

# THE ENDOGENEOUS CONSTRUCTION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL CONTEXTS: A PRACTICE-BASED PERSPECTIVE

## Introduction

The notion of context in entrepreneurship research is attracting increased attention (Zahra et al., 2014; Welter, 2011; Zahra, 2007). Specifically, calls have surfaced to place “researched enterprises within their natural settings to understand their origins, forms, functioning and diverse outcomes” (Zahra et al., 2014: 3). However, merely sharpening focus on ‘where’ entrepreneurial behaviour occurs through time and space does not fully account for context. Important questions arise over *whose* understanding of context is being analysed, what aspects of context are instrumental in enabling and constraining entrepreneurial actions and how knowledge of contexts may be accessed and interpreted by researchers. This paper addresses these methodological issues by outlining a framework for examining episodes of situated social interaction. Drawing on Goffman’s (1967; 1961) interaction order, Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodology and Sacks’ (Sacks and Jefferson, 1995) conversation analysis, a novel means of accessing dynamic entrepreneurial contexts is presented. It is proposed these frames for understanding the social world offer a unique and empirically robust vantage point from which to study the endogenous construction of entrepreneurial contexts.

Understanding of context is largely shaped by the ontological and epistemological stances assumed by researchers. Entrepreneurship scholarship has leaned towards functionalist approaches (Grant and Perren, 2002; Jennings et al., 2005) that minimize or otherwise remove context from analysis (Hjorth et al., 2008). A smaller number of scholars have deployed interpretivist narrative and discursive approaches to understand the *socially constructed* entrepreneur (Downing, 2005; Chell, 2000; Fletcher, 2006). These contributions have respecified conceptualisations of entrepreneurial processes and challenged normative philosophical assumptions within the field (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). However, as a consequence of prioritising abstract theoretical models over concrete examples of practice, less is known about the reflexivity between entrepreneurial actions and the environments in which they are produced. How, for example, do entrepreneurial actors accomplish mundane -

though significant - activities through situated interactions (e.g. Reveley et al., 2004), and how are the social, cultural and institutional structures in which they are embedded, simultaneously recognised and reconstituted by these same actors (McKeever et al., 2015). Experience shows this is not an analytical problem that is necessarily unique to entrepreneurship scholars; Llewellyn and Hindmarsh (2010: 4) make similar observations within the field of organisational studies (OS) where, “in research papers, what some domain of work practically entails is normally covered in a section *before* the analysis begins”.

To understand entrepreneurial contexts therefore, it is suggested that attention must be reoriented towards practice. This too remains an underdeveloped facet of extant research (Johannisson, 2011), something confirmed by Moroz and Hindle’s (2012) review of process-based theories of entrepreneurship which reveals only 9 of 32 models considered are empirically derived. From an analytical perspective this is problematic. The everyday, often mundane activities people do to get their work done constitute the foundations of social order and institutions (Miettinen et al., 2009) and failing to engage with these building blocks from an appropriate philosophical or theoretical perspective increases the chasm between research findings and the lived world. This aloofness from what Hayek (1945) considers ‘practical knowledge’, has implications for understanding the *how* of entrepreneuring and thus the dynamic functioning of entrepreneurial contexts. The idiosyncrasies and specificities of practice are fundamental for developing a comprehensive picture of entrepreneurship (Anderson and Starnawska, 2008) and for challenging or improving upon incumbent theories. There is a need therefore to study “phenomena that are actually done, as they become evident in the here and now” (Miettinen et al., 2009: 1309), and to adopt methodological resources that will facilitate development of a more dynamic and context-including programme of research (Johannisson, 2011).

This article will explore treatment of context and practice in the entrepreneurship domain before suggesting a philosophical and methodological direction for scholars seeking to connect with the situated ‘work’ of individuals engaging in entrepreneurship. We begin by outlining a case for why context is important in entrepreneurship research before considering calls to explore entrepreneurial phenomena from beyond present ontological and epistemological boundaries

(Watson, 2013a; Watson, 2013b; Down, 2013). We then turn to the analytical significance of both context and practice, each of which are important features of research whose relative prominence is, to a large extent, contingent on philosophical and methodological choice. Recent articles by Welter (2011) and others (Watson, 2013b; Zahra et al., 2014; Fletcher, 2011; Hjorth et al., 2008) have reopened discussions around the significance of context and there is now a welcome move towards ‘theorizing context’ rather than simply contextualizing theory (although both are important considerations for researchers). A framework is presented that undertakes to prioritise the local knowledge of the individual engaging in entrepreneurship and their accountability and orientation towards evolving contextual factors. A single video case study based on an entrepreneurial pitch is then presented to illustrate the real-time endogenous functioning of context through finely grained analysis of social interaction. In doing so, we illustrate how this research approach avoids the “arbitrary invocation of a countless number of extrinsic, potential aspects of context” (Arminen, 2005: XV); a problem often encountered by scholars when framing their analyses. The paper concludes by discussing some of the challenges and rewards that may be encountered through adopting praxiological, sociological and linguistic approaches to entrepreneurship scholarship.

### **Arguing for a contextualized approach**

Before progressing further it is worth briefly considering why context is important, and for that matter why it should be given a more prominent and considered role in entrepreneurship scholarship. The most obvious response is that conventional sociology, in the mode of Durkheim, considers that context enables and constrains social actions: without cognizance of the extrinsic social ‘facts’ that exist, independent of the individual, entrepreneurial behaviour cannot be fully accounted for. While psychology - from which the field of entrepreneurship draws liberally - is considered to be the science of the individual, sociology is the science of society. Researchers are therefore compelled to operate with greater sensitivity towards micro and macro-contextual factors that shape processes of entrepreneurship. Yet Holmquist (2003: 84) identifies a scholarly fixation with the entrepreneurial individual, warning that “aspects of entrepreneurial action have to be analysed in their specific context to grasp the full meaning of the studied phenomenon”. This preoccupation has in turn

contributed to “frustrated efforts to overgeneralize results across very heterogeneous settings within and across studies” (Wiklund et al., 2011: 4).

Scholars are increasingly recognising that sections of entrepreneurship research have failed to adequately account for context in a theoretical or empirically robust manner (Welter, 2011; Zahra, 2007; Morrison, 2006; Ucbasaran et al., 2001). Zahra (2007) identifies ongoing tensions between the theorization and contextualisation of research by explicating difficulties inherent in utilising ‘borrowed’ models that are grounded in assumptions often reflecting other phenomena. Context, defined by Welter (2011: 167) within a management research framework as “circumstances, conditions, situations, or environments that are external to the respective phenomenon and enable or constrain it”, operates concomitantly across a multiplicity of dimensions, yet despite this, entrepreneurship papers tend to focus on only a single aspect of context (Welter, 2011; Holmquist, 2003). Leitch et al. (2010) and Bygrave (2007) blame the tendency of entrepreneurship scholars to ape the reductionist natural sciences for poor contextualisation, while Gartner (2010: 10) argues that quantitative studies, which are proportionally overrepresented in top entrepreneurship journals, “can never portray the interdependent interactive aspects of individuals over time, engaging with, and responding to, their circumstances”. In sum, context is identified by growing sections of the entrepreneurship research community as being of acute analytical importance, yet pervasive weaknesses are evident in the means through which it is both conceptualised and operationalized in research papers.

### ***‘Whose text? Whose context?’***

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges confronting researchers who seek to better contextualise theory is embodied in the question posed by Emmanuel Schegloff (1997); “Whose text? Whose context?” Schegloff solicits an answer here in order to highlight that, typically in research papers, context is treated as an exogenous constraint, judiciously established by the researcher (and, notably, *not* the data subject). This, it is argued, prioritises the knowledgability of the analyst over the actor and in doing so, potentially displaces the knowledge that is being ultimately sought through the research project (Llewellyn, 2008).

To illustrate this point, consider the following passage of ‘contextual’ information provided by Welter (2011: 166):

“In rural post Soviet Uzbekistan young women and girls are supposed to stay home until they are married. Therefore, the young woman learned a traditional craft because this was one of the few vocational training opportunities available to her; and this activity could be conducted from home.”

Several potentially important contextual factors are identified in this short passage. We know that this research is based in (1) rural (2) post Soviet Uzbekistan in a possibly paternalistic society where (3) women and girls are supposed to stay at home until they are married. Furthermore, an unsophisticated economy is alluded to as the girl learned a (4) traditional craft owing to (5) few available vocational training opportunities. Finally, religious constrictions are perhaps implied by the significance of the work activity being (6) conducted from home.

While all of these factors (gender, race, age, religion and social status) are quite plausibly relevant for explaining the enacted phenomenon of female entrepreneurship in this particular time and place, they nevertheless represent analytical layers that the researcher has deemed important (perhaps through *a priori* theorizing or even personal or experiential preference). This, to Schegloff’s mind, can lead to a form of theoretical imperialism that ignores the dynamic socio-interactional reality of actors existing and reacting to the lived world. He describes this in polemical terms as:

“...a kind of hegemony of the intellectuals, of the literati, of the academics, of the critics whose theoretical apparatus gets to stipulate the terms of reference to which the world is to be understood – when there has already *been* a set of terms by reference to which the world was understood – by those endogenously involved in its very coming to pass” (Schegloff, 1997: 167)

Thus, in order to tackle the seemingly intractable problem of adequately selecting *which* of the myriad ‘relevant’ contexts to include in analysis, priority must somehow be afforded to those contextual factors that are oriented to by actors themselves in a specific social interaction.

## **Outlining some philosophical foundations for endogenous context-including entrepreneurship scholarship**

In order to accomplish this endogenous understanding of context, entrepreneurship scholars must build on emerging strands of research. Firstly, they should strive to “research close to where things happen” (Steyaert and Landström, 2011: 124); that is, they must depart from often blunt, abstracted and fuzzy aggregated data. This can be achieved by developing research pioneered by Johannisson and others (Johannisson, 1988; Reveley et al., 2004; Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989; Johannisson et al., 2002) that treats single episodes of practice seriously. Johannisson (2011) establishes the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* (practical wisdom and local knowledge) as a guiding ontology/epistemology for understanding *in situ* practice and calls for constructionist methods, particularly autoethnography, ethnography and action research to underpin a programme of ‘enactive research’ in this spirit. This is a welcome and indeed necessary counterbalance to a more general tendency to either ‘control out’ the role of context in favour of objectivist theoretical generalisation (Leitch et al., 2010), or to set up a dualistic relationship between individuals and their ‘context’ (Watson 2012).

Scholars working loosely within the European tradition in entrepreneurship research have constructed compelling arguments against such normative attitudes. Watson, for instance, (2013a; 2013b) delivers a powerful case for adopting a pragmatist framework that draws on Max Weber, Charles Peirce and John Dewey, taking as its starting point the notion that an abstracted theory of the social world is unobtainable:

“A complete understanding of any aspect of the world is impossible; reality is far too complicated for that to be possible. Knowledge about entrepreneurship, or any other aspect of the social world, is therefore to be developed to provide us with knowledge which is better than rival pieces of knowledge, or is better than what existed previously” (Watson, 2013a: 21).

This is a liberating insight, and one that provides an intellectual bedrock for those seeking to connect with entrepreneurship ‘in the field’ yet who aspire to go beyond the reductionism inherent in the near ubiquitous multiple-case study approaches

pioneered by Eisenhardt (1989) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007). In short, it provides justification for a form of empiricism that takes a highly granular approach to phenomena on the basis that, when multitudes of discrete cases are aggregated together, a new ‘context’ is formed that most probably will never have existed or been observable in the ‘lived’ world.

This classical pragmatism also permeates theories such as effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001) which takes an anti-deterministic view of entrepreneurial action, and entrepreneuring (Steyaert, 2007a) where an ontology of ‘becoming’ as opposed to ‘being’ is enacted. Each of these approaches affords the entrepreneurial actor a more dynamic and instrumental role in shaping their reality, and hence, theory is often found to be tethered more closely to concrete practices. Yet, despite these advances, an epistemological question remains over how seemingly ephemeral contexts and actions can be robustly accessed and convincingly interpreted by the researcher.

A potential remedy lies in a second emerging stream of research by Reveley et al. (2004), Down and Reveley (2009), Reveley and Down (2009) and Goss (2005; 2008) that utilises the interactionist sociology of Erving Goffman (1967; 1961; 1955) to theorise social action. Goffman’s work, and the research it inspires, is significant for offering a unique empirical perspective on how self-identities are both constructed and subsequently confirmed ‘face to face’ by participants in an interaction. Following Goffman’s approach, the researcher fixes their analytical gaze on how actors themselves verify self-identity based on the reaction of others, and subsequently how these reactions are used as a basis for reconstructing or repairing ongoing narrative identities. Notably, this engenders an endogenous perspective whereby individual agency is not “reduced to the self-narrational activities of individuals or the effects of external societal narratives or discourses upon them” (Down and Reveley, 2009: 383). Thus, to expand upon these developments in entrepreneurship scholarship, it is proposed that a practice-based framework is adopted to systematically analyse the dynamic endogenous construction of entrepreneurial contexts through episodes of naturally occurring social interaction.

### **Advancing the study of situated interaction in entrepreneurship scholarship**

### *Interaction Order, Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis*

Goffman's interaction order, with its focus on the ordered properties of human conduct, provides the basis for two important developments in sociology that we will utilise for our context-including framework: ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. The first, ethnomethodology, is the study of members'<sup>1</sup> methods for achieving endogenous social order through situated interaction. It remains a somewhat radical theory in sociology owing to a rejection of 'micro' or 'macro' explanations for social action. Instead:

“Garfinkel argues, the methods essential to work (and organization) will be found in details of attention and mutually oriented methods of work, and ordered properties of mutual action, rather than abstract formulations” (Rawls, 2008: 702)

This emphasis on the 'detail' of social action forms the basis of ethnomethodologically informed studies' unique contribution to social science. Garfinkel himself offers strong criticism (1948/2006; 1952/2008) of sociological approaches that he believes obscure what individuals *actually do*, insisting instead that order can be obtained from even the most mundane examples of interaction. This in turn forms the basis for conversation analysis and Harvey Sack's often repeated mantra of 'order at all points'. Conversation analysis, or *ethnomethodological interaction analysis* as some believe is should be more accurately titled (Psathas, 1995), is a rigorous set of principles and procedures for studying the social world as it happens. The purpose of such analysis is to uncover the intersubjective meaning of social actions by exposing recordings of naturally occurring interaction to exhaustive levels of scrutiny.

The primary unit of analysis in CA is the sequential organization of conversation turns. So, for instance, each utterance or gesture by an individual performs a social action (in addition and often separate from any literal meaning) that is reflexively tied to the previous utterance. Hence, participants in an interaction make visible their

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<sup>1</sup> 'Member' is a term used in EMCA research to indicate a person that is part of an interaction. The term 'analyst' is used to mean the researcher.



understanding of the previous ‘turn’ through the design of their immediate response, simultaneously demonstrating their relationship to the enfolding context. This framework allows the analyst to ascertain precisely *how* intersubjective meaning is achieved on a second by second basis with respect to enabling and constraining structural factors. Situated interaction can then be reverse-engineered to understand the “composition, meaning and hidden rationality” of participants’ social actions in order to understand the phenomenon in question (Arminen, 2005: XIII).

While initial CA studies focus on the non-institutional dimensions of conversation, latter studies became interested in the unique ways in which situated interaction shapes and is shaped by contextual (i.e. institutional) forces. In particular, many studies have focussed on institutional settings such as courtrooms (Atkinson and Drew, 1979) and medical consultations (Maynard and Heritage, 2005) where “interacting parties orient to the goal-rational, institutionalized nature of their action” (Arminen, 2005: : XIV). Through comparison with ‘normal’ conversation, the unique and relevant properties of institutional conduct can be brought to the analytical foreground:

“The analyst demonstrates the ways in which the context plays a role in a particular aspect or a segment of interaction, thus allowing us to examine the role the institution has in and for the interaction in the setting” (Arminen, 2005: XIV)

The institutionality of a particular interaction can be revealed through participants’ orientation to the ‘procedural consequentiality’ of utterances and actions (Schegloff, 1991). This can be demonstrated through features such as lexical choice, the overall structure of interaction, and the asymmetrical distribution of questioning rights between participants. In order to perform an institutional task such as ‘participating in a job interview’ (Llewellyn and Spence, 2009), both interactants will orient to the question-answer structure that typically characterises a recruitment interview (and the power imbalance entailed in such circumstances). Each participant will also restrict the vocabulary employed in his or her utterances and the interviewer will most likely attempt to cultivate a display of professional neutrality through each conversation turn. In short, job interviews do not exist objectively as some kind of tangible context, but rather they are co-constructed second by second by interview participants.

Ethnomethodology/conversation analysis can provide a perspective on the job interview that, firstly, reveals unknown details of intersubjective practice and second, allows the analyst to explore how local contingencies challenge generally accepted specifications of work.

While it may be tempting to discount such fine-grained analysis as irrelevant or even trivial, Llewellyn (2008: 764) argues, “the detailed order of work activities is not incidental or merely interesting but vital for understanding how people find themselves at work, find ways of dealing with others and find solutions to practical problems which arise along the way.” In this sense it provides a window into how members’ recognise features of context as they fade in and out of relevance for a particular episode of work. As Llewellyn and Burrow’s (2008) study of a Big Issue vendor demonstrates, unanticipated contingencies (specifically, from a theoretical perspective) can shape conduct in unexpected ways (in this instance, the problematizing of a Catholic religious identity for purchasing the Big Issue magazine). The data-driven nature of EMCA thus allows *all* facets of context to be incorporated into analysis, as and when they come into view, as they are oriented to by members’ themselves.

#### *Abandoning the bucket approach to context*

Central to an ethnomethodological/conversation analysis mentality is a rejection of what Garfinkel (1967) terms the ‘bucket approach’ to context whereby actors are treated as ‘cultural dopes’. This is a terms that refers to “man-in-the-sociologist's-society who produces the stable features of the society by acting in compliance with preestablished and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides” (1967, p. 68). The implication of this position is that the individual engaging in entrepreneurial behaviour, or any other social actor for that matter, is treated as a passive puppet of “abstract social forces which impose themselves on participants” (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008: 139). Conversation analysis takes a contrasting perspective, holding that individuals are actively knowledgeable of their environment, making visible (to others, and hence analysts) their orientation “to the relevance of contexts” (ibid). Each utterance or gesture made in response to a prior interlocutor’s utterance provides evidence of how intersubjective understanding of a task or activity

is maintained or repaired. Analyst's must therefore 'bracket' understanding of context in order to grasp its endogenous construction through this interaction (Arminen, 2005).

In conversation analysis studies, the burden therefore falls on the analyst to show the consequentiality of context and structure for a particular interaction. It cannot be assumed that power asymmetries, social status or gender are enabling or constraining factors unless the design and flow of interactional sequences indicates so. Prior studies on male interruptions when females are talking illustrate this point acutely (James and Clarke, 1993). The follow excerpt from Zimmermann and West (1975: 108) shows how a male (A) projects a dominance over a female (B) by interrupting and finishing a sentence (lines 4 and 5).

- 1 A: How would'ja like to go to a movie later on tonight?  
(3.2) 2 B: Huh?=  
3 A: A movie y'know like (x) a flick?  
(3.4) 4 B: Yeah I uh know what a movie is (.8) It's just that=  
5 A: You don't know me well enough?

Rather than treat contextual factors including gender as an "immediate explanatory resource" (Arminen, 2005: 33), conversation analysis demands empirical evidence of precisely *how* gender is accountably relevant during an interaction rather than being a purely exogenous constraint. So, in the case of male dominance over women, scholars have identified linguistic patterns such as men taking more conversational turns, men interrupting more, men making unilateral topic shifts (as opposed to women making collaborative ones) and men denying women interaction rights. Through the study of small fragments of interaction, scholars (Stokoe, 2006; Shaw, 2000; Ainsworth-Vaughn, 1992) have been able to empirically link everyday mundane activities with the reproduction of wider sociological structures and hierarchies.

*Talk as doubly contextual*

A fundamental departure point for studies of CA is the notion that talk and actions are doubly contextual. In this sense context is considered to include both the “immediately local configuration of preceding activity in which an utterance occurs, and also to the “larger” environment of activity within which that configuration is recognized to occur” (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 18). Firstly, talk is *context shaped* in that it cannot be understood without reference to the preceding utterance. The context will also enable and constrain episodes of talk meaning that participants in an interaction must design their behaviour in a manner appropriate to the local environment. This becomes particularly important during formal and quasi-formal institutional interactions such as courtrooms, classrooms or even news interviews. In the latter example, news journalists must design their talk by taking into consideration obligations of ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ when conducting live interviews on-air (Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Greatbatch, 1998). Close analysis of these interactions can provide description of how ‘neutrality’ is achieved (and often circumvented) by reporters.

Second, talk is *context renewing*. As “every current utterance will itself form the immediate context for some next action in a sequence, it will inevitably contribute to the contextual framework in terms of which the next action will be understood (Drew and Heritage, 1992: 18). This means that interactional context is a dynamic and changeable structure that is perpetually being renewed, maintained and altered in increments. This provides justification for a rejection of a ‘containing view’ of structure where ‘cultural dopes’ are at the mercy of abstract social forces. Instead, it demonstrates that context is endogenously created by knowledgeable actors who make visible their orientation to context and hence work to sustain intersubjectivity.

### **An ethnomethodologically informed analysis of a business plan pitch question and answer session**

In order to animate some of the theoretical and methodological arguments outlined in this article (in a notionally ‘entrepreneurial’ setting), a short empirical case drawing

on video recordings of a student business competition will now be presented to uncover some of the ways through which an institutional context functions in real time.

## **Methodology**

The business (or investment) pitch is a critical, yet in many ways routinized aspect of the entrepreneurial process. Few nascent entrepreneurs are blessed with easily accessible financial resources and hence ‘pitching’ an entrepreneurial idea to potential investors is a common method of sourcing venture capital. The process has been somewhat institutionalised and ‘business pitching’ has diffused widely, now permeating the entertainment industry (e.g. Dragons Den) and the curricula of many leading business schools.

The dataset for this research is sourced from video recordings of business pitch competitions held at Texas Christian University between the years 2011 and 2014. This data is supplemented by ethnographic field notes and observations from 2013 and 2014<sup>2</sup>. The recordings have not been produced specifically for this project, but were instead published online as a learning resource for other students and entrepreneurs. The video data are currently publicly viewable through the Values and Ventures competition website<sup>3</sup> and on Youtube<sup>4</sup>. In utilising such data, the research follows the pragmatic spirit of Sacks (1984: 26) who worked with “whatever data he could get (his) hands on.” This is not to imply Sacks’ simply took an easy or somehow lazy approach to data; in fact, the very opposite is true. The rationale for working with such wide ranging, often mundane data, can be located in one of the founding principles of the EMCA approach; that organisation can be found ‘at all points’ in social conduct, and hence, even seemingly mundane or otherwise unexceptional instances of social interaction have some form of analytically recoverable orderliness to them. The present data, while somewhat contrived in an institutional sense, meets the strict conversation analysis requirement for working with naturalistic data (Ten Have, 1999). That is, the analytic material is studied as it

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<sup>2</sup> One of the authors was part of the audience in the video that forms the analysis in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.neeley.tcu.edu/vandv/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://youtu.be/j6uPp8BQgc>

happened in real time with no editing of the content or the sequential ordering of interaction.

Following a general review of the whole data corpus, a single specific case was selected for analysis (owing primarily to the presence of analytically interesting features of interaction). Permission was sought from the competition organisers to use the specific video for this study. All those who feature in the video were contacted by the organisers and provided consent for the video data to be used in this research. Finally, theoretical sampling is not relevant for single case EMCA studies as no attempt is being made to generalise findings beyond the immediate context.

*Data: recovering organisation through audio/video recordings of naturally occurring interaction*

CA studies use audio or video recordings of naturally occurring interactions – a source of data that, thus far, has rarely formed a central part of analyses in studies of entrepreneurship. The distinctive properties of recorded multimedia address some important concerns raised by Gartner (2010: 13) in relation to openness and integrity in the research process, where “the failure to provide readers with opportunities to see all of the data is...asking the scientific community to trust me in ways that are incredibly naïve.” Working within a CA framework, it is strictly prohibited for the analyst to hide or otherwise shield data from others. Part of Sacks’ objective was to create an observational science of social life where “the reader has as much information as the author, and can reproduce the analysis” (Sacks and Jefferson, 1995: 27).

Open access audio and video recordings therefore present an opportunity to increase the rigour of entrepreneurship studies. Without a permanent reproducible record of events, analysis can only ever offer a single *prima facie* account of a phenomenon in a given time and place. This account cannot be empirically reviewed, challenged or reinterpreted by other scholars, hence placing primacy on the initial recollection and interpretation of the author(s). Davidsson and Wiklund (2001) acknowledge this in their review of the entrepreneurship field where they argue “real time studies are valuable as retrospective approaches are likely to be flawed by memory decay,

hindsight bias and rationalization after the fact.” Yet, since publication of their article, few have taken up the call (interesting examples include Miller and Sardais, 2013: who utilise a diary approach to capture detailed temporal dynamics of practice, and Maxwell & Lévesque, 2011, who conduct real time analysis of business pitch interactions).

### *Data Transcription*

An additional striking facet of CA research papers is the manner through which data is transcribed and presented to readers. It is, at least initially, “daunting to the untrained eye” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008: 11) filled with “mysterious looking symbols” (Sidnell, 2009: 25). This detail is however an entirely necessary part of the CA process. Gail Jefferson first devised the unique CA transcription convention during her work transcribing Sacks’ lectures. Sacks had initially transcribed his interaction fragments in a relatively straightforward manner (i.e. without expressive detail). Jefferson, however concluded that a central part of the methodology required faithfully capturing all nuances of an interaction in order that the reader can reach the most accurate analytical conclusions:

“Why put all that stuff in? Well, as they say, because it’s there. Of course there’s a whole lot of stuff “there,” i.e., in the tapes, and it doesn’t all show up in my transcripts; so it’s because it’s there, plus I think it’s interesting. Things like overlap, laughter, and ‘pronunciational particulars’, (what others call ‘comic book’ and/or stereotyped renderings), for example. My transcripts pay a lot of attention to those sorts of features.” (Jefferson, 2004: 15).

In Jefferson’s transcription system (a simplified version of the transcription system used by Llewellyn and Spence (2009) is included in Appendix 1), seemingly innocuous actions and utterances become potentially significant. For instance dynamics may include the placement of a sigh, the overlapping of utterances, the length of a pause, speech emphasis, volume or the speed of delivery. Each of these elements of interaction may be analytically significant as they display some participant’s understanding of a previous utterance or their context.

## Analysis

### *Judging a business pitch: Doing 'neutrality'*

A feature of judging a business pitch involves producing and sustaining a 'neutralistic posture' throughout. From an ethnomethodology/conversation analysis perspective, this is not a pre-given fact or an inherent feature of the context, rather, it is something that must be accomplished by interactants at all points during a pitch. This task is further complicated by a requirement on the judges to ask adversarial questions of the pitching team without displaying favour or bias towards any of the other competing teams. Our analysis will describe some of the structural features of interaction that reproduce this context.

Departing from the notion of a pre-established 'neutral' containing context towards one that is incrementally produced and thus changeable at any point, firstly requires the analyst to show how relational dynamics in a *neutral though adversarial* context are oriented to by participants in the first instance. The following examples illustrate how sociolinguistic and interactional features such as turn-design and relational asymmetries endogenously shape and are shaped by the institutional context.

### *Question-answer structure: withholding receipt tokens*

The institutional nature of talk can be gleaned through comparison with the turn-taking systems of normal conversation and other forms of institutional talk. Business pitches, for example, share some comparable features with other *formal* speech-exchange systems such as courtrooms and news broadcasts. In these settings, it is common to witness a departure from the three-part question-answer-confirmation structure that is typical to everyday non-institutional interaction. Levinson (1992) notes for example that defence lawyers draw on their institutional power to ask a series of juxtaposing questions that maintain their supposed neutrality yet expose weaknesses in victim testimonies. Furthermore, utterances in these public settings are designed to be 'hearable' to third parties (i.e. the immediately situated audience and the televised audience), which adds a further dynamic to intersubjective understanding.



Extract 1 [14:58]



14.58



*Extract 1: 14:58*

- 1 P: This is not a marketing gimmick (.) this is (0.4) our entire
- 2 P: <fabric of our brand> ↓
- 3 J: (1.2) I have a question about yo::ur penetration so far (.) so 5% year one ( )
- 4 J: How did you come up with that >have you had conversation with<
- 5 J: buyers of these companies u:h in your marketing plan]
- 6 P2: [Sure]
- 7 P2: ( ) we've talked a lot of ( ) we've done

- 8 P2: a lot of visits through the Entrepreneurship Centre  
9 P2: with people in Austin that are CEO's of packaged goods

Extract 1 (above), illustrates how a business pitch context is oriented to on a turn-by-turn basis by both a judge (J) and pitcher (P). In line 2 we can hear the pitcher finish an affirmative statement in response to a previous question. Notably, the judge, beginning in line 3, does not offer any form of acknowledgement or receipt token to the pitcher (such as 'uh huh' or 'I see') (Heritage, 1985); rather he proceeds by directly signalling another question. In everyday conversation, this withholding of positive or negative affirmation would most likely be seen as rude or abrupt – it may even prompt a withdrawal of further cooperation from the answerer, yet in line 6, we see another member of the pitching team respond enthusiastically to the question ("Sure"). It is clear then that the pitcher in line 6 is orienting to and reinforcing an asymmetrical power dynamic, which favours the judge. Simultaneously, the judge is demonstrably constraining their range of utterances (i.e. encouragement or disapproval) and indeed their embodied actions (such as smiling or nodding) to make visible for the pitcher and audience, their apparent objectivity in accomplishing the task in hand. Although receipt tokens are a relatively minor feature of interaction, their usage demonstrates how constraints are functioning as part of evolving practices.

### *Neutralising Aggressive Questioning*

Extract 2: 14:15



14:17



Extract 2: [14:15]

10 J: Why wouldn't Kimberly-Clark just do this themselves? ↓

11 P: I would welcome (.) Kleenex to do this and start giving more to our society↑,

12 P: honestly (.) ha. I wish that 15 cents off of all their boxes went to a non-profit

13 P: but (0.6) what we are passionate about these days...

A further clear orientation to the local institutional power of the business pitch judge is embodied in the structure and delivery of pitcher answer-responses. In Extract 2, we can see the pitcher studiously avoid direct confrontation with the judge despite a relatively provocative question in line 10. Rather than treat this question as an obvious criticism, designed to undermine and discredit the business idea, the pitcher instead orients towards the utterance as a collaborative suggestion (in lines 11 and 12). This is a subtle yet neat strategy on the part of the pitcher as, in doing so, she manages to partially neutralise one of the principal context-derived resources (questioning entitlements) the judge possesses. The interactional context has, for a fleeting moment at least, been reshaped from an adversarial encounter towards a collaborative one. This shift is achieved through an initial acceptance of the 'suggestion' by the pitcher ("I would welcome") and the insertion of a plural possessive pronoun ("our society").

A further interesting facet of the pitcher response (lines 11 and 12) is that the individual does not address the judge directly with her reply, but rather looks across a large swathe of the audience. Through this gesture, the pitcher has widened out the context for the interaction, making the audience a consequential and accountable part of any next move (perhaps minimizing the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between judge and pitcher). By orienting to the judge's critical comment as *an idea*, and subsequently offering a positive evaluation and endorsement of the idea *towards the audience* (in lines 11 and 12), the pitcher has constructed a 'judging' identity for

herself (this time directed back towards the competition judge), in doing so, temporarily gaining a more equal footing with her interlocutor in the eyes of the (judging) audience.

The final part of the pitcher's response in line 13 is also significant. Here, rather than continuing to answer the judge's question, which has been disposed of in two lines, a topic shift is initiated ("But, what we are passionate about these days"). It appears therefore that lines 11 and 12 acted as a 'buffer' to avoid a direct confrontation with the judge (which, had the topic shift had been initiated in line 11, may have resulted in a sanction for failing to answer the question).

*Contextual ambiguity: deviant institutional conduct*

The final vignette reveals methods through which competing institutional identities are invoked during an interaction. The passage, beginning in lines 14 and 15, opens with the judge asking a probing question about the quality of the pitchers' product. In line 17, we see a shift from this supposedly objective 'neutral' identity towards a more intimate identity (with the invocation of a personal preference). In line 19 (Extract 3, picture 2, 22:17), a pitcher responds to line 18 with a short giggle. The judge then responds to this with more laughter, triggering wider audience laughter. In line 21, the judge then asks a question which is oriented to by the audience and pitcher as 'humorous' rather than 'serious'. The pitcher does not respond to the question directly, but rather looks at her fellow pitcher and builds on the intimate personal context, saying, "I love it".

Extract 3 [22:06]



[22:10]



[22:17]



[22:18]

Extract 3 [22:06]

- 14 J: What is the quality of the recycled paper, >cos  
 15 J: This is not clearly recycled [paper]<  
 16 P: [yup]  
 17 J: Um, when I think of recycled, I don't really wanna  
 18 J: put it next to my nose] (0.7)  
 19 P: [laughter]  
 20 [Audience laughter]  
 21 J: (laughing) how are you gonna get over that?  
 22 P: (laughing) >I love it< (0.9) yes, ok

This interaction signals a momentary breakdown in the normative conduct of a business pitch; the neutral adversarial context is recast as a somewhat friendly and familiar one – something capitalised on immediately by the pitcher. This is evidenced through the way in which the pitcher orients towards a personal comment (lines 17 and 18) by responding to the judge in a way that would typically be unacceptable in such a setting (“I love it”). The institutional constraints on allowable actions have suddenly and abruptly changed as the judge has reframed the situation and transformed the nature of the adversarial context. This in turn, has created a new landscape for the pitcher to operate within and opens new contextual resources that may be utilised for the entrepreneurial purposes in hand.

## *Discussion*

This transitory lapse from the judge in Extract 3 brings to the surface the extent to which contexts and relational dynamics are actively sustained and therefore immediately changeable. We can see that, rather than existing merely as ‘cultural dopes’ enacting predetermined roles and identities in response to extrinsic forces, interaction participants are “knowledge social agents who actively display for one another (and also, for observers and analysts) their orientation to the relevance of contexts” (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008: 139). Pursuing this approach draws out various subtleties that are often ‘glossed’ in common descriptions of practice yet that remain fundamental for understanding entrepreneurial phenomena.

Through the empirical material presented it is possible to witness how the pitcher engages in acts of resistance - albeit a form of resistance that operates subtly within the strictures of the business pitch context. Rindova et al. (2009) identify the removal of constraints as central to entrepreneuring, yet as Doern and Goss (2013) illustrate, the nature of the constraint and the processes used to remove the constraint are less well articulated. EMCA provides a precise means through which to view these processes and from a perspective that avoids incorporating static contextual barriers (and enablers) into analysis. This dynamic and evolving conceptualisation of constraint is illustrated in Extract 2, where an asymmetrical power relation is dissolved through the structuring of a question-answer response, in this instance, the creation of a ‘buffer’ answer that enables the pitcher to initiate a favourable topic shift. Indeed, if power is viewed as a function of practice (Goss et al., 2011), then the nature of wider contextual factors would similarly benefit from being reconsidered as primarily a project and product of interaction and individual agency.

The implication of this endogenous perspective of entrepreneuring as an outcome of dynamic, embedded (and unpredictable) processes, when expanded upon, offers promise to reconsider various central constructs in the entrepreneurship domain, including theories of resource acquisition and opportunity exploitation. Building on Goss’ (2005: 206) re-reading of Schumpeter, where he turns attention towards the “social processes that help to produce and reproduce entrepreneurial action”, an

interactionist framework may arguably underpin a better understanding of precisely how those engaged in entreprenuring produce ‘new combinations’ amidst the flux of contextual factors that emerge and dissipate *ad infinitum*. Similarly, researchers are also presented with a window into precisely how those engaging in entrepreneurial processes adopt various deviant behaviours to overcome contextual sanctions or constraints that inhibit (or sometimes enable) their actions (as Extracts 2 and 3 illustrate in different ways). It is at this juncture where Garfinkel’s (1967) reaction against ‘cultural dopes’ and the ‘bucket approach’ to context, may present a means of reconsidering the agentic nature of the entrepreneurial individual as someone operating of their own (temporally variable) free will in a *context shaped* and *context renewing* environment - particularly one where a range of “diverse outcomes” persist (Zahra et al., 2014: 3). In doing so, a case exists to partly reconsider the pervasive usage of *a priori* analytical frameworks (and the threat of theoretical imperialism that comes with them) and to encourage a more pragmatist inspired data-driven perspective on entrepreneurial phenomena.

Previous developments in sociological and practice-based entrepreneurial studies have drawn on rich data and methods such as ethnography (Dacin et al., 2010), autobiographical narrative data (Goss et al., 2011), storytelling (Steyaert, 2007b) and phenomenological inquiry (Cope, 2005), however EMCA provides both a complementary and supplementary framework for working with data that captures processes as they happen in real time, where those engaging in entrepreneurial actions make visible for each other (and analysts) evolving understanding of context. EMCA can deepen understanding of context by enabling the inclusion of additional analytical dimensions such as socio-material practices (Orlikowski, 2007) and the spatial nature of entrepreneurial contexts (Reveley et al., 2004). Highly granular naturalistic data provides an opportunity to study processes as they happen *in situ*, something that can provide a new perspective on how those engaging in entreprenuring navigate problems, analyse context and overcome social and institutional constraints on entrepreneurial behaviour.

Our three examples have provided short but novel insights into the hidden complexities of a typical business pitch by approaching the data with no *a priori* theoretical agenda. Instead, by analysing the methods through which participants

display their orientation towards the relevance of context, we sidestep analytical problems encountered elsewhere when researchers must select from a multitude of potential contextual variables to frame analysis. Through utilisation of recording technology, it has been possible to exhaustively explore the endogenous construction of context, turn by turn, as various identities, power relations and contextual factors become relevant, in the moment, to participants pursuing their own objectives and responding to the projects of others.

## **Conclusion**

It is argued in this paper that there remain many theoretical resources from the disciplines of sociology, discourse analysis and linguistics that could be applied to gain a better understanding of “when, how and why entrepreneurship happens” (Welter, 2011: 176). We identified various difficulties inherent in contextualising research, namely: whose understanding of context is being analysed? What aspects of context are instrumental in enabling and constraining entrepreneurial actions and how can knowledge of contexts may be accessed and interpreted by researchers? Our framework addresses these problems by directing analytical focus to the level of social interaction.

Entrepreneurial contexts are first and foremost a concern for entrepreneurial actors and those whom they interact with. How these individuals (or other social actors) analyse, respond to and (re)construct their social context is “not simply or even primarily a theoretical phenomenon for the analyst” (Llewellyn and Spence, 2009: 1420). It is instead something that is empirically available both to those involved in an episode of interaction and any analyst who has a recording of the interaction in question. This ethnomethodological stance offers a solution to the methodological puzzle outlined at the start of this paper, which queries whose understanding of context is ultimately being analysed in research? Building on Garfinkel’s (1967) distinctive framework, we have presented a means for empirically demonstrating the consequentiality of context for episodes of entrepreneurial practice, recognising that “contexts for action oscillate wildly, not simply over time, but utterance by utterance” (Llewellyn and Spence, 2009: 1436)



Our analysis offers several contributions to contemporary entrepreneurship scholarship. Firstly, the roles and identities that individuals construct through everyday interaction, shape and are shaped by the contextual constraints that emerge and dissipate during the course of an interaction. In this article, the notion of ‘contextual constraint’ as an exogenous and static barrier has been replaced by a more dynamic and reflexive one, illustrated in part through elucidation of the methods that entrepreneurial actors use to structure interaction so as to mitigate asymmetrical power relations. Second, by rejecting the idea of the ‘cultural dope’ in entrepreneurship studies, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis provide a theoretical apparatus that offers insights into the role social settings play in the formulation of entrepreneurial conduct. This, consequently, affords scholars the opportunity to challenge established theories that often fail to capture the complexity and idiosyncrasies of practice or that otherwise fail to account for context when using established theories to explain new entrepreneurial phenomena (Zahra et al., 2014).

There are limitations inherent in conducting such granular, context-sensitive research. While findings provide uniquely detailed real-time analyses of social interaction, the applicability of these insights to other related phenomena may be minimal. Similarly, scholars from aligned discourse analysis traditions such as critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), will query the practice of ‘bracketing’ understanding of the social world, claiming this artificially removes overarching power and political dynamics from analyses. While EMCA research may not offer general theories, it does afford the potential to cut across some of the static that envelops the entrepreneurship paradigm by reconnecting abstract theories with concrete examples of practice. We hope an endogenous perspective can be taken in future interaction-based studies of entrepreneuring as entrepreneurial actors perform important yet empirically overlooked tasks such as selling, networking, arranging finance and accessing resources.



## Appendix 1 - Transcription Notation

This adapted system is taken from Llewellyn and Spence (2009)

(.7)	Length of a pause.
(.)	Micro-pause.
=	A latching between utterances.
[]	Between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicates overlap.
hh	Inbreath
hh	Outbreath.
(( ))	Non-verbal activity.
-	Sharp cut-off.
:	Stretching of a word.
!	Denotes an animated tone.
Ø	Unclear fragment.
∞	Quiet utterance.
CAPITALS	Noticeably louder.
><	The talk in-between is quicker.
<>	The talk in-between is slower.
↓	Rising or falling intonation.
<u>Word</u>	Underline indicates speaker emphasis.

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