exercise

Do a grounding analysis of the Insoo and Sam video.

Be sure to do the required reading first as it will serve as a guide to the other activities. Make sure you keep the "grounding rules" close because you will have to refer to them continuously throughout this week's work.

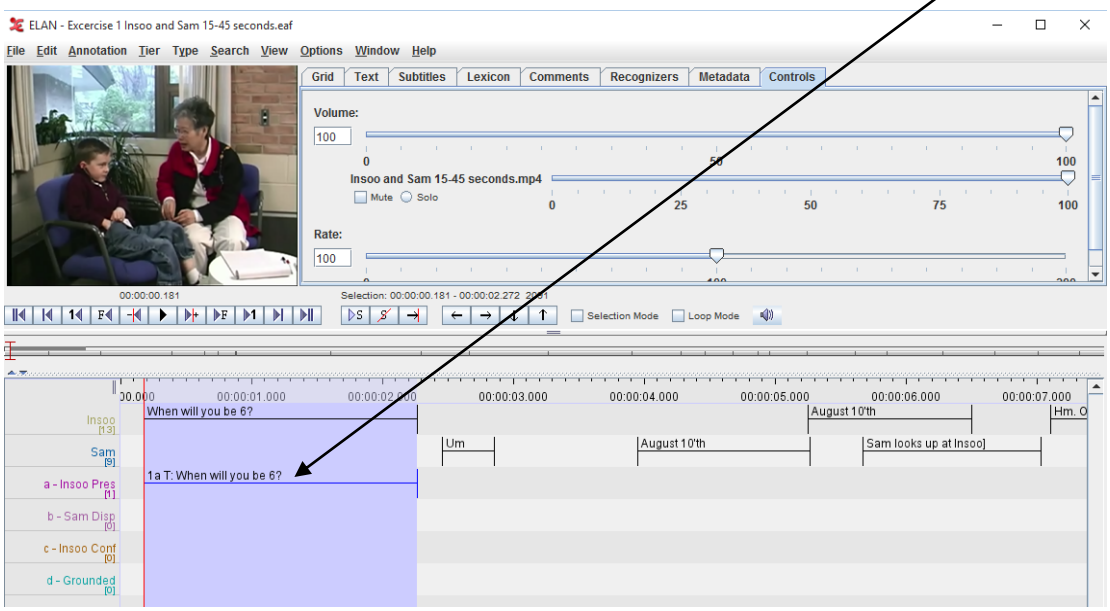
YOU WILL BE LOST IF YOU DON'T READ THE Grounding Rules !!!!!!

1. Download the ELAN-file "Exercise 1 Insoo and Sam 15-45 seconds.eaf" connected to the tape " Insoo and Sam 15-45 seconds.mpg". As usual rename your copy with your initials. Open the ELAN.
2. You will see that there are 6 tiers, which should look like the picture below (there are actually 4 more tiers that are hidden. Don't look at them yet ☺)

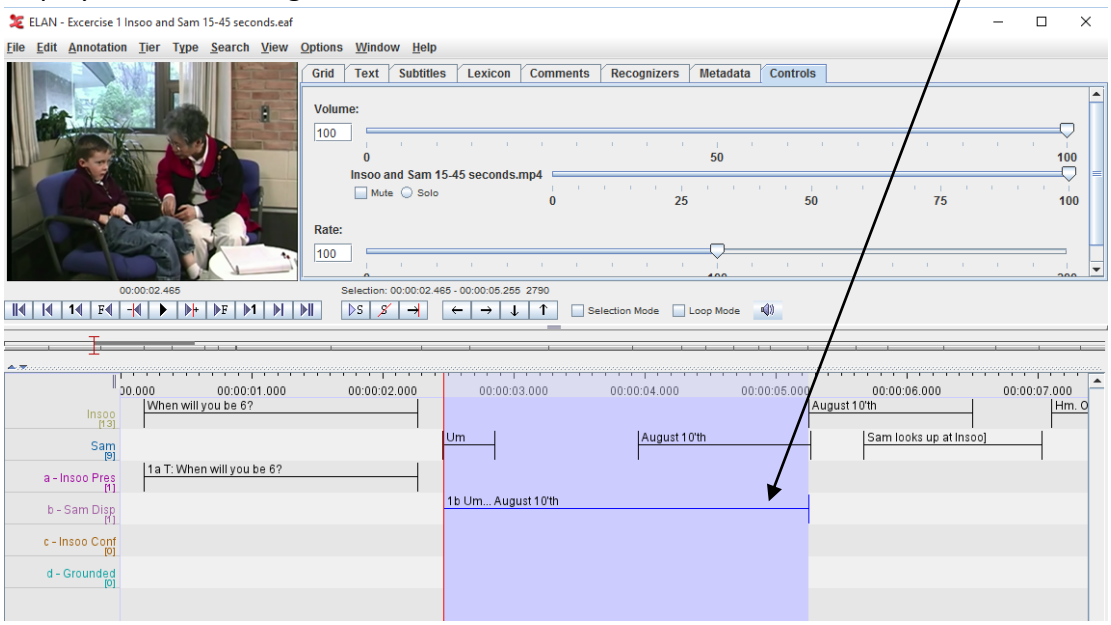


3. The first two tiers are a transcript of what the therapist and the boy say. (Never trust anyone else's transcript. Look and listen closely while doing the analysis and correct any errors or omissions in words or timing that you find.)

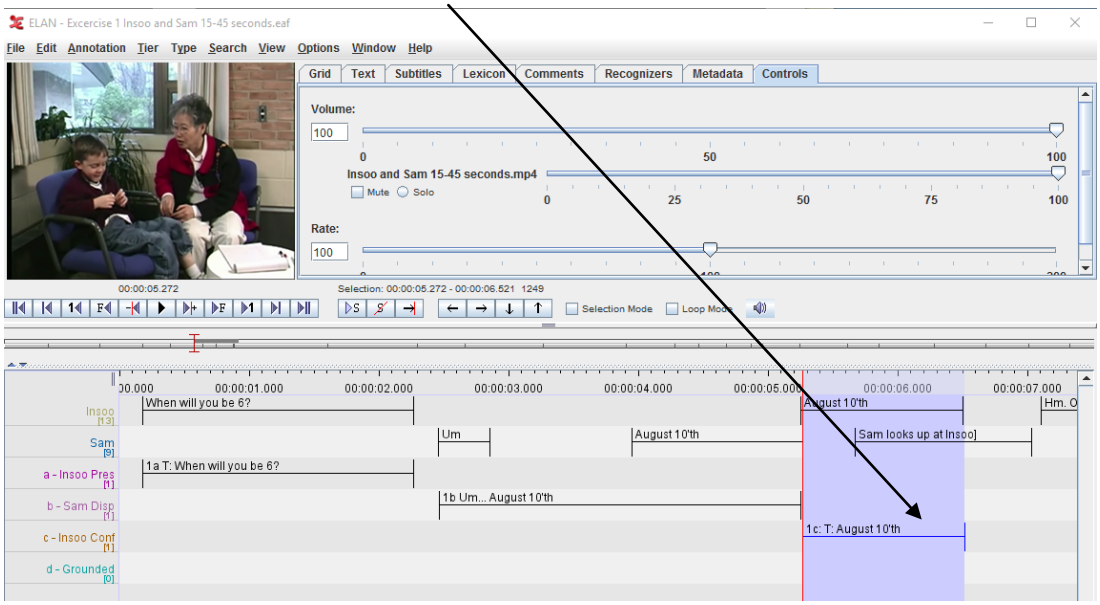
4. Start at 00:15.420 and watch the video in Elan. The first step is to locate Insoo's first utterance (either a not knowing question or formulation) that contains new information and annotate it on the "a - Insoo Presents" tier. In the example below we have done this for you. Notice that Insoo's first utterance that contains new information is a not knowing question ("When will you be 6?") so we annotated it on the "a-Insoo presents tier."



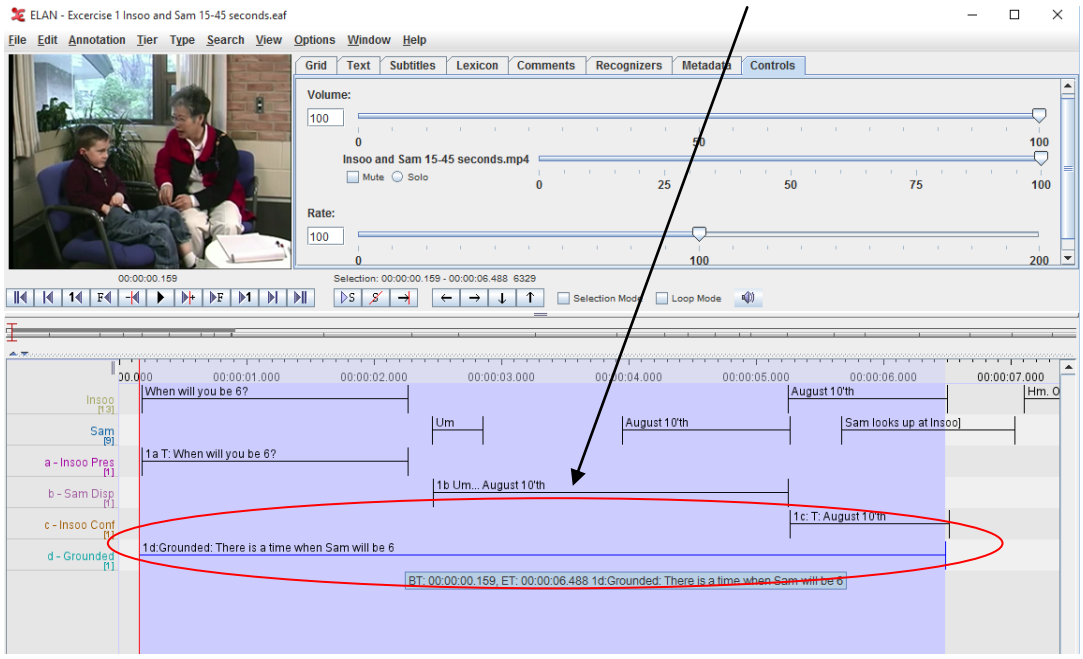
5. The second step is to notice how Sam displays understanding of the new information that Insoo presented, annotate what Sam does or says on the "b -Sam displays understanding" tier. In the example below we have done this for you. Sam answers Insoo's question by saying, "Um, August 10th" so we annotated it on the "b-Sam Displays understanding" tier.



6. The third step is to notice how Insoo confirms what Sam has said and then annotate what Insoo does or says on the '"c - Insoo confirms" tier. We have done this for you in the example below; Insoo confirms Sam's answer by saying "August 10th" so we annotated this on the "c- Insoo confirms" tier.



7. The last step is to select the whole a-b-c sequence and annotate on the "Grounded" tier what has been grounded. Notice how we have done this in the example below, we selected all three tiers (a-Insoo presents, b-Sam displays understanding, and c-Insoo confirms) and then wrote what was grounded in the "Grounded" tier.



(The first entire grounding sequence (from 15 seconds to 22 seconds) has been done for you in the ELAN file as illustrated in numbers 4-7 above

8. Now continue to watch the video in Elan and identify the next utterance by Insoo that contains new information and repeat steps 4-7. Keep on repeating steps 4-7 on each utterance of Insoo's that contains new information until you are at the end of the transcribed ELAN file (46 secs). Remember that the first step of the grounding sequence should always be to identify what the ***therapist*** introduces as new information (we'll work on when the client introduces new information next week).

9. Once you have recorded the grounding sequences through 45.918 seconds, upload your .eaf and psfx files (the ones with your initials) with the completed analysis to the Dropbox folder "Uploads, IMA online course."

Postings

Questions

1. What was easiest and most challenging about this analysis?
2. Does this analysis make co-construction visible for you in any way you have or have not thought about before?

(Questions post is due by midnight, Saturday April 15th, 2017)

Comparisons

- Download two other analyses in ELAN (from other course participants) and compare yours with one of theirs.
- Choose one other person's ELAN and post a comparison. Compliment yourself and your colleague on your agreements, and make a case for your own analysis by appealing to the rules when or if you disagree with something.
- If you wish (and it will probably be more fun), contact one of your colleagues on the course and discuss the above and post together. (You can connect via skype and share a desktop view either with skype, or "Chrome remote desktop". Instructions via google search.)

(Comparisons post is due by midnight, Monday April 17th, 2017)