Allusion

Term: Allusion

Part of Speech: *noun*

Definition:

The term **allusion** generally refers to something that has been conveyed inexplicitly in interaction. The term figures most prominently in Schegloff's (1996) analysis of the practice of confirming allusions. Roughly, this practice consists of a speaker using a **full repeat** to confirm a co-participant's **candidate interpretation** or **understanding** of the speaker's circumstances (current or past), typically as derived or inferred from the preceding interaction (Bolden 2010). In so doing, the confirming speaker not only confirms the correctness or adequacy of that understanding, but also attends to it as having explicated (or exposed) something that was previously conveyed indirectly (i.e. without having been said in so many words or in *those* words specifically). This can be seen in following example, adapted from Schegloff (1996: 186), in which Rita at line 05 forwards a conjecture about how Evelyn came to be in the state of being *a bissl verschickert*. By confirming this supposition with a full repeat in line 06, Evelyn not only confirms the correctness of that interpretation, she also communicates that her talk in line 01 can be understood to have previously conveyed this indirectly (i.e. 'alluded to it').

```
[Schegloff 1996: 186]
01 Evelyn: I fee:l a bi:ssl verschickert.
02 (0.2)
03 Rita: W-why's'a:t,
04 (0.4)
05 -> Rita: uh you've had sump'n t' dr^ink.=
```

```
06 => Evelyn: =I had sump'n t' dri:nk.
07 Rita: Uh huh
```

Allusions and allusiveness are generally hard to evidence empirically, and so care must be exercised in invoking these notions analytically. Moreover, in contrast to its vernacular usage, in analytic practice the term should not be understood to carry implications of intentionality or design (Schegloff 1996: 184; see also Drew 2018: 247). In characterizing Evelyn's repetitional confirmation in line 06 above as confirming an allusion, no claim is being made as to whether she 'actually' alluded to 'having had something to drink' (or intended to allude to it) with the formulation she selected in line 01. Descriptively, it is therefore more adequate to say that the repetitional confirmation registers that Rita's turn has proposed a legitimate inference of something that the preceding talk can be understood to have conveyed without it having been articulated (see also Bolden 2010). One environment in which allusiveness appears to play an important role is in the **delivery of bad news**, which are typically broached cautiously and (at least initially) often only hinted at (Schegloff 1988: 443-445; Maynard 2003).

Additional Related Entries:

- **Candidate understanding**
- **Confirmation**
- **Indirectness**
- **Full repeat**
- **News delivery**

Cited References:

Bolden, G. B. (2010). 'Articulating the unsaid' via *and*-prefaced formulations of others' talk. *Discourse Studies* 12 (1), 5-32.

Drew, P. (2018). Inferences and indirectness in interaction. *Open Linguistics* 4(1), 241-259.

Maynard, D. W. (2003). *Bad news, good news: Conversational order in everyday talk and clinical settings*. University of Chicago Press.

Schegloff, E. A. (1988). On an actual virtual servo-mechanism for guessing bad news: A single case conjecture. *Social Problems* 35 (4), 442-457.

Schegloff, E. A. (1996). Confirming allusions: Toward an empirical account of action. *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (1), 161-216.

Additional References:

Pomerantz, A. (2017). Inferring the purpose of a prior query and responding accordingly. In: Raymond, G., Lerner, G. H. & Heritage, J. (eds.). Enabling human conduct: Studies of talk-in-interaction in honor of Emanuel A. Schegloff. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 61-77.

Walker, T., Drew, P. & Local, J. (2011). Responding indirectly. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, 2432-2451.

Author:

Uwe-A. Küttner (Leibniz-Institute for the German Language, Mannheim) (https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1688-0896)

To cite:

Retrieved from "http://emcawiki.net/index.php?title=Allusion&oldid=28677"

This page was last edited on 25 August 2022, at 15:55.