Linguistics in L-A-P Research: An Analysis of Authority and Agency Dynamics in Leadership as it Happens

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Abstract

This article shows how a methodological approach borrowed from the discipline of applied linguistics can contribute to L-A-P scholarship which seeks to develop more and better representations of practice based on naturally occurring data. Specifically, it responds to the call of this special issue to focus on the role of 'micro-processes in affecting turning points and changes in trajectories as a means of understanding leadership within collaborative processes.' Working with a two-minute extract of naturally occurring spoken interaction, audio-recorded during a corporate strategy away-day, I use the empirical procedures and analytical tools of linguistics to provide an alternative vocabulary with which to describe practice. The study finds that the close study of language reveals important aspects of collaborative dynamics. Four discursive strategies are identified. Taken alongside the opening-closing dynamics these provoke, these describe how individual linguistic choices interconnect in the processual flow of the unfolding conversation. This linguistically informed empirical analysis extends our understanding of L-A-P by illustrating a means of studying the

collaborative dynamics of leadership. These observations and interpretations have wider implications for scholars who seek to attend to the performative dynamics by means of which practice emerges.

MAD statement. This century, scholars and practitioners have sought to better understand collective and collaborative leadership processes. Researching how leadership actually emerges in these forms of leadership is central to this quest. In this study I show how a close study of language can contribute to developing a better understanding of the collaborative processes that produce leadership.

Keywords: Leadership-as-practice; collaborative agency; applied linguistics

Introduction

This empirical study responds to calls from within the L-A-P community of scholars for empirical analyses which allow researchers to 'come close to the doing of leadership' (Alvehus & Crevani, 2022, p.231). The tools and methodologies of applied linguistics, by focusing on 'specific discursive processes through which leadership is accomplished at the micro level of interaction' (Schnurr & Schroeder, 2019, p.446), can provide an analytical resource for understanding practice 'as a transient phase that provides temporary structuring in the ongoing flow of action' (Simpson et al. 2018, p.647). The study uses methods borrowed from the discipline of linguistics to identify and describe some of the processes through which collaborative agency emerges. Raelin (2021) describes L-A-P as 'the exploratory study of the processes that detail social and material interactions that may alter the trajectory of the flow of practices within an organization' (2021, p.385). In this quest, scholars have differentiated between practices and practice, where the former refers to discrete entities which 'are valued for their routineness', and the latter signifies processual flow which is continuously emergent (Simpson 2016, p.168). Thus, researching leadership as practice is ontologically distinct from researching leadership practices and commensurate methods should be developed which

draw clearer distinctions between entity and processual perspectives (Robinson & Renshaw, 2022).

Recent methodological developments in L-A-P have included short term ethnographies (Arhus & Crevani, 2022; Sklaveniti, 2020), video ethnography (Robinson & Renshaw, 2022) and shadowing (Buchan, 2019; Murphy, 2023). Methods of analysis have drawn on discourse and frame analysis (Carroll & Simpson, 2012), Gergen's act + supplement analysis (Ramsey, 2016; Sklaveniti, 2020), speech act theory (Ramsey, 2016), adjacency pairs (Gergen & Hersted, 2016), the performativity of language (Simpson et al., 2018), organisational discourse analysis (Crevani, 2018), and multi-modal coding (Alvehus & Crevani, 2022; Robinson & Renshaw, 2022). While many of these constructs are informed by ideas with their intellectual origins in linguistics, they are not linguistic analyses. This study seeks to complement these advances while also introducing methods, tools and empirical procedures of linguistics which provide an additional means of researching practice.

The study is informed by linguistic ethnography (Rampton et al., 2004; Tusting 2019, 2023), an approach to research that studies relationships between the micro-level of language practices and the broader social context and social order, drawing on linguistics, social theory and ethnographic methodology. The approach draws on a range of analytical tools including interactional sociolinguistics which forms the backbone of my analysis. In the article, I analyse empirical data collected during a corporate strategy away-day, the goal of which is to respond to changes in the external regulatory environment. The group, which I describe below in more detail, was temporarily convened to share knowledge and offer strategic input outside the day-to-day organizational hierarchy. This means that apart from minimal encouragement to take up facilitation and note-taking tasks, formal leadership roles and responsibilities

are not *a priori* assigned to specific individuals. I draw on Simpson's (2016) re-examination of agency in leadership theorizing to provide a framework for analyzing collaborative dynamics, concentrating specifically on *collaborative agency* which focuses on how agency emerges. Using analytical tools of applied linguistics, I show that the close study of language offers insights into leadership and the production of collective direction.

The principal question I address is if and how linguistic analysis can contribute to the study of leadership within collaborative processes by identifying and describing some of the processes through which practice emerges.

Theoretical framework

There is a lack of empirical studies which eschew individual and dyadic person-centred explanations of leadership in favour of attention to how 'unfolding social processes change the trajectory of the flow of practices among parties to an activity' (Raelin, 2023. p.19). This means going beyond individual entities both in theoretical and analytical focus. A focus not on the 'who' of *collective agency* where a number of human and non-human entities interact by engaging in practices but on the 'how' of *collaborative agency* where a focus is on the processes by which practice emerges in the spaces around, between and beyond interactants (B. Simpson, personal communication, April 18, 2024). However, approaches to studying the emergence of practice defined in this way remain elusive. This paper borrows empirical procedures and tools of analysis from applied linguistics to test the usefulness of these methods for studying leadership-as-practice.

In traditional leadership literature (e.g. MacGregor Burns, 1978) and frequently in the treatment of leadership from the discipline of linguistics (e.g. Van De Mieroop, 2020) analyses of agency are based on a blended understanding of agency and authority.

This agency-authority combination is mostly conceptualized in individualized terms as agentic intentionality with effects. Authority here is both a precondition and the hierarchically established resource which is needed to legitimize a leader's power to shape events. From this perspective (for example, Bass & Alvolio, 1994), individual leaders are understood to mobilize followers, and linguistic research which aligns with this perspective privileges the influence of an individual's discursive strategies upon a group (e.g. Wodak et al., 2011). Even where collective forms of leadership are studied (see Foldy & Ospina, 2023 for a recent overview) analytical emphasis is on ways in which agency is shared or distributed between (human and non-human) entities. Linguistic research aligning with this perspective understands leadership as an interactively accomplished, conjoint endeavour (e.g. Clifton, 2017; Clifton et al. 2020). Drawing principally on conversation analysis such studies examine how leadership agency is produced in relations and interactions (for example, Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Larsson, 2016). These studies are in line with research that challenges person-centred conceptualizations such as L-A-P but they mostly focus on practices, that is, entitative or weak process conceptualisations of agency which is ultimately located in the authority of interactants. However, when agency is tied to authority in this way, it is difficult, if not impossible, to escape entity thinking. The concept of authority itself seems to attract to individuals whether they are conceptualized as lone leaders or groups of individuals who coordinate their actions.

To escape entity thinking, it is necessary to focus on agency without this anchor in authority. Barbara Simpson's (2016) theoretical re-exploration of different orientations to leadership agency provides the conceptual L-A-P framework to support such an exploration. Simpson draws on the work of Pragmatist writers John Dewey and Arthur Bentley (1949 [1960]), in their book 'Knowing and the Known', who distinguish

between three categories of action: self-action, inter-action and trans-action (see Simpson, 2016, and Elkjaer, 2018, for summaries of this work). Simpson argues that these categories illuminate different orientations to leadership as object of enquiry (see table 1 for an overview). 'Self-action' in Dewey and Bentley's terms refers to 'independent actors' which are taken as 'activating events' (Dewey & Bentley, 1949 [1960], p.72, as cited in Simpson, 2016, p.159–160). Simpson argues that this sort of thinking is 'nowhere more evident than in the leadership literature' (2016, p.161) where debates have for so long been dominated by heroic accounts of leadership located within an individual (e.g. Collins, 2001). Simpson's second category 'inter-action' illustrates the dynamics of collective leadership agency which is understood as being shared or distributed among discrete agents. According to Simpson, this thinking underpins more recent literature which defines leadership as shared or distributed between more than one entity (e.g. Pearce & Conger, 2003). From this perspective, shared leadership agency temporarily resides in individuals as they inter-act with each other in participative ways (Clifton, 2017; Ospina & Foldy, 2015). According to Simpson, the final category, 'trans-action', reflects an ontological shift towards process and emergence. This category lends theoretical coherence to the processual conceptualisation I foreground in this study. Ontologically distinct from the previous two perspectives, the trajectory of the flow of practices is seen as separate from the individual entities involved (e.g. Alvehus & Crevani, 2022; Crevani et al., 2010; Ramsey, 2016). The emphasis here is on processual agency occurring 'in the midst of action rather than as a directive regulating the action' (Raelin 2023, p.27). In effect, the processes which contribute to leadership work extend beyond entitative thinking and imply that collaborative agency unfolds in the spaces between and beyond interactants

(Raelin, 2023; Simpson et al., 2018; Robinson & Renshaw, 2022). These ideas are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Next, I describe my data and methodology before turning to empirical analysis.

Data and methodology

In this article I analyze transcribed data from a corporate strategy away-day which was designed to share knowledge and develop a plan regarding a specific strategic challenge. People with knowledge, expertise and authority had been invited to participate in the event which was held at the corporate headquarters. I shadowed the executive who was hosting the event and audio-recorded interactions whenever she was present. I held prior discussions with her and agreed first, that the study would be limited to the conversations she approved post-recording, second, that the research would remain focused on her expressed learning objectives and third, the levels of anonymity and confidentiality that were required. All pre-event documentation and textual materials (such as flip charts) produced during the event were subject to a strict confidentially agreement. The analysis therefore focuses on naturalized transcriptions (Bucholtz, 2000) of audio recordings taken from samples of different meetings.

To collect the data, I placed a small audio-recorder in the middle of the table around which the group of eight participants were seated. I had been introduced at the start of the day as the senior manager's 'shadow', gathering data for use in a study of leadership as it happens. I collected and analyzed mid-conversation sections from eight different small group SWOT analyses and selected a two-minute representative sample. These 'middle sections' of group interaction generally receive less attention in the literature on business meetings than do beginning and endings (Angouri & Marra, 2010). They are of interest to the study of L-A-P because they make 'different turning

points in the flow of talk' (Simpson et al. 2018, p.656) more visible and therefore open to analysis. The interaction from which the extract in the paper was selected was transcribed using the transcription conventions listed in the Appendix.

The underlying methodological assumptions associated with the study are consistent with linguistic ethnography (Rampton et al., 2004, 2015; Tusting, 2019, 2023). While not so narrowly defined as to only be interested in language per se, this approach takes a linguistic point of entry into data analysis using discourse analytic tools which are selected from a range of approaches and methods, applied using well established procedures, and described using relatively technical vocabularies. Methods of data collection and data analysis derive from both ethnographic and linguistic traditions from an epistemological position that 'generally holds that to a considerable degree, language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity' (Rampton et al., 2015, p.2).

The study from which the two minute data sample I analyze in this article has been selected is one of three case studies of language and power based on shadowing senior executives as they went about their day-to-day work (Murphy, 2023). Kate (a pseudonym), the research subject of one of the cases, wanted to change established patterns of conversation. My aim in turning to linguistics was to uncover hidden or unnoticed meanings, details and patterns which are carried in discursive processes. The process of choosing specific episodes for linguistic analysis was an iterative one, moving between close reading of the transcripts to identify where conversations appeared to move to new ground including related areas of interest (such as authority, leadership and collaborative agency) and returning many times to the linguistics

literature (e.g. Gordon & Kraut, 2018; Holmes et al., 2011; Koller, 2018; Mullany, 2022; Vine, 2018) in order to understand the relationship between these and specific discourse features, such as questions and directives, control of the floor, stance, evaluation, indexicality and so on. The two-minute extract I analyze in this paper is a strong illustrative example of discursive processes which illustrate aspects of this relationship.

Linguistics is as varied a disciplinary field as management studies and it provides a home for scholars with vastly different theories, research interests and methodological commitments. These include: critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak, 2013), an interdisciplinary approach to language analysis that draws attention to hidden dimensions of power embedded in social practices and highlights the role of discourse in society; professional discourse analysis (Candlin & Sarangi, 2011), the analysis of language used by trained specialists and professionals in the workplace; conversation analysis (Drew & Heritage, 1992), which focuses on sequences of interaction in everyday exchanges; the sub-discipline of pragmatics (Culpeper & Haugh, 2014), the study of meaning in a specific context, including the analysis of specific features of workplace interaction (Angouri, 2012; Schnurr, 2008) and interactional sociolinguistics (Jaspers, 2012; Rampton, 2019), a framework that combines micro-level analysis focusing on language use in its social context with 'information about the macro-level context in which the interaction occurred' (Schnurr 2022, p.24). While there are some points of tension where specific theoretical and methodological commitments of these traditions do not sit comfortably together, in practice, applied linguists frequently combine tools and approaches. I have tried to keep technical linguistic terminology to a minimum, but to explore a different vocabulary of analysis, some terms are unavoidable. Here I define a few terms associated with conversation

analysis (authority rights, epistemic and deontic aspects of interaction, status and stance), linguistic modality (epistemic and deontic modality) and interactional sociolinguistics (contextualisation cues, conversational inferencing).

Conversation analysis focuses on the fleeting negotiations at the interface of knowledge and power and shows how participants orientate to each other as direction is produced and courses of action are set or changed. In identifying authority rights in interaction (Heritage, 2012; Mondana, 2013; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012), analysts distinguish between the epistemic and deontic aspects of spoken interaction where epistemic refers to participants' rights and obligations to know relative to co-participants (Heritage, 2012), and the deontic rights refers to a participant's entitlement to impose actions on co-participants (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012). Analysts also distinguish between status and stance (Heritage, 2012, p.4–6). Epistemic status is the relative position a person has in a certain domain of knowledge. Epistemic stance refers to public ways of displaying how knowledgeable one is, which is often expressed through linguistic choices. Participants' orientation to power, control and agency are expressed in the deontic order which is related to rights and obligations (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012). Deontic status refers to the position that a participant has in a domain of action relative to their co-participants. Deontic stance refers to a speaker's public ways of displaying how powerful they are.

Different forms of linguistic modality are relevant to this sort of analysis. Linguistic modality relies on notions of epistemic and deontic intentionality. Epistemic modality in linguistics refers to the ways speakers express their relationship to truth and knowledge. Epistemic modality indicates how certain or probable a speaker considers a particular statement to be. Deontic modality refers to duty or obligation. It relates a speaker's position towards norms and rules and can indicate what is allowed or

forbidden based on institutional and social expectations. Modality can be expressed in many ways, for example through modal auxiliaries such a 'must' or 'can', conditional phrases, as well in different parts of speech such as adverbs, nouns and adjectives. Utterances are often constructed with flexibility in mind and because the differences are not always clear cut, interpretation relies on contextual information.

For episodes of naturally occurring spoken data linguistic ethnographers often turn to interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982) to support the analysis of language use in its wider sociocultural context because 'the approach benefits from both contextual information and fine-grained analytic tools to understand how meaning is negotiated between participants in interaction' (Vine et al., 2008, p.345). Features under scrutiny include content and topic management, turn-taking, interruptions, hesitations and pauses, discourse markers (well, okay, right etc.), use of pronouns etc., drawn from a wide range of linguistic, paralinguistic, pragmatic and conversational features. The approach uses conversation analytic procedures and draws on its literature but is not bound by the same methodological protocols (see Angouri & Mondada, 2017). Critically, from the perspective of interactive sociolinguistics, agency is understood as interaction bound by linguistic and contextual constraints. The tentative assessments made of what the speaker seeks to convey in illocutionary terms - that is what the speaker aims to achieve by what they say – can only be validated in relation to other background assumptions which build on extra-linguistic knowledge. Gumperz calls this process conversational inferencing (Gumperz, 1989, p.230). For example, a request made by one participant does not function as such until some form of acknowledgment, known as a compliance token, displays understanding that the recipient knows the utterance has consequences for them. 'Only when a move has elicited a response can we say communication is taking place' (Gumperz, 1982, p.1). Put simply, whether an

utterance has its intended effect depends not only on the agentic intention of the speaker, but also on the interpretative frame of the recipient. That people's assumptions about power, status, role and knowledge 'form the very basis for indirect communicative strategies' (Gumperz, 1982, p. 6-7) means meeting participants are continually engaged in interpreting shifts in the conversational flow to position themselves in relation to others. Linguistic analyses can thus reveal the frequently felt but mostly invisible dynamics of collective direction as it emerges as shown in the analysis that follows.

Empirical analysis

The two minute extract I have selected for analysis illustrates some of the discursive processes through which practice emerges. I have further divided the episode into two shorter sections which illustrate different processual dynamics (lines 1 to 39 and lines 40 to 63).

Setting

After an introduction from Kate to the overall goal for the strategy day, the 45 participants are invited to break into smaller syndicate groups to analyse the problem situation in more depth and from different perspectives. This syndicate group of eight members is discussing the current technology available via which the strategic goal might be reached. They have been informed that their suggestions will influence a final policy document which will be circulated throughout the firm. For the participants this represents a critical text that will have managerial consequences for global operations. Participants are also aware that the final activity for the day is to present a summary to the vice-president accountable to the board for the implementation of this new policy direction.

Before the extract begins, two of the more vocal participants, Anke and Fred, have been

discussing tactics at length. Kate, the event convenor, enters the room midway in the

conversation and listens in silence. There are some differences of emphasis but there is

no overt disagreement. Kate does not intervene either formally or informally even

though as convenor of the event she embodies an implicit authority to which other

participants orientate. Maarten and Lucas now join the discussion, which continues to

focus on finding solutions to the strategic challenge.

The extract opens with Fred emphatically claiming ownership of the topic. Fred,

purporting to speak for everyone, claims his authority indirectly from the company.

```
1    Fred        and if it doesn't err: and if it doesn't come
2                back positive then the er the game is back
3                     on our plate /again really/
4    Lucas                              /huh/
5    Maarten                /yeah, yea:uh/
6    Kate                   /yeah, indeed/ ye-
```

He posits that if not resolved by the group, the problem will end up '*back on our plate*'.

Fred claims epistemic authority from his alignment with the group, which we read from

the ambiguous '*our*'. No one asks for clarification of this use of the inclusive pronoun

'our', (The group in the room? The company? The division Fred represents?), indicating

that either the reference is clear to those present or that no one wants to question it.

What *is* clear to others in the syndicate, however, is that no matter whose plate it is,

Fred claims ownership of it.

After a few brief alignment exchanges a possible new direction is introduced by

Lucas, who begins, in line 7, with an adversarial '*but*' to highlight this different angle:

```
7    Lucas       -but for the countries tha-, I was thinking, if
8                the incentives strong enough↑ So they all got
```

```
9                   the ((item)) reduction in their heads but
10                   probably it's not obligatory /so so why/
```

He is careful to mitigate what may be read as resistance by positioning his contribution as an unfinished idea-in-progress ('*I was thinking*') which, as well as signalling personal ownership of the move, also mitigates against a possible loss of face (Goffman, 1963) should no one support him. Despite the measure of doubt, Lucas' structuring question helps to open up a space where different ideas can be aired. Although hesitation suggests a tentativeness and the intervention itself is framed as a question rather than a bold knowledge claim, the content contains a significant challenge to the way the group has been thinking about the problem.

 Fred wastes no time in claiming knowledge rights about this issue too. In line 14 he aligns with Lucas' indirect proposal by drawing attention to the flexibility attached to the interpretation of 'obligatory'.

```
11   Maarten                                 /the centre/

12             /position/
13   Lucas     /should/ they do it↑
14   Fred      it is obligatory but uh what does obligatory
15             mean eh↑
16   Lucas     yeah . yeah so the country may get stronger
17   Kate      yeah . yeah
18   Lucas     because that would really help
19   Kate      yeah
```

Kate continues to nudge the flow of the conversation, backchanneling responses (yeah) in lines 17 and 19 to keep it going, as Lucas takes an additional couple of turns to finish his point but in Line 20 Fred introduces a potential problem in Lucas' line of thinking.

```
20   Fred      but it is not connected to technology
21   Maarten   no of course but (1) you're right it could be a
22             solution, that could be a solution↓
```

Fred's move here claims epistemic and deontic authority: he knows what should be discussed and his view of his own relative rights of imposition enable him to voice this. However, in the first hint of incongruence (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012), Maarten rejects Fred's reference to the supposed technological focus of their discussion (line 21), thus questioning not only Fred's right to know but also his right to impose his view on others. There is a notable pause which is followed an ambiguous reference to the potential solution: Maarten's evaluation of Lucas' proposal, '*you're right*', is followed by the modalized '*it could be a solution*'. The modal treats the projected action as an option, not an obligation. Nonetheless, Maarten's turn boosts the epistemic status of Lucas' contribution. Fred returns again in line 23 with another bold authority claim.

```
23   Fred        that is happening of course . ((xxx)) wants to
24               step this up as well and >/she is hitting/ all
25               the ((business centres))< over the head
26   Kate        exactly . yeah
27   Fred        every ((team leader)) (  ) closer /and closer/
28   Kate        /yeah yeah/
29   Maarten     and also of course they are probably waiting
30   Anke        /yeah/
31   Kate        /yeah/ yeah
32   Maarten     /waiting to/ delay this moment now and because
33   Kate        yeah exactly . yeah
```

In effect, Fred evokes the organization in the name of a specific known executive to elevate his own status in relation particularly to Lucas as previous speaker. After a couple of phatic agreements from Kate (lines 26 and 28), Maarten continues to build the argument that countries may be delaying the testing of new technology.

```
34   Maarten     *because it's on cost<which you don't want er>*.
35   Fred        In cases where there's legislation . things
36               move faster
37   Maarten     ah yeah of course
38   Fred        surprise surprise
```

```
39                 ((agreeing laughter by all))
40    Maarten     There could be a solution /there . I agree/
```

Maarten's notable pauses and hesitant ending convey a hint of uncertainty. Fred notices the floor is open and steps in to clarify his position and this serves to strengthen his knowledge claim (legislation will cause countries to act faster), which Maarten supports in line 37 ('*ah yeah of course*'). Fred's irony in line 38 ('*surprise, surprise*') provokes laughter from the group, at which point Maarten is able, in line 40, to echo his previous attempt to build agreement.

Section 2, Lines 41-63: Fred's moral authority – closing down

In the Section 1 (line 8), Lucas reaches out beyond the immediate conversation to bring in institutional constraints and the larger regulatory environment in which they are operating ('*if the incentive's strong enough*'). It is a suggestion which unsettles the pattern of interaction established prior to this exchange. New possibilities and alliances are made possible as Maarten plays a crucial role in opening up the conversation so that others can influence its direction. However, Section 2 opens with yet another move from Fred to re-establish his authority claim.

```
41    Fred                                /ah well yeah but/
42                we were discussing that in there earlier as well
43                is that this notion of creating . even . an
44                external problem to get an inside thing moving
45                that's also not good business sense of course
46                that should not be necessary /eh-
47    Kate        /-exactly/ yeah
48    Fred        putting your own business at risk in order to
49                 drive an internal decision making but err
```

In line 41, Fred voices a challenge and immediately signals a potential blockage to the route Maarten is indicating. This challenge pivots the conversation back onto ground where Fred can claim authority. With '*we were discussing that in there earlier*' (line 42), he refers to another group outside the present syndicate, thereby claiming an inside track of knowledge and excluding current participants from its source. Lucas' suggestion is perhaps not so new after all - Fred was part of a conversation earlier where the controversial notion of creating an external problem to move an internal programme had already been mooted. Fred reinforces his status by drawing on both organizational and moral authority (he knows makes '*good business sense*' in line 45 and what is best for everyone) to position himself above the need to bend the rules. Kate agrees (line 47), for the first time articulating a position of her own on the risks of compliance rather than simply repeating agreement aimed at moving the conversation along. This may be significant. Participants need to gauge where each one stands in relation to the position Kate eventually takes as part of the need to monitor who knows what and who knows better (Heritage, 2012).

Maarten is in favour of incentivizing the countries and sees neither the ethical nor the business risk as extraordinary problems ('*that's work*', line 50).

```
50   Maarten     *that's work*
51   Kate        yeah because the risk is then you get 100%
52               er compliance
53   Anke        /yeah/
54   Fred        /yeah/
55   Maarten     *I don't see that, er*
```

Seemingly unnoticed, he quietly disaffiliates himself from the unfolding direction (lines 50 and 55). Fred certainly ignores him. Instead of enquiring into Maarten's position, trying to find out more about why he sees this topic differently and what alternative

action he might suggest, Fred goes ahead to repeat his deontic stance ('*it shouldn't be necessary*' because '*we should as a company be able to internally just you know drive this*'). This does not go unnoticed in this group, particularly as he rather backs himself into a corner where, for a moment, it appears nothing can be done (field notes). Fred is unable to act, nor does he unblock the process so others may do so. Earlier in the sequence Fred has shown a tendency to speak for everyone, and he does so again on this occasion. His announcement '*but it's not easy*' (line 59-60) functions as a final evaluation and signals closure, which Lucas confirms.

```
56   Anke        /so er/
57   Fred        /but even/ that they shouldn't be necessary
58               I mean we should as a company be able to
59               internally just you know drive this . but it's
60               not easy
61   Lucas       /no: no: er/
```

In response to this non-agentic lull in the process, Kate takes the lead. She spots her chance to make a strategic structuring contribution (line 62), which shapes the topic and creates more space for her to pursue her agenda. '*It is in fact*' is a bold epistemic statement about the way the world is. It introduces an inclusive '*we'* which binds the group in a shared space where a conversation about a change of direction might unfold.

```
62   Kate        /it is in fact/ how do we change that mind-set
63               then, eh↑ . internally
```

Up until this point, the flip chart standing in the corner remains empty though one group member is holding a flip chart pen. The conversation has been too engaging for anyone to think about taking notes. During this contemplative lull, one of the consultants facilitating the overall process, pops his head around the door and announces that they have five minutes left to summarise the conversation onto a single flip chart sheet which they are to hang alongside others in the communal area for perusal. The consultant's

intervention breaks the flow. Someone jumps up to the flip chart, another checks his watch and announces how much time remains and they start, seemingly spontaneously, to go round the room eliciting facts, assumptions and perspectives. At this point, Kate quietly announces she will 'let them get on with it' before leaving the room. As Kate's shadow, I follow her out. She meets in a fast and furious huddle with two consultants as they discuss tactics for enabling the group as a whole to move from the phase of listening to each others' ideas and perspectives to negotiating enough of a shared understanding to be able to move forwards together during the afternoon session towards a phase where they are able to suggest actions.

Discussion

This section identifies three aspects of collaborative processual dynamics that the above analysis facilitates. First, that entity-like descriptions of discursive strategies are important to identify if the flow between these is to be adequately described. Second, what individual actors do and do not do are equally important in understanding how practice emerges in collaborative processes. Third, a change in direction comprises a series of utterances rather than a single conversational move. I address these in turn.

Discursive strategies (and conversational flow)

I identify and describe four 'entity-like' discursive strategies which can also be understood as 'flow-like' interventions that influence the conversation as it courses around them.

  (1) Levelling

Maarten's utterance in line 21 resists the pattern of interaction by directing a challenge to Fred. He positions himself carefully between Lucas and Fred. Maarten addressing

first Fred ('*no of course but*') and then Lucas ('*you're right, it <u>could</u> be a solution*') designs a strategy which levels the ground between Fred, who claims authority at every turn, and others in the group who may have important contributions to make. He uses the adversarial conjunction '*but*' in response to Fred's previous obstacle to signal that other views are possible, and the second person pronoun '*you*' ('*you're right*') to address and include Lucas. This distribution of legitimate authority is important leadership work for building shared agreement and potential for joint action. It is a pivotal moment in the discussion - a conversational turning point (Simpson et al, 2018; Sklaveniti, 2020). By displaying his support for Lucas' idea, Maarten shifts the discussion away from a right-or-wrong dynamic towards an opportunity which can be held between them (Crevani, 2018).

(2) Co-orientating

Co-orientating to fellow participants' epistemic statuses is an important process for building shared or distributed leadership actions (Buchan, 2019, p. 59–62). While it is individuals who speak with (more or less) intentionality, it is the collective process of tacitly establishing authority rights in the unfolding conversation which steers its course towards particular kinds of outcomes (Van Der Mieroop, 2020). In line 21, Maarten's triangular levelling exchange also shows that the participants co-orientate to each other's authority stances as they unfold. Maarten's deliberate closing of the topic ('*no of course*'), quickly followed by his use of the adversarial conjunction '*but*', shows that he interprets Fred's previous move in line 20 ('*but it's not connected to technology*') as an authority claim and not simply as a newsworthy comment to which he might simply acquiesce. Fred, however, continues to make authority claims for himself by emphasising that he knows things other people do not know and even draws upon the authority of an absent senior executive to bolster his own status (line 23). Despite this,

and by carefully modalizing his contributions ('*that could be a solution*' in lines 21 and 40), Maarten continues to develop Lucas' idea. Finally, and with irony which elicits laughter, Fred shifts his orientation to affiliate with Maarten. Kate also co-orientates to the emerging direction by keeping her deontic status out of play. She does this by making only phatic agreements which keep the conversation going – in effect, by not closing it down.

(3) (Dis)affiliating

Fred and Kate appear to affiliate with each other's stance (line 51). Kate confirms Fred's concerns, and together they ignore Maarten's attempts to express a different point of view. However, without the support of Maarten and Lucas (and in the context of minimal agreement from Anke and the watchful silence of four other members of the group), participants' affiliative stances are becoming less clear. Agency is blocked and authority, as a fluid phenomenon rather than a bounded entity, appears inherently unstable. For example, Fred's (and indirectly Kate's) authority is challenged by Maarten in the disagreement in line 50 '*that's work',* and resistance in line 55 '*I don't see that*'. Maarten does not acquiesce because he does not accept Fred's authority on this matter. By extension, if Maarten does not accept it, Fred does not actually have it (Gumperz, 1982).

(4) Nudging

In lines 62 and 63 Kate makes a bold move by steering the topic towards the idea that the internal mindset is at the root of the problem. Kate embodies her power as convener and we can infer from this that there may be consequential obligations flowing from her proposed change of focus. Kate's question encompasses everyone ('*we'*), focuses on a leadership need (change) and a problem that has just been collectively identified. She

frames an opportunity for joint action which might channel collective agency. This 'moment of leadership' (Ramsey, 2016, p.199) is not brought about by a particular 'leadership skill' that Kate brings to this and other situations, but as a consequence of the collective process that has been unfolding throughout the conversation. Identifying the ebb and flow of agency helps to account for how leadership work is done. Kate, Anke, Fred, Lucas and Maarten all play their parts, but the space is achieved collectively by participants adjusting their own and co-orientating to others' status and stance as the conversation unfolds (Buchan, 2019). Kate's final structuring utterance is therefore seen as less to do with her personal ability to mobilize others, and more as an outcome of collaborative interaction which she senses and speaks to (Crevani, 2018).

The role of non-intervention in the emergence of practice

Of the eight people in the group (nine counting Kate), only four speak. We cannot infer the reasons for their silence (Jaworski, 1993) but we know these people are there, taking up space around the table, moving their bodies, joining in laughter and making other small phatic moves. Their acquiescence cannot be taken for granted. If the group is to generate direction, everyone counts. Maarten, however, displays disaffiliating behaviour when he articulates, *sotto voce*, a counter position to Fred's pivoting back onto ground he believes he controls (lines 50 to 55). From this point, Maarten is silent and we can infer from this that he does not see himself in the future Fred is attempting to impose. Fred, seemingly unaware of the potential disruption to the collective direction, carries on regardless. Kate does not intervene. For the most part, throughout the exchange, she co-orientates to the emerging direction by keeping her deontic status out of play (e.g. line 47). She does this by making only phatic agreements which keep the conversation going – in effect, by not closing it down. We can see from these examples of non-intervention that some of the processes through which collaborative agency emerges in

an encounter are not in the *presence* of specific moves or utterances but in their *absence*. What individual actors do and do not do are equally important in understanding how practice emerges in collaborative processes

Changes in conversational direction

Identifying turns in the 'continual unfolding of texts, discourses and conversations' (Blommaert, 2005, p.47–48) helps to describe processes through which the flow of practice emerges, by attending to patterns of interaction which change the trajectory over the course of an entire conversation (Sklaveniti, 2020; Ramsey, 2016). The linguistic analysis above shows changes in direction comprising a series of utterances rather than a single conversational move. Section 1 brings to view a conversational flow of 'opening up'. The new possibilities and alliances afforded by the interplay of challenge and counterchallenge between Lucas, Fred and Maarten move towards a different understanding, and thus a different potential direction. Section 2, by contrast, brings to view a conversational flow of 'closing down'. Fred backs himself into a corner by not attending to Maarten's (dis)affiliation and thus losing his support. The hiatus which follows is punctured when Kate chooses to draw the group's attention to a topic which might provide enough common ground for the vocal members of the group to stand on without force or compromise. Before this potential path to a fresh trajectory is developed however, the group is moved on by the consultant and Kate's ephemeral idea is lost in the group's written precis (field notes).

This 'flow of practices among parties to an activity' (Raelin, 2021, p.385). shifts the analytical focus from (co)leaders as entities to leadership as process. From the perspective of processual agency, leadership is seen as flow and can be broadly understood as the outcome of collaborative processes (Alvehus & Crevani, 2022; Simpson et. al, 2018). The analytical commitment to concepts which hang exclusively

on an entity misses or misinterprets the emergence of leadership processes. This perspective on collaborative agency, by capturing unfolding and fluid process of becoming (Chia & Holt, 2006), implies that leadership is, in any case, always in flux. These findings are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2 about here

Conclusion

The four discursive strategies identified, taken alongside the opening-closing dynamics these provoke, describe how individual linguistic choices interconnect in the processual flow of the unfolding conversation. Leadership agency from an L-A-P perspective implies that practice emerges across the interactional process as a whole. An analytical focus on language can contribute to this endeavour by providing tools and methods for identifying patterns of interaction which occur throughout the course of a conversation, such as *levelling, co-orientating*, *affiliation patterns* and *nudging*. Identifying entity-like 'inter-actions' between actors facilitates the identification of flow-like 'trans-actions' which emerge from within the collaborative process. This orientation captures an aspect of L-A-P which has thus far eluded close study, that of how we bring empirical rigour to the analysis of emerging practice. This study is exploratory and has been limited to the two-minute extract thus precluding linguistic analysis of resulting textual material the trajectory of which might be empirically traced across time (Maybin, 2017). It is further limited by the strict confidentiality conditions permitting only audio-recorded data and precluding therefore a linguistically orientated multi-modal approach which might yield a more detailed discussion of socio-materiality (Mesinioti et al., 2020). Further work along these lines is needed to test the usefulness of linguistic analyses of the type presented in this paper to the development of L-A-P theory. That said, this linguistic analysis has provided descriptive detail of the dynamics of collective direction.

Therefore, these observations and interpretations have wider implications for scholars who seek to attend to the performative dynamics by means of which practice emerges.

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Appendix: Transcription conventions

/ /	Overlapping speech
:	sound stretching
CAPITALS	loud speech
Underlining	emphasis
__	speech at especially low volume
(1.0)	Pause in seconds
.	Pause of less than 1 second
( )	indecipherable
((laughs))	transcribers descriptions or comments
((xxx))	redacted for anonymity
–	interruption
> <	quicker than surrounding talk
↑	rising 'questioning' intonation

Leadership agency	Individualized	Collective (who)	Collaborative (how)
Leadership agency is identified in the production of direction, the mobilization of collective agency and changing or setting a course of action. [Crevani, 2018]	[self-action] Something within a single individual usually attributed to personality traits or skills.	[inter-action] Agency is shared or distributed between entities.	[trans-action] Agency can neither be isolated nor located in single or multiple entities. [Simpson, 2016]
How is this process understood to occur? [Dewey & Bentley, 1949 [1960]; Simpson, 2016: 159–160.]	Leadership is primarily seen as the influence of an individual's discursive strategies upon a group Leader mobilizes followers [Bass & Alvolio, 1994]	Analytical emphasis is on entities (human and non-human) and is understood as interactively accomplished Leadership is a conjoint endeavour. [Clifton, 2017; Clifton et al. 2020; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Ospina & Foldy, 2015.]	Analytical emphasis is on processes which produce direction or changes in trajectory Leadership is the outcome of a collaborative process, [Crevani, 2018; Raelin, 2023; Robinson & Renshaw, 2022; Simpson, 2018]
To what extent does the close study of language explain the sort of (linguistic) authority required to perform the kinds of agency described above?	Authority is seen as a hierarchically established resource which legitimizes a leader's power to shape events Linguistic pragmatics (for example speech act theory) studies the meaning of single utterances in the context of their power relations.	Leadership and the authority to enact it are seen as interactive accomplishments. Linguistics provides analytical tools to identify authority rights in spoken interaction	Because the notion of authority attracts to entities, traditional analysis from a linguistic perspective is challenged. The analysis in this paper explores a possible role for linguistic analysis in identifying and describing conversational processes which describe emergent and collaborative dynamics

Table 1. Orientations to leadership agency

Discourse strategies, with examples		Conversational flow
Levelling Levels the ground between competing claims and establishes an expanding conversational space which can be more easily shared. e.g. lines 21-22	Maarten addressing first Fred ('*no of course but*') and then Lucas (*you're right, it <u>could</u> be a solution*) levels the ground between Fred, who claims authority, and others who have contributions to make.	Flow is redirected from a challenge-counterchallenge dynamic towards an opening for new patterns of participation and interaction.
Co-orientating The collective process of tacitly establishing authority rights in the unfolding conversation. e.g. line 47	Kate co-orientates to the emerging direction by keeping her deontic stance out of play. She does this by making only phatic agreements in order to keep the conversation going – in effect, by not closing it down.	Flow gently courses over and around a combination of voiced and unvoiced positions.
Disaffiliation Shifting patterns of affiliation and disaffiliation which are inherently unstable. e.g. lines 50 and 55	Fred's authority is challenged by Maarten's disagreement '*that's work*' and resistance '*I don't see that*'. Maarten does not accept Fred's authority on this matter. By extension, if Maarten does not accept it, Fred does not actually have it.	Flow is generated and redirected in unseen but felt patterns of allegiance and disaffection.
Nudging A significant utterance or sequence of exchanges which changes or attempts to change the trajectory of the conversation. e.g. lines 57-63	Kate attempts to frame an opportunity for joint action and for channelling collective agency.	Whether or not flow is redirected depends not on the personality or skill of any individual but on the combination of actors' interventions interpreted in the interactive context in which they were uttered

Table 2. Discourse strategies and conversational flow