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STRUCTURED OBJECTS: THE ORGANIZED RELATIONSHIPS OF PARTS AND WHOLES

Abstract

This paper explores the organized relationships of parts and wholes through Harvey Sacks's work, taking it as an inspiration for empirical studies. This topic is often conceived in terms of *gestalts*, where each part appears through its functional significations. I propose a complementary examination of parts and wholes as members' phenomena. In an early lecture, Sacks [1992: 89] notes that "we need ... a notion that what Members see is decomposable by them", and that they "seem to do this [by] treating something that they see as a combination of parts, some of which have names". To develop this direction of inquiry, I offer the notion of *structured objects*: entities with recognizable features such as "left" and "right" sides (e.g., photographs and faces) or "beginnings" and "ends" (e.g., stories and streets). Two illustrations – covering directly and retrospectively available structuredness – elucidate how structured objects are constituted and maintained. Importantly, such a decomposition is not imposed by professional analysts. The structuredness is rather established in practical manipulations with the relevant "parts", the relevant structures of social objects being produced or discovered in and as these operations.

Keywords: conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, Harvey Sacks, objectivation practices, parts and wholes, structured objects

What I'm calling "indivisible" is not what one unsuccessfully tries to partition but that of which it makes no sense (is forbidden) to say that it consists of parts.

[Wittgenstein 2005: 329e]

INTRODUCTION

The organized production and recognition of social objects are central to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM/CA). For both lay and professional analysts, such objects can routinely be seen as consisting of certain “parts” that constitute a “whole”. Two related conceptions of “objects” have gained prominence in recent literature: physical artifacts and gestalt contextures. Their importance and cogency notwithstanding, these themes may provide a contrastive background for specifying the topical orientation and broader contribution of this article. First, in response to an interest in “objects” and their incorporation in social activities [e.g., Day, Wagner 2019; Due 2024], I emphasize that for EM/CA, the key feature of “thingness” is not the physical materiality of an artifact. Instead, it is the produced and recognized totality of organizational objects – such as persons, requests, glances, or pens – as a concerted accomplishment. Some of these objects might be material, but it is not a required condition. The objectivity of material objects is itself constituted and reaffirmed through practical actions [Hindmarsh & Heath, 2000; Macbeth, 1992]. Second, the objects’ part-whole relations can be conceived in terms of gestalts, where parts appear as members’ everyday phenomena through their “functional significations” [e.g., Eisenmann, Lynch 2021; Hutchinson 2022]: “The part is what it is only as a constituent of the Gestalt-contexture and as *integrated into its unity*” [Gurwitsch 1964: 121; emphasis added]. This paper – taking inspiration from Harvey Sacks – develops a complementary conception of parts and wholes through an inquiry into the practical methods by which wholes are *decomposed and divided* into operational parts. Focusing on decomposability, in addition to unification, allows us to specify how the constitution, maintenance, and abandonment of organizational objects through “objectivation practices” [Lieberman 2018] are accomplished in details of situated activities, including the work of “taking an object apart”.

My approach is radically praxeological: it focuses on explicating the familiarity of observable practices. It aims to avoid the reduction of practical action and practical reasoning to either of the two poles of Cartesian dualism – psychological processes or the motion of matter – nor to their coupling [Bennett, Hacker 2003;

Coulter 2008]. The account of the organized relationships of parts and wholes provided here is not about cognition or formulating “a theory of part–whole relations” [see Gerstl, Pribbenow 1996; Wagemans 2024]; it is concerned with what people are observably doing. Likewise, my approach is not grounded in “sociomaterialism” [see Mondada 2019; Raudaskoski 2023]; it is concerned with objects tied together by coherence of sense, rather than by material bonds. The objects of interest here are, first and foremost, social and organizational [Garfinkel 2022] – they comprise farewells, maps, landscapes, and hotel rooms, as well as telephones, their rings, and heartfelt greetings. Briefly put, I explore the consequentiality of the proposal that “there are no objects without practices” [Rawls 2008: 51].

The ethnomethodology of Garfinkel and his students respecified “gestalt phenomena” as praxeological achievements [Hutchinson 2022] to retain the lived unity of embodied activities. In this regard, Garfinkel has been especially inspired by Gurwitsch’s [1964] exploration of the foundations of perception, which begins by contrasting Hume’s empiricism and James’ pragmatism. As Eisenmann and Lynch [2021: 9] aptly put it: “While for Hume the question is how the perceiver groups the various disconnected sensory elements, the contrary question for James ... is *how persons actively discriminate and decompose distinct perceptions from the totality of experience*” [emphasis added]. I am pursuing this problem praxeologically, taking it not as a matter of consciousness but as members’ practical embodied achievement through details of activities in concrete settings [Garfinkel 2021].

To develop this line of inquiry and analytically grasp the situated production and recognition of parts and wholes, I propose and elaborate the notion of *structured objects*. It encompasses entities with recognizable features such as “left” and “right” sides (e.g., photographs and faces) or “beginnings” and “ends” (e.g., stories and streets). Importantly, such a decomposition is not imposed by professional analysts uncovering inherent “essences”, but “the features that define an object, *any object ... are determined only and entirely by a rule that governs the actor’s treatment of these features* and not at all by an object’s «substantive» or «intrinsic» features” [Garfinkel 2019b: 178, original emphasis]. The structuredness is established solely in how objects are treated in practical manipulations with the relevant “parts”, the relevant structures of social objects being produced or discovered in and as these operations.¹ The practices, not the

¹ In a recent paper, Mäkinen [2026] uses the notion of “decomposition expertise” to capture the aspect of professionals’ work that enables them “to break down the products of their work into

artifacts themselves, are key; the structure of the object is reflexively tied to the practices through which it is both displayed and constituted. For example, in a video excerpt analysed by Lindwall and Mondada [2025: 15–16], a novice in Dutch braiding is being instructed to “take an upper section of the hair”, thereby producing a locally enacted structure of the whole object (“the hair”) consisting of “upper” and “lower” sections. In what follows, two empirical illustrations will elucidate in closer detail how structured objects are constituted and maintained within orderly courses of action. Such an investigation reaffirms the centrality of organizational objects for the study of sociality, underscoring the enduring relevance of Sacks’s work for contemporary research and highlighting his pioneering role in the study of “naturally organized ordinary activities” [Garfinkel 2022].

SACKS ON OBJECTS, THEIR PARTS AND WHOLES

Sacks’s insights about the organized relationships of parts and wholes, which provide inspiration for the notion of structured objects as proposed here, are partly related to the “image” of machinery that is among the fundamental conceptual elements of his approach to the study of social activities. Sacks explicitly reflected on this feature in a lecture² given in Fall 1965:

Now, what I’m going to be doing is taking small parts of a thing and building out from them, because small parts can be identified and worked on without regard to the larger thing they’re part of. And they can work in a variety of larger parts than the one they happen to be working in. I don’t do that just as a matter of simplicity, but as I mentioned earlier in the course, the image I have is of this machinery, where you would have some standardized gadget that you can stick in here and there and that can work in a variety of different machines. And you go through the warehouse picking them up to build some given thing you want to build. So these smaller components are first to be identified because they are components perhaps for lots of other tasks than the one they’re used in. But then they’ll be fitted together into some actual single larger component in this case. [Sacks 1992 I: 159]

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a thorough discussion of Sacks’s nuanced machine imagery, though it is a fascinating topic that remains to

individual components, assess each part, and evaluate how the components come together to form the whole”. The difference between her approach and the approach developed in the present paper is that while Mäkinen discusses a *decomposition expertise* that is ascribable to individual actors as their competence, I am trying to account for the real-time, situated *practices of decomposition* through which objects are structured for temporary and local practical purposes.

² Lecture 5 that dealt with “tying rules” and “insult sequences”. An attempt at developing Sacks’s notion of tying, as well as discussing it conceptually, is available as part of my analysis of oral history materials [Mlynář 2020].

be closely scrutinized.³ In an early form, it famously featured in Sacks's [1963] paper on sociological description where he introduces a "commentator machine" that consists of a "moving part" and a "talking part". Sacks writes: "At industrial and scientific exhibitions one encounters a machine which the layman might describe in the following terms. *It has two parts; one part is engaged in doing some job, and the other part synchronically narrates aloud what the first part does.*" [Sacks 1963: 5; emphasis added]. While the commentator machine is explicitly framed as a «representative metaphor» which intendedly characterizes the stance sociology currently adopts towards its subject" [Sacks 1963: 4], it is not presented as a thought experiment and seems to be based on existing machines at the time.⁴ For the lay user, such a machine is a structured object – its components are recognizable as two different parts of the whole. The parts "belong together", mutually elaborating each other and constituting the machine in its encountered operative unity.

Sacks's lectures [1992] provide further insights and materials to consider with regard to part–whole relationships, as well as the sequential and structural constitution of social objects from distinct elements. Already in the very first lecture (Fall 1964 – Spring 1965), Sacks proposed an intriguing distinction between "composites" and "constructives":

I heard "May I help you" as something like an idiom. I'm going to call these idiom-like things "composites." That means you hear the whole thing as a form, a single unit. And as a single unit, it has a proper return. [...] Now the thing about at least some composites is that they can be heard not only as composites, but as ordinary sentences, which we could call "constructives," which are understood by taking the pieces and adding them up in some way. [Sacks 1992 I: 8]

The conceptual pair of composites and constructives is intended to analytically distinguish between – on the one hand – conversational objects that are practically divisible, i.e. the "understanding" of the whole is accomplished by a decomposition of the parts, and – on the other hand – objects that are "heard" as "a single unit," i.e. they already make sense as a whole and they are not open to decomposition. In other words, it is a distinction between practically structured objects (constructives) and objects that are unstructured (composites). To use

³ Some comments on the subject can be found, e.g., in a recent interview with Michael Lynch in *Ethnographic Studies* [Lynch et al. 2024: 331–332].

⁴ Edward Rose, who was one of Garfinkel's early collaborators involved in extended discussions of Sacks's 1963 paper before it was published [Mlynář 2023], later included a reflection on the commentator machine in his book *The Werald* [Rose 1992: 324–341; reprinted in Lynch, Sharrock 2003].

Wittgenstein's phrase, it means that for the latter "it makes no sense (is forbidden) to say that it consists of parts. Then «indivisible» is a grammatical stipulation" [Wittgenstein 2005: 329e].⁵ When Wittgenstein says that "indivisibility" is a grammatical stipulation, rather than an inherent feature of the object, he means that within the orderly structure (grammar) of ordinary activities it would be absurd or pointless for members to make such a decomposition of the whole.

Lastly, but perhaps most relevantly for my present purpose, in another early lecture⁶ from the Fall 1964 – Spring 1965 term, Sacks pointed out:

A first thing we need is a notion that what Members see is decomposable by them. That Members can decompose some event, situation, complex, whatever you want to call it, is no surprise at all, given the sorts of things we've been considering. That is to say, we've been talking about activities as being "assembled". [...] The question then is, having taken something apart, how do they put it back together again so as to find what it is that's strange. The way they seem to do this involves treating something that they see as a combination of parts, some of which have names. [Sacks 1992 I: 89]

Sacks turns the analytical attention to the observation that within their activities, members have routine and organized practices of dividing or decomposing social objects, at least those that are constructives. For the argument he is making in the lecture, it is crucial that these objects are put back together, but for the remainder of this article, it is the last sentence of the quote that is of principal importance. The notion of structured objects that I am proposing is aiming to grasp precisely how people treat objects as "a combination of parts", to arrive at a characterization of a set of practices that are done to structure an encountered object (e.g., referring to the "sides" of the object, marking them, pointing them out). For practices that involve talk, I elaborate on Sacks's observation that the parts routinely "have names". In what follows, I will illustrate and explicate structured objects as members' phenomena by focusing on objects structured with regard to their temporality (and names such as "beginnings" and "ends" of a video clip), and those that are practically atemporal (with names such as "sentences" and "paragraphs" of an on-screen text).

⁵ Sacks appreciated Wittgenstein's writings [e.g., Sacks 1992 I: 26], and so did other early ethnomethodologists, including Garfinkel of course [Mlynář 2023: endnotes 79 and 81; Garfinkel 2019a].

⁶ The lecture is titled "On exchanging glances", and the quoted segment appears in Sacks's discussion of "incongruity" that was an important theme in a number of students' reports of the phenomenon.

STRUCTURED OBJECTS AS DIRECTLY AND RETROSPECTIVELY AVAILABLE

Building on Sacks's insights on parts and wholes, I will now turn to examining how the reflexively maintained identity of structured objects is constituted through their practical availability and intelligibility. The practically relevant structuredness of an object might be inspectable "directly" at a glance or "retrospectively" after an engagement with it. Crucially, one is not analytically encountering the object's structure as a fixed characteristic, but rather the structure is "given" only in and through the demonstrable practical orientations that are constitutive of particular activities.⁷

As noted above, the concept of structured objects is grounded in an understanding of objects as social, rather than material. To underscore this aspect, I have selected examples that could be, in a certain sense, described as "involving screens" – where participants not only "interact with" them, "but also more substantially *merge with, engage in and produce* assemblages, and thereby accomplish larger activities that are intertwined with screen-based technologies" [Due 2024: 126]. An important point of my argument is, however, that for members amid action, the material or technological nature of objects – and their character as "screens" – is normally transparent and practically irrelevant as long as everything is going well. In other words, the social objects that I am examining, and the practices that constitute them, are not screens in a technical or material sense. Instead, in the first excerpt, the object is the text of a conference paper being written by three researchers in co-present collaboration, and in the second one, the object is a video clip being inspected for an answer to a question in a classroom group activity. Throughout the analysis, my primary focus is on how the structuredness and objectivity themselves are practically achieved in real time within the ongoing activities. I aim to show how structured objects, as the practices of their establishment and maintenance, are deeply tied to the situated

⁷ In the first draft of this article, I used the notions of "temporality" and "spatiality" to gloss the distinct practical orientations encountered in the two excerpts in this section. The comments of an anonymous reviewer, for which I am very grateful, allowed me to acknowledge more consequentially how time and space intertwine within structured objects, as their "temporal" and "spatial" aspects are indeed always simultaneously available as possible members' orientations. "Temporal" aspects and terms can be transformed into "spatial" ones, and vice versa. For social activities in their "here and now", space and time are inevitably pervasive, and it would be misleading to force locally contingent practical actions into formalized categories of "temporally" or "spatially" structured objects. I have thus abandoned this distinction as an analytical framework in favour of focusing more clearly on the oriented-to structured objects in their locally ongoing availability.

tasks being accomplished – whether watching an oral history video clip to answer worksheet questions or transferring edits from a printed version of a text into the digital document displayed on a screen.

DIRECTLY AVAILABLE STRUCTURED OBJECT

The empirical illustration of a directly available structured object comes from a corpus of several hours of video-recordings in which three researchers – Anton, Bohdan and Claude – are working on a conference paper in an online text editor ShareLaTeX.⁸ The analysed sequence comes rather late in the longer process, just before the submission of the manuscript on the day of the deadline, as the participants have already finished the writing. As the last step, they have printed the text in several copies for the final proofreading, after which they reassembled in a meeting room and continued with introducing minor edits and corrections. For this purpose, they displayed the text editor window on a large screen, to which one laptop was connected to introduce the edits after they have been discussed.⁹ The room has been video recorded from two complementary angles.

To achieve shared orientation and coordinate their suggestions and editing, the researchers employed various practices such as verbal instructions, reading aloud, gestural pointing, and marking with cursor. As Sacks [1992 I: 89] has put it, they also “have names” for the locally relevant parts, employing terms such as “introduction”, “the next page”, “the same column”, “the first paragraph”, “the last sentence”, or “the next line”. While these terms indicate a serial order, this order is relatively generic and available immediately, without the need for prior sustained engagement with the text. As shown in Excerpt 1, the ensemble of such practices and orientations enables the constitution and maintenance of the on-screen text as a structured object.

⁸ All names used in this article to refer to study participants are pseudonyms. The event took place in September 2017, and ShareLaTeX has since been taken over by Overleaf.

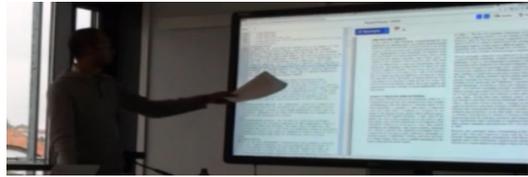
⁹ The conference paper has been published afterwards [Alavi et al. 2018].

EXCERPT 1¹⁰

01 A okay
 02 C after: (.) in the last sentence, as it might change after change (.)
 03 there shouldn't be comma I think >'cause it might change from (.) one
 04 &#day to another (0.6)&(0.7) should be one sentence without comma.
 b &points with papers in LH at the phrase&
 fig #fig.1/2



1



2

05 A mhm
 06 C I think %(.) one day maybe?=
 a %scrolls code down and up-->
 07 B =hold on!=%
 a ->%
 08 C =from one day to another (0.5) or from the day to an°other°
 09 (1.0)

inhabitants' tendency for *Anchorage* to a zone. This could be attributed to the inhabitants' daily work schedules (meetings, etc.), affinity to specific tools required to accomplish tasks, or a disposition for one kind of space. Moreover, anchorage is a dynamic quality of inhabitants' working experience and style, as it might change from one day to another depending on the tasks at hand and the social context.

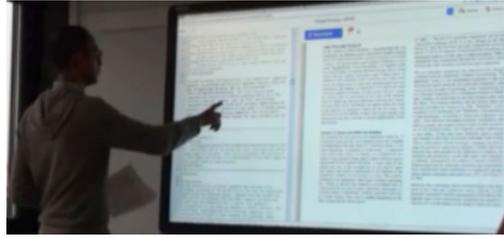
3

10 B it's fine from:&: a day to ano&ther
 b &points with papers at the phrase&
 11 (0.8)
 12 C okay
 13 A doesn't really matter .hh a::nd so what do you have?
 14 B yes er::: the ne&xt paragraph (0.5)& he&re >hold on<
 a %scrolls code down-----%
 b &points with papers&
 &(2.0)#(2.0)
 b &points with RH index finger along the line-->
 fig #fig.4/5
 15 B re&move all factors
 b ->&

¹⁰ The video materials are transcribed using the conversational-analytic conventions developed by Jefferson [2004] and Mondada [2024]. Participant doing the embodied action is identified in small caps in the left margin. Descriptions of bodily conduct are delimited between two identical symbols (such as “%” or “&”, with one symbol per participant). These symbols are synchronized with corresponding stretches of talk or time indications. The action described continues across subsequent lines until the same symbol is reached (indicated by an arrow “-->”). The “#” symbol denotes the precise moment when a screenshot (fig.) of the given number was taken. “RH” stands for right hand, “LH” stands for left hand. See also the Appendix for an overview of the transcription symbols.



4



5

```

16 A remove what?
17 B &all factors in the: (.)& parentheses=everything in the parentheses
    b &points with papers-----&
18 A yes
    %(4.1)
    a %deletes text, scrolls code down
19 B &okay
    b &puts down the papers
    (3.0)
20 A so what else do you have?
    &(1.2)
    b &sits down

```

Anton, Bohdan and Claude work with the view of Anton’s laptop, as he is the one introducing the changes in ShareLaTeX. As visible in fig. 2 and 5, the text editor displays the source code of the text file on the left side of the window and the rendered document on the right side. In this excerpt, the participants point to (Bohdan) and manipulate (Anton) solely the source code, although the rendered document on the right might also be relevant for their shared orientation. The excerpt captures how two edits, penned by the participants in the printed version of the manuscript, are introduced in the digital version of the document. The first edit – suggested by Claude – is discussed and made in lines 1 to 13, and the second edit – suggested by Bohdan – is discussed and made in lines 13 to 20.

In line 2, Claude marks the “last sentence”, practically decomposing the whole paragraph into sentences, and ordering them from “first” to “last”. The marked sentence at the end of the paragraph is shown in fig. 3 (taken from the published version of the paper). Furthermore, Claude reads aloud part of the sentence, shifting from directional instructions to the contents (“as it might change”) in order to argue that there is a comma that should be removed. He quotes (lines 3–4) the whole phrase concerned, and as he reads aloud, Bohdan – standing next to the screen – points to it with the printout he is holding in his left hand. In this way, the structure of the text as an object is made directly visible, highlighting the relevant part. Once the correction is done, in line 6, Claude suggests another change – replacing “a day” by “one day”, which is contested

as rather unimportant but eventually also introduced. Through such practices and orientations, the text displayed on screen is treated as a structured object whose structure is available “at a glance” [cf. Sudnow 1972: 259], but this is not to say that it possesses fixed or essentialized properties. Instead, the visually inspectable structure of the text on the screen relies on its reflexive relationship to temporalized reading’s work [Livingston 1995; McHoul 1982; Watson 2009]. Participants practically navigate the text through its dual character: while all its parts are immediately visible and available (e.g., to be pointed to), the text is also oriented to as readable in a proper sequence from the “first” to the “last” sentence, providing also for a locally established sense of “nextness”.

In line 14, Bohdan starts suggesting another edit to be made, prefacing the suggestion by “in the next paragraph”. This structural feature of the text serves as a pointer for Anton to scroll through the source code of the document towards the indicated place, and he already starts doing it while Bohdan produces the utterance. After a short moment, Bohdan announces that the required part of the text is visible by saying “here hold on” in line 14. He then points to the line to be corrected with his right index finger, reading quietly, and then formulating his proposal in line 15 as an instruction, quoting part of the text: “remove all factors”. After an other-initiated repair sequence, he clarifies that the portion of the text to be removed (“all factors”) is currently in parentheses and reformulates that he would like everything in the parentheses to be removed (line 17), which is then done. In this way, the punctuation marks (parentheses) in the text are used as a structuring element that allows for establishment of shared orientation and enactment of collaborative action.

I have used this excerpt to show that an object’s structuring is a dynamic process in which the participants employ verbal descriptions alongside gestural pointing, bringing out specific parts of the text that are to be edited or removed. Although the “whole text” is only partly present on the screen, the other – directly unavailable – parts are routinely evoked and named by terms such as “next paragraph” or “previous page”. This shows that structured objects are practically decomposed at different levels of locally relevant granularity [cf. Schegloff 2000], and that the organization of parts can be established from the outside of the given whole (“first”, “last”) or relatively to the momentary position within its internal structure (“next”, “previous”). Nevertheless, structured objects sometimes require earlier engagement for a practically meaningful organization to become retrospectively discernible and available as a resource, which is the phenomenon I will explore next.

RETROSPECTIVELY AVAILABLE STRUCTURED OBJECT

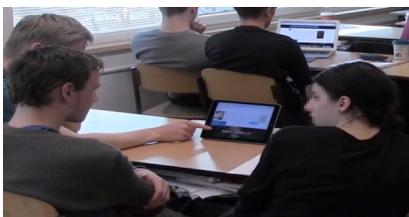
The empirical illustration of a retrospectively available structured object comes from a study based on several hours of video-recorded classroom interactions in Czech and French, involving groups of two or three students working with one computer device per group. The sessions were recorded using multiple cameras and audio recording devices to capture a comprehensive view of the students' activities. The students' tasks were formulated around an online lesson on World War II migration, which included subtitled oral history clips, texts, images, and a paper worksheet with six questions. Each group worked independently, following a sequence of reading the text on the screen, watching the video clips, and writing down answers on the worksheet. In practice, this sequence was often altered as students navigated the digital materials alongside their collaborative work in answering the questions in the worksheet. As part of their group work, students also watched and interpreted brief video clips taken out of longer oral history interviews [see Mlynář 2021a, 2021b].

The second excerpt shows how an oral history video clip becomes a structured object in the course of the students' operations performed on it – such as watching, rewatching, and using the timeline control to move forward and backward through the clip while locating its distinctive parts. In the transcript below, Adam, Bob, and Clara try to locate specific information after they summarize the gist of a video clip which concluded with the narrator describing his imprisonment following an illegal wartime escape from Slovakia to Switzerland. After viewing the clip once, a rewatching sequence [Mlynář 2021b] commences following an approximately one-minute discussion when the students realize that they are missing a key piece of knowledge. In line 11, Clara initiates the partial second viewing through embodied action, orienting not to the video clip as a whole but to its internal temporal structure of ordered parts.

EXCERPT 2

- 01 B takže celou dobu byl už ve Švý-eh-carsku (.) potom teda
so he was already in Swi-eh-tzerland (.) well afterwards
- 02 A n[o (.) ()]
y[ep (.) ()]
- 03 B [jestli sem to správně] pochopil. heh heh
[if I have correctly] understood. heh heh
- 04 C pak ho převezli do Sant Gallen &
then they drove him to Sant Gallen &
- b &folds arms/withdraws LH from desk
- 05 (1.3) * (0.5)
 a *reaches with right arm to tablet, withdraws index finger

06 C zavřeli ho
locked him up
 07 (0.6) #* (1.4)
 a *extends index finger, scrolls up to text
 fig #fig.6
 08 C ale:: (.) nebo ne?=
bu::t (.) or not? =



09 B =no to právě ne*vim
*=well I don't *know that*
 a *scrolls down
 10 C .hh % já taky nevím
.hh % I also don't know
 %leans left and towards tablet
 11 C % tak počkej# pustíme si ten konec zn(h)ov(h)a.
% so hold on# let's play the end ag(h)ain(h).
 %RH to screen, clicks on video clip
 fig #fig.7
 12 (1.6)
 13 C no
so
 (0.7)
 14 B spíš kde je ta p(h)ila (.) heh .hhh hhheh:
more like where's the sawm(h)ill (.) heh .hhh hhheh:
 15 C hhh heh heh †HEH heh (.)
 16 C .hhh % (1.3) %
 c %RH starts video clip, withdraws RH%
 17 % (0.4) %
 c %LH movement twd tablet and back%
 (1.3)
 18 C mam to%eště přetočit zpát[ky]
should %I rewind further ba[ck]
 %LH points to tablet
 19 B [jo] % poč\$kej=
 [yeah]% hol\$d on=
 b \$puts LH index finger on clip
 c %moves RH towards tablet
 20 C =°mhm°
 21 B protože \$to je tam nák \$
because \$it's there kinda\$
 \$touches clip----\$
 22 #\$(3.1) \$
 b #\$(moves time marker left\$
 fig #fig.8



8



9

23 (3.0)
 24 \$ (0.6)
 b \$puts left index finger on clip--->
 25 B 'čkej tam \$\$řikali eště <jedno švýcar\$ský město>
hol'on there they mentioned <another Swi\$ss town>
 >-----\$\$moves time marker left----\$
 26 (1.6) \$ (4.2) \$
 b \$moves time marker left\$
 27 B \$[>ta'y řikali< na začátku ná]ký švýcarský město:# °ale° \$
\$[>here they said< at the beginning so]me Swiss town:# °but° \$
 28 C [mhm mh:::m (.) j o ?]
 [mhm mh:::m (.) yeah ?]
 b \$moves time marker left-----\$
 fig #fig.9

The excerpt shows how the students segmented and reassembled parts of the video clips to extract task-relevant information. After watching the video clip for the first time, it is no longer entirely new to the students, and during the subsequent work, they purposefully search for specific parts of the narrator's talk. They observably orient to the temporal-narrative structure in moving back and forth through the clip, and by selectively re-watching specific segments of it that already became relevant with regard to finding answers to the questions in the spreadsheet and have revealed their significance as distinct parts of the whole video clip. In line 11, Clara suggests that they watch “the end again”, decomposing the clip into a set of chronologically ordered parts. This practice is later also employed by Bob, who refers to the “beginning” of the clip (line 27). At the same time, such an operative structure of the video clip – here consisting of “beginnings” and “ends” – is not void of specific content. The structural elements as parts of the whole clip are primarily relevant to the current task of responding to the worksheet questions. After a brief rewatching, Bob makes it clear that they need to clarify specific aspects of the oral history narrative – “where is the sawmill” (line 14). Clara then suggests a move through the established structure of the clip – “should I rewind further back” (line 18), whereafter Bob takes over the control of the tablet and moves his finger on the timeline, effectively scrolling through the subtitled video clip. Simultaneously, he accounts for his conduct, first

in line 25 and then again in line 27 with a structural reference: “here they said *at the beginning* some Swiss town” (emphasis added). Specific segments of the clip have emerged as significant parts of the whole; for the immediate practical purposes of the collaborative classroom work, the clip is treated as a structured object.

Structured objects can be reflexively maintained through features that are visually available “at a glance”, as illustrated earlier in Excerpt 1. In Excerpt 2, however, the structure of the video clip as a social object is only available in retrospect, when the students obtain an overall view that allows them to assign specific practical sense to locatable parts of the clip. Importantly, the temporal structure of the oral history video clip is not an inherent or essential feature of the “on-screen” object, but is produced by the practices of skilled manipulation, such as moving backward and forward using the timeline control [see also Tuncer et al. 2021]. This designed feature of the video player represents the temporality of the video clip in a spatial way as a graphic line, while its skilled use relies on prior engagement with the clip (the first watching) that provides the participants with practical knowledge of the structured object. The structuredness of the object is produced in and through the local history of the situated activity, in order to be treated as a feature of the object “all along”.

STRUCTURED OBJECTS AS MEMBERS’ PHENOMENA: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Structured objects consist of routinely recognizable and locatable parts, and their features are thus “reified” for all practical purposes, which is a necessary precondition of any concerted action: “No reification, no object; no reification, no action” [Garfinkel 2008: 134].¹¹ However, as demonstrated by the analyses above, the reification for practical purposes is remarkably temporary. As stressed by Liberman [2024: 436], members in action are “oriented to locating or developing (often collaboratively) some possible orderliness for their mundane affairs, but these orders can be elusive, and it is usual that the parties have only a tendentious hold of them”. Despite their locally produced and fleeting character, in each next moment of concerted action, social objects and their structuredness are consequential. Structured objects are not inherently fixed, deliberately constructed or rationally planned, but they might be reflexively seen as both byproducts and

¹¹ Garfinkel’s notion of reification is closely related to objectivation and naming; as he notes on the same page, reifying and naming are “synonymous terms” [Garfinkel 2008: 134]. This might stand in contrast to other sociological uses of the term, such as reification as a feature of objectification in the work of Karl Marx and in subsequent literatures engaging with his ideas.

conditions of organized activities. They emerge in and as local instantiations and applications of generic formal vocabularies and categorization devices. In what remains, I will draw some broader conclusions from the earlier discussion and analysis of empirical materials, building on Sacks's explorations into the possibility of sociology as a "natural observational science" [Sacks 1992 I: 803] that focuses on the detailed, moment-by-moment unfolding of social life. What insights does the present study provide about the organized relationships of parts and wholes, and what is the value of the notion of structured objects?

By introducing the distinction between directly and retrospectively available structured objects, my aim was to explore and illustrate how the structuredness of the mundane world – its parts and wholes – can be seen simultaneously as experienced and retrieved. The structure of social objects is *experienced* in the sense that people find themselves in the midst of it, having it immediately available as a resource. Furthermore, we can see structuredness as *retrieved*, in the sense of its intelligibility in retrospect, after encountering a particular object and gaining a sense of its overall organization that can afterwards be used as a taken-for-granted structural principle. In this article, for consistency, I have explored the production of structured objects that consist of speech and texts. However, I submit that the notion of structured objects goes beyond "linguistic" phenomena and can be productively used, and in the process also refined, in studying other kinds of practical activities. For instance, spatial objects such as shared offices [cf. Mlynář et al. 2024] and their oriented-to structures are reflexively tied to different activities "taking place" in those settings. In the end, importantly, the analytic pursuit is about what is being done with, in, and through the structured objects, and for what purposes they are used as resources, e.g., in instructed action, specification, navigation, exemplification, etc.

The two empirical illustrations above document the detailed production, manipulation, and transformation of social objects in real time, providing a nuanced understanding of Sacks's early distinction between composites and constructives. Composites, as discussed, are (conversational) objects perceived as indivisible units, where the whole is understood without the need for decomposition. Constructives, on the other hand, are objects whose understanding is achieved through the practical decomposition of their parts. The empirical analyses have illustrated that any notion of practical "divisibility" is dependent on the situated nature of the ongoing activity and its organizational features. This includes decomposition and reassembly of structured objects that allows for further specification of the concrete practices of decomposing objects into recognizable parts and reassembling them to achieve a coherent whole, again and again, as well as the skilled

manipulations of distinctive parts. While much could be gained from further analysis of other empirical materials, it seems to be the case that – indeed, as in Sacks’s original discussion – instead of taking constructives and composites as two contrasting types of objects, there is a variety of “constructive” and “composite” practical orientations. For instance, in the excerpts above, single words were treated as composites, in the sense that there was “no need” for their decomposition into characters, but this “need” is occasioned by the particular activity underway. Crucially, instead of imposing a part–whole organization through professional analysis, the goal is to account for the organized relationships of parts and wholes as members’ phenomena: “We are trying not to arrange things conveniently but to find out how they are arranged” [Sacks 1975: 66]. The notion of structured objects thus offers a lens through which to explore the interplay between social practices and the material and temporal aspects of organizational things. In line with the fundamental principles of Sacks’s radical approach to sociology, it also reveals how order and meaning are collaboratively produced and maintained, even in the face of their natural elusiveness.

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OBIEKTY USTRUKTUROWANE: ZORGANIZOWANE RELACJE CZĘŚCI I CAŁOŚCI

Streszczenie

W tym tekście eksplorowana jest kwestia zorganizowanych relacji części i całości w dziele Harveya Sacksa, traktując je jako inspirację dla badań empirycznych. Zagadnienie to jest często ujmowane w kategoriach postaci (ang. *gestalts*), gdzie każda część pojawia się poprzez swoje znaczenie

funkcjonalne. Proponuję ujęcie komplementarne polegające na analizie części i całości jako zjawisk wytwarzanych przez uczestników (ang. *members' phenomena*). W jednym ze swoich wczesnych wykładów Sacks [1992: 89] zauważył, że „potrzebujemy [...] pojęcia, zgodnie z którym to, co widzą Uczestnicy jest przez nich dekomponowane”, i że „zdają się oni to robić traktując to, co widzą jako kombinację części, przy czym niektóre z nich posiadają nazwy”. Aby rozwinąć ten kierunek analizy proponuję pojęcie „obiektów ustrukturowanych”, czyli całości z rozpoznawalnymi cechami, takimi jak „lewa” i „prawa” strona (np. fotografie i twarze) lub „początki” i „końce” (np. opowiadania i ulice). Dwie ilustracje – odnoszące się bezpośrednio i retrospektywnie do dostępnego ustrukturowania – pokazują, jak ustrukturowane obiekty są konstytuowane i podtrzymywane. Co istotne, dekompozycja całości nie jest narzucona przez zawodowych badaczy. Ustrukturowanie jest raczej ustanawiane poprzez praktyczne operacje na odpowiednich „częściach”, a odpowiednie struktury obiektów społecznych są wytwarzane i podtrzymywane w tych operacjach i poprzez nie.

Słowa kluczowe: analiza konwersacyjna, etnometodologia, Harvey Sacks, praktyki wytwarzania obiektów, części i całości, obiekty ustrukturowane

APPENDIX – TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Transcription conventions for speech (based on Jefferson 2004):

[]	overlapping talk
(.)	micro-pause
(2.2)	pause in seconds
.	final intonation
(but)	estimated hearing
()	inaudible segment
a:::	vocal prolongation
Re-	cut-off.

Transcription conventions for bodily conduct (based on Mondada 2024):

ope	Participant doing the embodied action is identified in small caps in the margin.
%%	Descriptions of bodily conduct are delimited between
&&	two identical symbols (one symbol per participant / type of action)
@@	that are synchronized with correspondent stretches of talk or time indications.
&-->	The action described continues across subsequent lines
-->&	until the same symbol is reached.
#fig	Precise moment when screenshot (figure) of the given number was taken.
RH	Right hand.
LH	Left hand.