Abstract

Persson Thunqvist, Daniel, persson.thunqvist@liu.se, Senior Lecturer; Osvaldsson, Karin, karin.osvaldsson@liu.se, Senior Lecturer; Cromdal, Jakob, jakob.cromdal@liu.se, Associate Professor; Tema Barn (Child Studies), Linköping University, Sweden: “Linguistic work in emergency calls. A survey and review of ongoing research”. Språk och stil 18, 2008, pp. 67–92.

Emergency calls are an important public service and comprise the first step in an emergency response. This service is essentially mediated through talk. The article presents a review of conversation analytic studies of the interaction taking place in real-life emergency calls. Some of these studies focus on analyzing the highly specialized conversational structure of calls to the emergency services. Others explore a variety of routine interactional troubles, including, for instance, misunderstandings arising from the asymmetries in knowledge about the institutional setting, as well as different expectations the parties bring to the interaction. A further subset of studies includes analyses of deviant cases, in which emergency calls not only evinced interactional troubles but also proved seriously consequential for the response operation. The present review reveals that there is a lack of studies targeting emergency calls with certain specific categories of callers that may prove communicatively problematic, such as non-native callers and children. An analysis of a few exchanges between an immigrant child and the operator serves to illustrate some specific language-related sources of interactional trouble. This demonstrates, more broadly, the need for analytic research to highlight the procedures through which the parties work to manage and remedy such interactional problems, thus allowing for the accomplishment of a successful emergency assistance.

Keywords: emergency calls, Conversation Analysis (CA), institutional interaction, interactional trouble, Swedish.