J Psycholinguist Res (2016) 45:423–446
DOI 10.1007/s10936-015-9404-0

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Ragnar Rommetveit's Approach to Everyday Spoken Dialogue from Within

Sabine Kowal[1] · **Daniel C. O'Connell**[2]

Published online: 23 November 2015
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Abstract The following article presents basic concepts and methods of Ragnar Rommetveit's (born 1924) hermeneutic-dialogical approach to everyday spoken dialogue with a focus on both shared consciousness and linguistically mediated meaning. He developed this approach originally in his engagement of mainstream linguistic and psycholinguistic research of the 1960s and 1970s. He criticized this research tradition for its individualistic orientation and its adherence to experimental methodology which did not allow the engagement of interactively established meaning and understanding in everyday spoken dialogue. As a social psychologist influenced by phenomenological philosophy, Rommetveit opted for an alternative conceptualization of such dialogue as a contextualized, partially private world, temporarily co-established by interlocutors on the basis of shared consciousness. He argued that everyday spoken dialogue should be investigated *from within*, i.e., from the perspectives of the interlocutors and from a psychology of the second person. Hence, he developed his approach with an emphasis on intersubjectivity, perspectivity and perspectival relativity, meaning potential of utterances, and epistemic responsibility of interlocutors. In his methods, he limited himself for the most part to casuistic analyses, i.e., logical analyses of fictitious examples to argue for the plausibility of his approach. After many years of experimental research on language, he pursued his phenomenologically oriented research on dialogue in English-language publications from the late 1980s up to 2003. During that period, he engaged psycholinguistic research on spoken dialogue carried out by Anglo-American colleagues only occasionally. Although his work remained unfinished and open to development, it provides both a challenging alternative and supplement to current Anglo-American research on spoken dialogue and some overlap therewith.

We wish to dedicate the following article to the memory of Robert W. Rieber, a good friend, wise editor, and loyal colleague. We also wish to express our special thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this article who has provided critical commentary and worthwhile suggestions for its improvement.

✉ Sabine Kowal
kowal-berlin@t-online.de

1 Technical University Berlin, Roonstr. 29, 12203 Berlin, Germany

2 Department of Psychology, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA

Keywords Spontaneous spoken dialogue · Intersubjectivity · Perspective · Meaning potential · Epistemic responsibility

Initiating a dialogue . . . is to 'transform a certain kind of silence into speech' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 184). Once the other person accepts the invitation to engage in the dialogue, his life situation is temporarily transformed. The two participants leave behind them whatever were their preoccupations at the moment when silence was transformed into speech. From that moment on, they become inhabitants of a partly shared social world, established and continuously modified by their acts of communication

(Rommetveit 1974, p. 23).

We view Rommetveit's integration of conceptions like perspectival relativity and meaning potentials into a social-cognitive theory of language and communication as a unique contribution to present-day psycholinguistic theory integrating disciplines and scientific traditions

(Hagtvet and Wold 2003, p. 194).

Introduction

According to the explicitly stated aims and scope of the *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, the journal "covers a broad range of approaches to the study of the communicative process, including: the social and anthropological bases of communication". An overview of the 28 articles in the first four issues of the Journal during the year 2015 and an additional summary check of the articles of the past 10 years revealed a thematic emphasis typically on linguistic structure as the source of organization of language use by the individual speaker, listener, or reader. And the empirical studies reported therein concentrate for the most part on experiments, a methodological approach that allows the testing of specific hypotheses about language processing at the level of syllables, words, or sentences under controlled conditions, but does not include verbal interactions for communicative purposes.

An article dealing with *everyday spoken dialogue*, i.e., verbal interaction that is not elicited by an experimenter under controlled conditions but occurs out of a felt communicative purpose or need on the part of interlocutors, must therefore be considered a rather unusual occurrence in this journal and calls for some preliminary comment.

The main theoretical issue facing psychologists who engage spoken dialogue has been and still is: How should the "fusion" of two or more minds characteristic of everyday spoken dialogue be conceptualized by a scientific discipline that has since its inception at the end of the nineteenth century made the *individual* mind its basic unit of analysis? In fact, his concern for an answer to this question has led the German psychologist Theo Herrmann (Herrmann 2003) to speak of a "communication-process-dilemma" (p. 81; our translation) for the psychology of language use:

> Models of the psychology of language use, the conclusions of which are concerned with isolated *individuals*, and models of the psychology of language use, the conclusions of which are concerned with *communication dyads*, are not, strictly speaking, reconcilable with one another. (p. 83; translation cited in O'Connell and Kowal 2012, p. 29)

Unfortunately, Herrmann's unexpected death prevented his own further engagement of this dilemma.

Currently, there are at least two Anglo-American approaches to spoken dialogue that have confronted Herrmann's dilemma and have suggested theoretical and empirical ways to engage it. The more recent psycholinguistic approach is Pickering and Garrod's (2004) "mechanistic account of dialogue" (p. 169), over the years developed into the authors' "integrated theory of

language production and comprehension" (Pickering and Garrod 2013, p. 1). Pickering and Garrod (2014, p. 131), in a synthesis of their 2004 and 2013 accounts, focused on two closely related properties of successful dialogue: shared understanding on the part of the interlocutors and precision timing of their contributions to avoid overlap and long pauses. They proposed two psychological mechanisms for language processing in dialogue: *interactive alignment* of speaker and listener across various levels of linguistic representation and *prediction-by simulation* on the part of the listener. Interactive alignment is assumed to be based on the construction of mental models of what is being talked about; in a successful dialogue these models of speaker and listener become aligned so that the interlocutors "come to understand the relevant aspects of the world in the same way as each other" (p. 132). Interactive alignment is assumed to be typically an automatic priming process and has been related empirically to "the tendency for interlocutors to repeat each other's choices at many different linguistic levels" (p. 132). For empirical evidence, the authors referred to experiments on task-oriented dialogues by Garrod and Anderson (1987) and Branigan et al. (2000). Although Pickering and Garrod (2014) acknowledged that alignment may also be achieved by "more conscious and deliberate strategies on occasion," they insisted that such alignment occurs only "when automatic alignment breaks down" (p. 133).

The mechanism of prediction-by-simulation is based on the assumption that a listener "covertly imitates the speaker, derives the speaker's upcoming production command, and constructs a forward model based on her most likely utterance under those circumstances" (p. 134). Pickering and Garrod (2014) found empirical evidence for this mechanism in the observations that, in principle, "people can predict different aspects of other people's utterances (meaning, grammar, sounds, etc.), that they covertly imitate language, and that people can use covert imitation to drive predictions" (p. 134). At the same time, they emphasized that predictability may vary with a dialogue's embeddedness in more or less restrictive activity types (e.g., buying bread in a bakery vs. casual conversations) and therefore closed with the warning:

> Psycholinguists should not assume that data derived from one form of language use (such as monologue or cooperative task-oriented dialogue) must be informative about other forms of language use. (Pickering and Garrod 2014, p. 139)

An alternative approach to spoken dialogue has been developed over several decades by H. H. Clark and his colleagues. For Clark (2012), dialogue is "two or more people talking in interaction" (p. 542), with language considered as an instrument used to coordinate the joint actions of individual participants involved in some basic joint activity (e.g., buying bread or assembling a TV stand). He adopted the term *coordination* from Schelling (1960) and its application to language use from Lewis (1969) who both viewed coordination as a means of "solving coordination problems" (Clark 1996, p. 62) in pursuit of common goals. Among other key concepts in Clark's approach are *joint commitment* and *common ground*. Participants in a joint activity "coordinate their parts of such joint activities by means of joint commitments" (Clark 2012, p. 542), i.e., by the mutual trust or belief that each of them will in fact do what is expected from her or him in order to reach their common goal. Thus, joint commitment implies a moral dimension of responsibility on the part of participants. Common ground, a notion originally introduced by Stalnaker (1978), refers to the "mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual assumptions" which interlocutors "infer . . . from past conversation, joint perceptual experiences, and joint membership in cultural communities" (Clark 2012, p. 547). For Clark, a successful dialogue presupposes the establishment of common ground, i.e., "the mutual belief that the addressees have attended, identified what is

said, and understood what is meant well enough for current purposes" (p. 547). Among the techniques used to ground what they say, Clark counted, e.g., "the back-channel response, acknowledgement, or continuer" as described in conversation analytic work (Schegloff 1982). Whereas Clark in his earlier studies (e.g., Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs 1986) used experimental evidence for his approach, he later typically argued with extracts from natural conversations, e.g., from the London Lund corpus (Svartvik and Quirk 1980).

Comparing Clark's approach to spoken dialogue with their own, Garrod and Pickering (2007) maintained that, whereas in their account, "alignment is principally the result of *automatic* mechanisms," for Clark (1996) "interlocutors use various *strategies* to accumulate what he terms 'common ground"' (p. 443; our italics). Later, Pickering and Garrod (2014) acknowledged that Clark's "process of *grounding* presumably takes place alongside alignment and, indeed involves alignment" (p. 133). It should be noted that Clark himself has not referenced Pickering and Garrod's research on spoken dialogue in his own research.

As the mottos cited at the beginning of the present article indicate, Rommetveit's hermeneutic-dialogical approach is notably different from both Pickering and Garrod's and from Clark's. We have chosen to present Rommetveit and his work to the readers of the *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*—in accord with the journal's aim and scope—because he represents the voice of a European "outsider" relative to Anglo-American research. We also consider him to be of both historical and current interest for an alternative psychological approach to spoken dialogue, specifically to its everyday form. This is quite in accord with Pickering and Garrod's (2014) warning mentioned above not to neglect different forms of language use. Having been involved in social psychological *Studies on language, thought and verbal communication* (Rommetveit and Blakar 1979) for almost 50 years and, since the 1980s, with a dialogical perspective on human everyday communication, Rommetveit has become himself part of the history of psychology, in critical distance to the prevailing zeitgeist, open for stimulation by other disciplines, and yet faithful to his basic convictions throughout his entire career.

The following presentation of Rommetveit's basic concepts and methodological approach concentrates on the main theme that he pursued throughout his entire career—to understand *everyday* spoken dialogue "as a process of building a fragile, temporary, and partially shared intersubjectivity in a deeply pluralistic world" (Wertsch 2003, p. 184). Consequently, the article focuses primarily on Rommetveit's later research pursued in an explicitly dialogical framework. The reference 2003b constitutes his most recent and last English-language publication on the topic. Rommetveit has therefore not discussed his own approach in light of the more recent developments in the twenty-first century with regard to spoken dialogue.

We first present an overview of Rommetveit's research across almost five decades so as to provide the reader with some background of the development of his thinking; we then engage his basic notions of *intersubjectivity* and *perspectival relativity*, *meaning* and *meaning potential*, and *moral* and *epistemic responsibility*. A section on Rommetveit's position on an appropriate study of everyday spoken dialogue *from within* follows. We conclude with a critical evaluation of Rommetveit's approach.

Rommetveit's style of communication can at times be challenging to the reader, or as Wertsch (2003) put it: "Instead of being a facile and prolific writer, Rommetveit has always been painstaking and meticulous in producing his writings" (p. 183). We have therefore made an effort to present his work as straightforwardly as possible in a combination of his formulations and our own.

A Survey of Half a Century of Rommetveit's Research (1955–2003)

The crucial role which Ragnar Rommetveit (b. 1924) has played in both the development of Norwegian social psychology and in the accessibility of his work to an international audience becomes evident already in Nafstadt and Blakar's (1982) review of Norwegian social psychology, which covered for the most part the years from 1970 to 1981. No less than 90 % of his publications during that time were written in English. A more recent review of Norwegian social psychology by Ommundsen and Teigen (2005) portrayed Rommetveit as "the most prominent representative" (p. 32) of the younger generation of Norwegian psychologists influenced by American Psychology after World War II. The authors confirmed Rommetveit's leading role in the history of Norwegian psychology and specifically in both theoretical and empirical work on language and communication from a social-cognitive perspective and with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity and applications to social issues. Knobloch (2003) characterized Rommetveit's approach as a "radical. . . engagement of the dialogical foundation of communication" (p. 29; our translation), especially under the influence of M. M. Bakhtin, "one of Rommetveit's 'spiritual ancestors'" (Wertsch 1992, p. 65).

Since his earliest publications in the area of social psychology in the mid 1950s, Rommetveit adopted a critical stance toward research approaches current at that time and maintained such an attitude throughout the rest of his academic life. Thus, already in his doctoral dissertation (Rommetveit 1955b), written under the direction of philosopher Arne Naess, Rommetveit cautioned against what he called "Psychological Escapism" (p. 5), i.e., the effort to make "psychology an 'exact' science by approaching as far as possible certain standards within physics" (p. 8):

> An escape from introspectionist psychology as represented by the extremely "physicalistic" and "operationistic" trends is an escape from the complexities of psychological phenomena and thereby to some extent an escape from fundamental psychological problems. (p. 8)

One corollary of his critique was to include "a more phenomenological analysis" (p. 9) in his methodological repertoire and to emphasize the need for a "*molar research model* over a '*step-by-step design*'" (p. 9) in an attempt to deal with complex psychological phenomena:

> *We have to tap the organism and the environment at the right places . . . i.e., to make use of our hunches and insights into structured social situations and patterned interpersonal relations – and out of such insights and hunches develop concepts deliberately adapted to our complex field of research. (p. 9)*

In a similar context, Rommetveit (1955a) criticized behavioristic approaches which, in their attempt to get rid of any "surplus meanings" (p. 338) of a concept, adhered to strictly operational definitions of the concept which thereby acquired its "entire meaning from the rules coordinating it to observations" (p. 339). Instead, he emphasized that "prescientific knowledge," which researchers have at their disposal before even engaging laboratory experiments, "though frequently more diffuse and primitive than scientific knowledge, does not differ radically from the latter" (p. 343) and should therefore be integrated into their research. Much later, Hagtvet and Wold (2003) insisted, that Rommetveit always adhered to his conviction that "there is continuity between what he understands as an ordinary human being and what he understands as a scientist" (p. 202). Such continuity is clearly to be found in

Rommetveit's consistent and resolute development of basic positions in his hermeneutic-dialogical approach to everyday spoken dialogue *from within*:

> We are as practitioners of language as a form of life in a sense imprisoned within linguistically mediated meaning yet have as researchers the privilege to wonder about and investigate our own and other people's imprisonment in—and intuitive mastery of—language. We have to . . . acknowledge that no scientifically elaborated and empirically based map of a word's meaning can capture its entire repertory of meaning potentials. (Rommetveit 2003, p. 211 f.)

According to Rommetveit's (1974) own account, already in the late forties he developed a "serious engagement (of an academic nature) in issues of communication" (p. 1). This happened under the influence of Arne Naess who exposed him to propositional calculus: "Our joint attempts at recoding detective stories into propositional language . . . served . . . as a very efficient antidote against formalistic escapism" (p. 1). Rommetveit's involvement in language research dates back to the 1960s, with a critique of behavioristic approaches to psychological studies of language (Rommetveit 1962) and with his own experimental studies on various aspects of words (for summaries see Nafstadt and Blakar 1982, p. 198; Rommetveit 1968b, p. 97 ff.; Rommetveit and Blakar 1979). These studies in turn led him to engage contextualized utterances (Rommetveit 1968b, p. 257 ff.) and ultimately to be preoccupied with spoken dialogue (e.g., Rommetveit 1992).

In his book *On message structure*, Rommetveit (1974) showed himself quite critical of the then current research on language use, and in particular of mainstream psycholinguistics or what he referred to as the "Harvard-M.I.T. programme of psycholinguistics" (p. 2) as fostered by both George A. Miller and Noam Chomsky. Therein he found "definite symptoms of encapsulation, dogmatism and formalistic escapism" and concluded: "The chances of a fruitful dialogue with colleagues adhering to the prevailing school seemed indeed very slim" (p. 2), largely by reason of a "programmatic disregard of problems of language use" (p. 124). But already in the "heyday of psycholinguistics" (O'Connell and Kowal 2012, p. 46), Rommetveit (1968a) had expressed his reservations toward the new psycholinguistics in his review of *Psycholinguistic Papers: Proceedings of the 1966 Edinburgh Conference* edited by Lyons and Wales (1966). He discussed the *Papers* as a social psychologist, dedicated in his research to everyday language use for communicative purposes. For him, the contributors to the *Papers* represented "the novel psycholinguistic culture of the Harvard-M.I.T. tribe" (Rommetveit 1968a, p. 307), a "particular – and particularly dominant – brand of psycholinguistics" (p. 305). But he also noted that there were "skeptical participants" (p. 307) at the conference (e.g., R. C. Oldfield, C. Fraser, and R. Huxley), all of whom were discussants of the papers presented in the five major sessions. Included in their recurrent criticisms was "the lack of a communicative perspective in the Harvard-M.I.T. approach" (p. 308). Rommetveit summarized his own critique of the positions presented in the conference papers as follows:

> Successful communication . . . presupposes, of course, that language is used for many other purposes than *logical exercise*. . . . the search for *logical vacuity* of utterances and the insistence upon *invariant semantic markers* for words seems [sic] to be of hardly any relevance whatsoever if we inquire into *acts of speech* as *subsets of communicative acts*. Logical exercise and legislation concerning word meaning were introduced into psycholinguistics at the very moment when psycholinguists . . . decided to detach utterances from their 'natural habitat' of *communication*. (p. 309)

Six years later, Rommetveit (1974) commented on the *Papers* as follows:

> It is in retrospect quite amusing to notice how difficult it was for 'outsiders' at that conference to engage in communication with proponents of the Harvard- M.I.T. school on premises other than those based upon faith in 'deep syntactic structures', premises that no longer are agreed upon *within* the Harvard-M.I.T. school. (p. 129, note 5)

More than 30 years later, in his interview with Josephs (1998), he described part of his work in the 60s and 70s as "writing critical footnotes to mainstream cognitivism and psycholinguistics" (p. 194) without receiving much feedback. Looking back at this time, he added:

> I don't think it was lack of will on the part of my opponents that prevented them from engaging in dialogue with me, but rather that they found their own point of departure so self-evident. If I had talked in a radically dialogical way at that time, they would have thought I were crazy. (p. 194)

Rommetveit developed his own approach to language and communication as a constructive alternative to this then dominant linguistic and psycholinguistic approach. His firm interdisciplinary thinking was influenced "by theoretical traditions like Gestalt psychology, European continental phenomenology, and sociocultural theories from the former Soviet Union" (Hagtvet and Wold 2003, p. 187). In his gradual development of a dialogical position, Rommetveit explicitly acknowledged the influence of the psychologists Michotte (1954), Heider (1958), Piaget (1952) and, interdisciplinarily, of Bakhtin (1981), Cassirer (1944), Gadamer (1975), Mead (1934), Vološinov (1973) and Wittgenstein (1968) as the more important theoretical companions of his own thinking—a reflection of his readiness to cross "the boundary between social-scientific and humanistic studies" (Rommetveit 1987, p. 77). Rommetveit (1974) in particular mentioned the influence of Wittgenstein, an influence which lasted throughout his entire career including his very last Norwegian publication in 2008. In fact, he had dedicated his 1972 book, written in Norwegian, to Ludwig Wittgenstein. His explanation for the dedication was expressed in Rommetveit (1974):

> The imagined alliance was perhaps facilitated by this physical context of my work: I was struggling to pursue Wittgenstein's basic ideas in terms of their implications for further inquiries of a linguistic and psycholinguistic nature, being surrounded by that very same western Norwegian silence to which Wittgenstein himself had resorted at times when pondering questions concerning in what sense and under which conditions something can be made known. (p. 3)

Rommetveit's "imagined alliance" with Wittgenstein was related to the conviction, already pointed out above, that psychology has to approach "issues of meaning in everyday dialogue from within, that is, in the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1968): qua participants in language as 'a form of life"' (Rommetveit 2003, p. 211).

The influence of Bakhtin on his thinking came only later, as Rommetveit (in his interview with Josephs 1998) acknowledged:

> I wrote *On Message Structure* before I had read Bakhtin. When I first read Bakhtin—and there was then only one German translation of his book on Dostoevsky's poetics in Norway . . . I felt that I encountered a mind with whom I could really have a dialogue, who spoke my language, so to say. (p. 194)

He specified the importance of Bakhtin as follows:

> The intricate interrelationships between individual processing . . . and genuinely social-collective properties of language . . . have been left largely unexplored in Western psycho- and sociolinguistics. Researchers who want to explore such interrelationships

> had hence better seek guidance in Soviet psychology, philosophy of language, and literary analysis from the early post-revolutionary period, i.e. in the works of Vygotsky, Leontiev, Volosinov, and Bakhtin. These eminent scholars were all seriously concerned with language and thought . . . as 'dialogical activity' embedded in social life. (Rommetveit 1987, p. 93)

In 1992, Rommetveit characterized his own theoretical position as follows:

> Such a paradigm represents a much-needed constructive alternative to representational-computational models within mainstream individual cognitive psychology and cognitive science. The latter models, I have argued, are monologically based and converge in an image of Man as an essentially asocial, but highly complex information-processing device. (p. 19)

By contrast, Rommetveit emphasized "the social nature of Man" from birth on and "firmly shared background conditions of a biological-ecological nature" (p. 20) which determine the spoken dialogue of adults. At the same time, he insisted that *all* human cognition and communication are inherently situated. He summarized his approach to cognition and communication in 24 general statements and later presented a selection of 10 of the statements as "theses about the embeddedness of the individual mind in a cultural-linguistic collectivity" (Rommetveit 1998b, p. 359 f.).

From his extensive research, we have selected three pairs of concepts to elucidate his hermeneutic-dialogical approach to the study of everyday spoken dialogue from within: intersubjectivity and perspectival relativity; meaning and meaning potential; and moral and epistemic responsibility**.** We will present these concepts in separate sections although they are, in fact, closely related and are often treated as interdependent by Rommetveit himself. But first we have to introduce the Mr. Smith story.

The Story of Mr. Smith

In order to exemplify his hermeneutic-dialogical approach, Rommetveit used fictitious case studies of everyday spoken dialogue extensively (see "How to Study Dialogue *from Within*" section below). His favorite case, which he began to use as early as 1980 when he had ceased doing experimental work (Josephs 1998, p. 215), involves an episode in the life of a Mr. Smith, his "hero in . . . attempts to convey the gist and commonsense plausibility of a dialogically based approach to communication" (Rommetveit 2003, p. 215). According to Linell (2009), Mr. Smith has over the years become "a locus classicus in the dialogical literature" (p. 329). He was originally created by sociologist Herbert Mentzel (1978) who discussed the relevance to explanations in sociological research "of the meanings which actions studied by sociologists have to the actors who perform them" (p. 140). He exemplified his concept of *action* by using the story of Mr. Smith who, on a Sunday morning, is seen to be "pushing a machine around on the grass" (p. 146), an action which would be identified by many observers as mowing the lawn. However, Mentzel pointed out, by his behavior Mr. Smith may also be doing other things, e.g., beautifying his garden, exercising his muscles, or avoiding his wife. Rommetveit's adoption of the Mr. Smith story indicates that his own concern about meaning and meaning potentials in dialogue does include both nonlinguistic actions and the way in which these actions are brought into language. Other casuistic examples used below (see "Some Basic Concepts" section) confirm this concern.

In Rommetveit's own version, Mr. Smith is a fireman living in suburbian Scarsdale who, on a Saturday morning, is mowing his lawn. This action, observed *by others* but not as yet put into words, Rommetveit argued, can be interpreted and verbalized in various ways in a dialogue. These verbalizations depend upon the perspectives of the interlocutors involved in a dialogue about the action. Perspectival relativity is made evident in the following episode. While Mr. Smith is mowing the lawn, Mrs. Smith is having her morning coffee in the kitchen and brooding over their deplorable marital relationship. Then the telephone rings. It is her friend Betty asking

> "That lazy husband of yours, is he still in bed?" Mrs. Smith answers, "No, Mr. Smith is *working*, he is mowing the lawn."
>
> A short time afterward, Mrs. Smith receives another call, this time from Mr. Johnson, who, she takes for granted, is ringing up to find out whether her husband is on the job or free to go fishing with him. So, when he asks, "Is your husband working this morning?" she answers, "No, Mr. Smith is *not working*, he is mowing the lawn." (Rommetveit 2003, p. 215)

According to Rommetveit, Mrs. Smith is in both cases telling the truth with respect to the action of her husband, despite her seemingly contradictory description of Mr. Smith's action as *working* and *not working* in the dialogues with Betty and Mr. Johnson, respectively. Rommetveit related this apparent contradiction to the meaning potential of the word *work* within the intersubjectively established social worlds and accepted perspectives on Mr. Smith's activity, which are temporarily shared by Mrs. Smith and Betty on the one hand and by Mrs. Smith and Mr. Johnson on the other.

It should be emphasized that Rommetveit's purpose in using the Mr. Smith story is to exemplify his dialogical approach towards the interpretation and verbalization of actions. Whereas Mr. Smith is doing the action (mowing the lawn), his wife (rather than Mr. Smith himself) is, in her telephone conversations with various interlocutors, putting into words what *she* thinks *he* is doing. In the process, she is *dialogically* influenced in her interpretation and verbalization of Mr. Smith's action by the concerns of her interlocutors. By contrast, in *individualistic* theories, an action or an event and its interpretation are dealt with as occurring by and in the *same individual*, i.e., without a reciprocal influence of interlocutors on each others' thinking. For example, action identification theory is concerned with "what people are doing and what they think they are doing" (Vallacher and Wegner 1987, p. 39), and construal level theory "posits that the same event or object can be mentally represented at different levels of abstraction" (Fujita et al. 2012, p. 412)—a theory that is also based on the *individual* as the unit of analysis and his or her mental representations.

Some Basic Concepts

What is characteristic of Rommetveit's use of the following concepts is that none of them is relevant without the preliminary assumption of *shared consciousness* presupposed in his use of the term *intersubjectivity*. Reference to shared consciousness essentially distinguishes Rommetveit's approach from other psychological or psycholinguistic accounts of spoken dialogue. For him, man "is a biological organism, part of nature, and as such subject to natural scientific explanation, yet in certain significant respects comprehensible only from within a taken-for-granted, subjectively meaningful and partially intersubjectively shared

life world ("Lebenswelt")" (Rommetveit 1998a, p. 179). These "significant respects" are reflected in the following basic concepts.

Intersubjectivity and Perspectival Relativity

Rommetveit conceptualized everyday spoken dialogues as social worlds conjointly produced by both speaker and listener for a limited period of time and at a specific location, i. e., as an experiential reality of the interlocutors. The

> *here-and-now* . . . of any particular dialogue is . . . never an entirely public affair: it cannot be captured in terms of 'conceptual realities' imposed upon the situation from the outside, independent of the presuppositions and situationally determined perspectives of the individual participants. Nor can it be adequately described in terms of the private and idiosyncratic experiences of those individual participants. . . the *here-and now* that constitutes the prerequisite for any human dialogue appears to be neither entirely public nor purely private, but has to be conceived of as *an intersubjectively established social reality.* (Rommetveit 1974, p. 24)

From the hermeneutic-dialogical position, gradually developed by Rommetveit, everyday dialogue can be understood comprehensively only from within. States of intersubjectivity that emerge out of an ongoing dialogue allow the interlocutors temporarily to transcend their individual private worlds by focusing their attention jointly on specific aspects of a given state of affairs and to achieve mutual, linguistically mediated understanding with respect to these aspects. The focused joint attention and the "'fusion' of minds in conversation" (Rommetveit 1998b, p. 360) are essential for the attainment of intersubjectivity. Rommetveit was convinced that this sharing of consciousness requires a subject-to-subject relationship rather than an I-It or subject-object relationship between interlocutors. For it is a subject-to-subject relationship that permits interlocutors to momentarily set aside those aspects of the talked about state of affairs that are not jointly attended to.

The attainment of intersubjectivity involves a dynamic process because both speaker and listener come to the dialogue from their own "cultural-linguistic collectivity" with its "firmly shared ecological-cultural background conditions," typically taken for granted by them (Rommetveit 1998b, p. 359) and therefore often implicitly assumed to be shared with the other. These background conditions may remain unacknowledged as long as they stay unchanged. But they influence an individual's perspectives on aspects of reality and consequently on the understanding of linguistically mediated meaning during an ongoing dialogue, and they contribute to *perspectival relativity*. For Rommetveit, perspectival relativity unavoidably characterizes human cognition and communication and is in this sense "an axiomatic feature of a dialogical approach to language and mind" (Hagtvet and Wold 2003, p. 188): Since there are typically options regarding the perspective a person may adopt on a given state of affairs, the concept of *perspectivity* also involves motivational aspects, e.g., interests and commitments which determine the choice of perspective.

But he underlined: "An essential component of communicative competence in a pluralistic social world . . . is our capacity to adopt the perspective of *different* 'others'" (Rommetveit 1980, p. 108). Attainment of mutual understanding within a dialogue is therefore "contingent upon reciprocally adjusted perspective setting and perspective taking" (Rommetveit 1992, p. 23). At the same time, the ecological-cultural background conditions "constrain the range of possible human perspectives on states of affairs in everyday communication" (Rommetveit 1998b, p. 359 f.). As a consequence, perspectival differences inherent in human cognition and the resulting perspectival relativity can be either enrichments or hindrances to understanding.

In symmetric dialogues, both interlocutors contribute to the jointly adopted perspective and are in this sense epistemically co-responsible for the ensuing common perspective on the talked-about issue; in asymmetric dialogues, such epistemic co-responsibility is diminished (for more details see "Morality and Epistemic Responsibility" section).

Rommetveit (1974) introduced his "architecture of intersubjectivity" (p. 29) and its "spatial-temporal-interpersonal coordinates of the act of speech" (p. 36) with two extreme fictitious examples for the identification of reference. At one extreme, there is the elderly married couple worried about their son. Upon the wife's inquisitive gaze "in response to the visibly exposed gloomy tension of her husband," he may utter the elliptical remark "Pot" and be immediately and perfectly understood by his wife in his worries about their son's smoking pot (p. 29):

> "*ellipsis,* we may claim, *appears to be the prototype of verbal communication under ideal conditions of complete complementarity in an intersubjectively established, temporarily shared world*. (p. 29)

At the same time, we might add, an elliptical utterance such as "Pot," to be understood, needs a history of dialogues on the topic on the part of the interlocutors. These dialogues then become *privately* rather than *culturally* shared background conditions that allow the establishment of intersubjectivity with minimal verbal means.

At the other extreme, Rommetveit gave the example of a teacher who is faced with "the task of teaching modern French history to illiterate adults in a tribal and secluded African community" (p. 34), i.e., a case in which the overlap of shared pre-established social worlds is minimal. In such a situation, Rommetveit argued, a reference to the late President de Gaulle with the formulation "the powerful king of France" (p. 34), under ordinary conditions an assertion lacking in truth value, may be the best way "of bridging the gap between what the students already know of relevance to the topic and what . . . can be made known to them about de Gaulle and his political role in France" (p. 34).

In their review of Rommetveit's writings, Hagtvet and Wold (2003) formulated the establishment of "mutual understanding or intersubjectivity" (p. 190) as the aim of interlocutors, a formulation that suggests identity of mutual understanding and intersubjectivity. And such identification would delimit intersubjectivity to a context of tensionless, cooperative interaction. This interpretation of Rommetveit's position is confirmed in their later statement: "His focus is the 'good dialogue,' in which communication takes place primarily as collaboration between two or more persons aiming at intersubjectivity" (p. 196). A similar interpretation can be found in Linell (2009). In his dialogical approach he distinguished the concept of *intersubjectivity* "that stresses commonality, sharedness and perhaps consensus" from the concept of *alterity* "which emphasizes the other's (at least partly) different or strange perspective" (p. 81) and maintained that Rommetveit "prioritized intersubjectivity over alterity" (p. 82). But Rommetveit himself (in Josephs 1998) insisted: "I definitely do not equate intersubjectivity with consensus . . . in the most fruitful dialogues novel ideas emerge as a result of fruitful misunderstanding" (p. 200).

In a number of publications, Rommetveit turned to his famous Mr. Smith example (see "The Story of Mr. Smith" section above) in order to show the plausibility of his dialogical approach to intersubjectivity. While Mr. Smith is mowing his lawn, Mrs. Smith is telling her friend Betty on the phone that Mr. Smith is working (rather than being lazy and still in bed, a possibility that Betty had suggested when she called Mrs. Smith). In a next phone call, Mr. Johnson asks Mrs. Smith if Mr. Smith is free to go fishing, and Mrs. Smith replies: "No, - Mr Smith is NOT WORKING this morning; he is mowing the lawn" (Rommetveit 1998b, p. 358). Rommetveit's casuistic analysis from within the two dialogues is as follows:

> On both occasions, Mrs Smith is telling the truth, even though she states that Mr Smith is WORKING in the first phone conversation, and NOT WORKING in the second. What is made known about one and the same 'external' state of affairs is inextricably fused with different, yet in each case intersubjectivity [sic! intersubjectively?] endorsed concerns. In her conversation with Mr Johnson, Mrs Smith adopts a position attuned to his concern about going fishing, i.e. a position from which the LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITY rather than other potential aspects of her husband's activity acquires salience. A state of intersubjectivity is thus attained by reciprocal perspective setting and perspective-taking. (p. 358)

By contrast, in her conversation with Betty, Mrs. Smith adopts a position attuned to Betty's concern about Mr. Smith's ALLEGED LAZINESS: His mowing of the lawn in this case stands out "in contrast to alternatives such as *lying in bed* " (Rommetveit 1991, p. 20). It should be added that, according to Rommetveit, the reciprocal attunement of Mrs. Smith and her interlocutors "is not an act of will but *immediate*, rather than mediated by reflectively monitored 'computation' involving choice among alternative internal 'mental representations' or 'lexical entries' of WORK" (Rommetveit 1992, p. 27). Such immediacy, characteristic of adult everyday dialogue, is related to the fact that from birth on the preverbal interaction of infants with their caretakers is dyadically structured and thereby contributes to the dialogical constitution of the developing human mind.

Meaning and Meaning Potential

Without denying the importance of nonverbal aspects in communication, Rommetveit has limited his reflections on meaning in everyday dialogical interaction for the most part to verbally mediated meaning as evident in his casuistic analyses. The concept of *meaning potential* is directly related to the concept of *perspectival relativity*: The same state of affairs (e.g., an event, an object, an action) can, within a concrete everyday dialogue, be made sense of and brought into language very differently, depending upon the common perspective established by interlocutors on the specific aspect of that state of affairs. According to Hagtvet and Wold (2003), the term "*meaning potential* refers to the entire range of a word's meaning-mediating possibilities. It builds directly upon the idea that a word's meaning changes, depending on context and perspectives" (p. 190), or, as Rommetveit (1998b) stated: "In normal, everyday discourse words are imbued with meaning from temporarily shared social realities established within the mode of felt immediacy" (p. 357). At the same time, as mentioned above, he acknowledged the restraining influence of collectively shared cultural background conditions on the meaning potential of words. Scientific terminology is a special case of an explicit restraint of the meaning potential, in which precision is obtained at the cost of the fixation of perspective (Rommetveit 1990, p. 91).

Already in the early 1960s, Rommetveit (1962) had begun his "search of lost components of meaning in psychological studies of language" (unnumbered title page) in his critique of the then current research on meaning in American psychology (e.g., Osgood 1952; Skinner 1957) with its restriction to what he referred to as emotive and associative meaning. Among these "lost components" he included reference and cognitive meaning of words (by contrast to emotive connotations), their flexibility, and the dependence of word connotation upon semantic and syntactic context. Already then he was convinced that a "major reason for these serious sins of omission seems to be the explicit or implicit reductionist research strategies adopted" (p. 34), which did not allow the study of "*natural language in action*" (Rommetveit 1962, p. 31; our italics). Instead, Rommetveit had insisted that

> the focus of the psychologist's inquiry is in principle the individual speaker and listener, and *not* the linguistic society. One of his aims is to understand what processes or states of affairs are being encoded or decoded in a given utterance, irrespective of its correctness as judged by lexicographical rules for reference or by some formal system of syntax like a given calculus of symbolic logic. And if he then wants to know whether a given recorded linguistic event deviates from common (i.e. *frequent*) usage of words, neither grammarians nor lexicographers can provide him with unequivocal answers. The reason is simply that statistical and "ideal" norms seem to be confounded in grammars and dictionaries. And, whatever these norms may be, their utility will probably be seriously restricted once we extend our studies to psychologically highly interesting cases of language in action like e.g. *the reference of one-word sentences spoken by lovers*. (p. 37)

The concept of *meaning potential* seems to have developed for Rommetveit through the 1970s. His criticisms of philosophical positions such as Searle's 1974 speech act theory, which he referred to as "a non-dialogical speaker-centered approach" (in Josephs 1998, p. 191), and of mainstream psycholinguistics (e.g., Chomsky 1968; Miller 1962) both contributed to this development. Consequently, Rommetveit (1974) had argued against "presumedly invariant semantic features and propositional form of *what is said*" because such an approach "fails to capture significant differences with respect to *what may be made known"* (p. 17). Later, he (Rommetveit's 1988) strongly opposed what he referred to as "the myth of literal meaning" (p. 13). The myth "tries to explain . . . how *one* state of intersubjectivity or 'shared meaning' is attained by linguistic means in encounters between *different* subjective worlds" (p. 13; our italics), but is incapable of dealing "with the perspectivity inherent in human cognition, the dependency of linguistic meaning upon tacitly taken-for-granted background conditions, and its embeddedness in communicative social interaction" (p. 14f.). Rommetveit saw a direct connection between the myth of literal meaning and the *written language bias*, a concept developed by Linell (2005). It entails the claim that modern language scientists have for the most part concentrated on written rather than spoken language as the prototype of language use.

Rommetveit's (1983b) basic premise was that linguistically mediated meaning, embedded in a context of everyday spoken dialogue, is characterized by its "inherent ambiguity, flexibility and systematic negotiability" (p. 5)—an embeddedness which, according to Uhlenbeck (1992), "allows speech to be underspecified" (p. 281). Such underspecification of word meaning in use makes it quite efficient for encounters between different subjective worlds. As indicated above, the meaning potential of words used in everyday communicative settings is closely related to the fact that interlocutors always speak and listen from perspectives. Rommetveit's concept of *perspectival relativity* is therefore complementary to the concept of *meaning potentials* of words.

In order to explore differences between literal meaning and meaning expressed in a specific case of casual spoken discourse, i.e., in "speech as social activity versus text as publicly available product of writing," Rommetveit (1988, p. 21) made use of the following two fictitious examples. The first example is about a potentially ambiguous deictic *that* reflecting the focus of the interlocutors' attention at the moment of utterance, but referring to two quite different states of affairs:

> Consider . . . the following situation. I am sitting together with a friend. On the table between us there are a pot with tea in it and several cups, only some of which are clean.

1. My friend: "Jim tries to get me fired from the job by spreading false rumours about me".
2. I: "That is dirty".

> Consider, next, two different conditions of dyadic coordination of attention at the moment of my utterance. The first is a condition of mutual gaze. The two of us are in sustained eye contact throughout the chat, and my *that* refers hence anaphorically and unequivocally to *the indecent behaviour of Jim* my friend has drawn my attention to. The other condition is as follows: my friend has at the moment of my utterance the teapot in his hand and is on the verge of pouring tea in one of the cups on the table. I am watching this, *he is aware of my watching it, and I know that he is.* My *that* is in that case deictically and unequivocally referring to *the dirty cup in front of him*. (p. 29)

According to Rommetveit, what is meant by what is said, in this case the reference of *that*, is immediately understood by the listener on the basis of the interlocutors' "mutual commitment to the temporarily shared world at that stage" (p. 29). The temporarily shared world is in the first case construed by Rommetveit as being dialogically established by means of his friend's preceding utterance and by sustained eye contact on the part of both interlocutors. Both means focus the mutual attention on the reported offence as the unequivocal reference of *that*. In the second case, the utterance "That is dirty" is construed as being dialogically established by the nonlinguistic action of his friend and the fact that both interlocutors are reciprocally aware of each others' shift of attention from the friend's utterance to his pending choice of a dirty cup to pour his tea into. In both cases, Rommetveit insisted, the basic prerequisite for the established intersubjectivity is the interlocutors' *mutual commitment* to engage the temporarily shared world.

The problem of unequivocal deictic reference in the first case has, of course, also been a topic in psycholinguistic research. An example is Clark's (1983, p. 300) discussion of important characteristics of "indexical expressions" (e.g., I, there) with a shifting reference. What such expressions actually refer to under specific conditions, Clark maintained, depends "on moment-to-moment coordination," i.e., on what he called "contextuality" (p. 201). But still another relationship to Clark's more recent research can be established with regard to Rommetveit's second case. Starting from Schegloff and Sacks (1973) notion of *adjacency pair* where both parts of an exchange consist of spoken actions, Clark (2004) extended their notion so as to include exchanges where either one or both parts consist of non-linguistic actions and termed it a "projective pair" (p. 370). In Rommetveit's second case, the projective pair in question would consist of the friend's taking the teapot and being about to pour tea into a dirty cup and his interlocutor's warning him.

Another casuistic example, chosen "for further explorations of casual versus literal meaning" (Rommetveit 1988, p. 26), is a brief episode from *Sesame Street*:

1. Earnie: "I'm going to divide this banana up so both of us can have some".
2. Earnie gives Bert the skin. "See, I took the inside and here's the outside part for you". (Olson and Torrance 1985, p. 16; cited in Rommetveit 1988, p. 26)

Rommetveit reported the finding of Olson and Torrance that "first graders commenting upon this episode think that Earnie lied" (p. 28) and noted "I shall side with kindergarten children and first-graders on the issue of whether Earnie lied and/or told the truth" (p. 27). For him, an analysis from principles of literal meaning would conclude that Earnie is telling the truth. For instance, in the objective world of Habermas (1981), "banana skins are proper parts of bananas" (Rommetveit 1988, p. 27), a presupposition which establishes the truth of Earnie's

utterance. And from Searle's (1974) principle of expressibility, the same conclusion must be drawn:

> if Earnie wants to cheat Bert, we must concede, he can hardly hit upon a more accurate expression than *part of this banana* for the intended referent, the skin. Accuracy of expression is within Searle's theory of speech acts a matter of correspondence between *speaker's* intention and her or his expression only. (Rommetveit 1988, p. 27)

By contrast, Rommetveit claimed, "any plausible and psycholinguistically relevant version of truth-conditional semantics . . . should label him a liar" (p. 27). In his analysis, he embedded Earnie's utterance in an imagined scenario of dialogical interaction between Earnie and Bert:

> The expression *this banana* is no doubt used deictically and efficiently by Earnie in order to focus Bert's attention on a particular banana. Which aspects of that banana are thereby intersubjectively attended to, however, is not a matter for Earnie alone to decide. What can be *meant* and *truthfully asserted* by his experession *part of this banana* is constrained in an orderly fashion by their discourse situation and mutually taken-for-granted concern. If Earnie and Bert were talking about a particular banana while jointly concerned with it in a botanics class, for instance, the skin might thus very likely be a contextually relevant and properly talked-about part of it. But a banana *to study* in a botanics class is in semantically significant respects different from a banana *to eat* and/or to be *shared by friends*. . . .
>
> The *edibility* of the banana Earnie refers to . . . is clearly by mutual commitment part of their temporarily shared world. Earnie's giving Bert the skin is therefore . . . anomalous . . . Earnie's reference to the skin by the expression *part of this banana* . . . violate[s] a universal constraint upon linguistically mediated intersubjectivity. (p. 30f.)

Rommetveit added that this analysis also shows the extent to which the "study of meaning within natural language is . . . in a very significant respect a 'moral science"' (p. 31), a topic which we turn to in the following section.

Morality and Epistemic Responsibility

In the conclusion of their epilogue for a Special Issue of *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, Linell and Rommetveit (1998) bluntly stated: "Morality is an intrinsic feature of any dialogue. It is in and through dialogue that man constitutes himself as a moral agent . . . Morality remains both a prerequisite and a product of the engagement in dialogue" (p. 472). Earlier, Rommetveit (1991) had claimed:

> The superordinate aim in empirical communication research geared toward ethical issues is . . . to explore how socially shared categorizations of and intersubjectively endorsed perspectives on what we talk *about* are pervaded by collectively shared as well as subjective, shifting, and often conflicting commitments and concerns. (p. 14)

Rommetveit (1998b) traced back the morality characteristic of adult dialogue to the infant's interaction with adult caretakers. As research (e.g., Trevarthen 1998) has amply demonstrated, he argued, the infant immediately, i.e., without voluntary control, is attuned to the caretaker's behavior: "The infant is thus *response-able*, i.e. able to respond, but not (morally) *responsible* for its contributions to the interaction" (p. 364). He was convinced that the development of moral agency rests initially upon our "inborn capacity to establish intersubjectivity," then

upon gradually learning "how to mean," and later upon "*being held accountable* for what we do and for what we mean by what we say" (p. 364).

Rommetveit (1990) called attention specifically to the "largely unexplored problems of *distribution of epistemic responsibility*" (p. 98) among interlocutors in a dialogue. For him, the concept of *epistemic responsibility* involves the expectation that interlocutors verbally express and negotiate their own *individual* perspectives in a way that allows them to arrive at *intersubjectively* established and accepted perspectives on the topics they talk about. If the expectation is fulfilled, interlocutors become "epistemically dependent upon each other and co-responsible for the ensuing product" (p. 99). Again using the Mr. Smith example, Rommetveit (1991) argued that the distribution of epistemic responsibility in the two telephone conversations of Mrs. Smith with her friend Betty and with Mr. Johnson, respectively, is clearly symmetrical:

> The perspective on what is being talked about is in neither case set by Mrs Smith on the basis of the marital worries in which she is immersed prior to and in between the two calls, but by her conversation partners. (p. 20)

Hence, Mrs. Smith allows for a cooperative dialogue by attuning herself to the attunement of her respective dialogue partners in pursuit of epistemic co-responsibility. To the extent that her interlocutors in turn take up Mrs. Smith's perspective on Mr. Smith's activity (i.e., that he is working or not working, respectively), Rommmetveit argued, the dialogue will develop to a point where the interlocutors are indeed "epistemically dependent upon one another and co-responsible" (p. 21) for the established intersubjectivity.

Hagtvet and Wold (2003) pointed out that the distribution of epistemic responsibility becomes an issue especially in "asymmetrical dialogues . . . in which one person is defined – or defines herself or himself – as more of an expert (and with an epistemically more dominant role) than does the other" (p. 200). Rommetveit (1991) himself suggested that in informal conversation, by contrast to institutionally asymmetric situations (e.g., doctor-patient interactions), epistemic dominance means that the subjectivity of only one of the interlocutors is "transformed into *inter*subjectivity and – potentially – shared social reality" (p. 23). He provided an example of such epistemic dominance "under conditions of conflicting individual concerns" (p. 22) on the basis of an excerpt from Ibsen's (1961) play *A doll's house*, taking the excerpt as a transcript of a face-to-face conversation. Rommetveit's purpose was to disclose patterns of dominance and of asymmetry in the opening of the first conversation between Helmer and Nora. The following excerpt begins when Nora returns happily from shopping for Christmas gifts:

1. HELMER (in his study). Is that my little skylark chirruping out there?
2. NORA (busy opening some of the parcels). Yes, it is.
3. HELMER. Is that my little squirrel frisking about?
4. NORA. Yes.
5. HELMER. When did my little squirrel get home?
6. NORA. Just this minute. (She stuffs the bag of macaroons in her pocket and wipes her mouth.) Come out, Torvald, and see what I have bought.
7. HELMER. I don't want to be disturbed! (A moment later, he opens the door and looks out, his pen in his hand.) "Bought", did you say? All that? Has my little spendthrift been out squandering money again?
8. NORA. But, Torvald, surely this year we can spend ourselves just a little. This is the first Christmas we haven't had to go carefully.
9. HELMER. Ah, but that doesn't mean we can afford to be extravagant, you know. (p. 23).

At the beginning of their conversation, Rommetveit noted, it is Nora who tries to involve Helmer in a state of affairs of immediate interest to *her*, namely Christmas presents for their children, by asking him "to come out" and have a look at the presents. However, Helmer, after coming out of his study, immediately brings up spending money as his own individual perspective on Christmas presents—one of dominant interest to *himself*:

> The strategically crucial interactional moves at the beginning of their conversation are thus turns 7 and 8. What happens across those thematically connected adjacent turns is that Helmer sets and Nora takes a perspective clearly at variance—and in some important respects contrary to—that of her opening remark. By arguing (*against* her husband) that they can spread themselves a little this year, she is in turn 8 *eo ipso* engaged in a debate about the parcels and her Christmas shopping on Helmer's premises. (p. 24)

Rommetveit went on to conclude:

> This is a recurrent pattern in their first conversation: Nora's attempts to topicalize things and events they talk about from perspectives emerging out of her own subjective concerns are not taken seriously at all. She is a pet, and as such deprived of epistemic responsibility. (p. 24)

Nora is indeed dominated by Helmer, and his domination excludes the possibility of dialogically sharing the responsibility for this topic. But one might add that Nora's deprivation of epistemic responsibility is also due to her inability to oppose Helmer's domination. By adopting an epistemically dominant position, Helmer treats his wife not as a person who is epistemically equal to him and co-responsible for the themes taken up in their ongoing conversation. This asymmetry of epistemic responsibility is precisely what Helmer's dominance imposes upon Nora.

How to Study Dialogue from Within

In the course of approximately 50 years of research, Rommetveit adopted "an open position toward methodological issues" (Hagtvet and Wold 2003, p. 187). In fact, experimental studies on language, mind, and verbal communication characterized the period between 1960 and 1977; they have been summarized in Rommetveit and Blakar (1979; for a review thereof see Linell 1981). They include topics such as word perception, reading under conditions of binocular rivalry, aspects of word meaning, intra- and extra-linguistic context, and child-adult communication. But his dialogical turn led Rommetveit to acknowledge that, in such a framework, psychological methods themselves can be reinterpreted "as communicative genres" (in Josephs 1998, p. 207). In order to *understand* (rather than to *explain*) what is meant and made known by what is said, Rommetveit argued, the dialogically oriented researcher has to approach the study of dialogue from within the perspectivized social world which the interlocutors temporarily establish throughout their dialogue.

In his last English publication, Rommetveit (2003) specifically engaged methodological problems involved in dialogical research. In order to contextualize these problems within the history of psychology, Rommetveit reverted to the controversy between Hermann Ebbinghaus (1885) and Wilhelm Dilthey in the concluding decades of the nineteenth century (for details on the controversy see Rodi 1987). Their theme was the "dual heritage" (Rommetveit 2003, p. 206) of academic psychology from the natural sciences on the one hand and from

philosophy and the humanities on the other. Rommetveit took this historical controversy to distinguish three approaches based on the role relationship between researcher and "informant" (p. 206). He conceptualized Ebbinghaus's introspective research on human memory as "a psychology of the first person" (p. 206). By contrast, Dilthey (1894) saw psychology's commitment in the exploration of an *understanding* of "inner man" and consequently emphasized what Rommetveit (2003) referred to as "the I-you or subject-to-subject relation between the researcher and her or his informant as fellow human beings" (p. 206). Such a position represents "a psychology of the second person" (p. 205). Rommetveit was convinced that basic issues of meaning can be dealt with, from the point of view of a dialogical psychology, only in such a conceptual framework:

> Humans are part of nature, biological organisms subject to natural laws and natural scientific explanation; yet humans are also inhabitants of an immanently meaningful world and, as such, only intelligible as a "you", "from within". (p. 205)

Finally, Rommetveit identified "a psychology of the third person" in empirical approaches to the human mind, modeled after "the progressive and prestigious natural sciences at the turn of the 19th century" (p. 206). But he noted critically:

> A commitment to abide by the criteria for constructing and empirically testing theory within the "hard" natural sciences . . . may lead to an attitude of extreme alienation toward human beings under investigation. (p. 206)

For him, empirical research on everyday spoken dialogue, in the conceptual framework of a psychology of the second person, has to have as its goal to make its methods fit the I-You relationship between researcher and participant; a methodology characteristic of a psychology of the third person which invokes empirical controls over conversations, does not reach a knowledge of everyday spoken dialogue from within. In most of his more recent studies, therefore, Rommetveit took up a method which he (Rommetveit 1974) referred to as "casuistic analysis" (p. 35; see also Rommetveit 1980, p. 145), i.e., logical analyses of invented examples of everyday spoken dialogue. The choice of this method was based on his conviction that, as researchers with

> a commitment to basically hermeneutic method [sic!] of participant observation . . . : we cannot make scientific sense of actual discourse at all unless we approach the participants 'intersubjectively', i.e., as basically rational and cooperative agents, *in principle on a par with ourselves as far as rationality and mastery of linguistically mediated meaning is concerned.* (Rommetveit 1983b, p. 4 f.)

And still later, Rommetveit (1990) specified:

> as *participants* in ordinary language as a 'form of life', we are imprisoned within human meaning, yet as *researchers* we are capable of reflecting upon and exploring our very embeddedness. *Understanding*, in social scientific studies, is logically prior to *explanation*. (Rommetveit 1990, p. 83)

Rommetveit (2003) provided a description of his casuistry by relating it explicitly to Heider's (1958) analysis of the concepts *Can*, *Ought* and the interrelationships between them, an analysis that "aims at assessing potentially universal semantic features and inherent logical structure of a core of lay psychological vocabulary" (Rommetveit 2003, p. 213). According to Rommetveit, Heider's

> strategy consists of shifts between interpretation of (imagined, but plausible) cases of everyday conversations and systematic conceptual analysis. And such an oscillation between intuitively imbued inspection of particular cases and strictly theoretically disciplined distanciation is in Ricoeur's view the very prototype of "the hermeneutic circle". (p. 213)

Rommetveit would agree with Wittgenstein (2001, p. 124; cited in Shotter 2009, p. 31) that, unlike the logicians, who "do not give . . . examples any life", "we must invent a surrounding for our examples". That it may take a specific competence to invent such surroundings was emphasized by Uhlenbeck (1992). He criticized semantic research based upon native speakers' intuitive judgements of the "oddness/normality, or possibility/impossibility of occurrence" of sentences *in vacuo* on the ground that native speakers may not have sufficient "access to their language and especially to its semantic potential" (p. 27). It should be noted that casuistry, although it is far closer to classical armchair psychology than an empirical method, nevertheless deals logically with empirical facts. Already in 1955, Rommetveit (1955b), in his critique of "extremely 'physicalistic' and 'operationistic' trends", had refused to consider "meaningful psychological problems" as "armchair taboos to be avoided by empirically minded psychologists" (p. 8). And he had warned that "the adaptation of problems to methods . . . may lead to avoidance of psychologically significant fields of research" (p. 8).

To our knowledge, Rommetveit has applied his hermeneutic-dialogical theory only once to a dialogue not of his own creation, namely in the analysis of an excerpt from Ibsen's 1961 play *A doll's house* presented in "Morality and Epistemic Responsibility" section above. His comment that he had used the excerpt as if it were an actual transcript of a face-to-face conversation and his analysis of the excerpt indicate that his approach may well be applicable to the analysis of transcripts of spontaneous spoken dialogue. However, Rommetveit did not include such methodology in his own research agenda.

A Critical Evaluation

In view of Rommetveit's consistent emphasis on everyday spoken dialogue, it appears somewhat paradoxical that his casuistic examples do not include cases wherein typical characteristics of such discourse, e.g., prosodic variation, hesitation, elision, contraction, and interruption play an important role. This limitation goes along with Rommetveit's neglect of transcripts of everyday spoken dialogue and of references to conversation analytic research (see p. 26 above). He seems to have known of this research as evident in his use of conversation analytic terminology in his discussion of "sequential" vs. "simultaneous dialogicity" (Rommetveit 1998b, p. 367); referring to studies of protoconversations in infancy and to his Mr. Smith example, he commented: "Sequential dialogicity is . . . revealed in semantic analysis of so-called adjacency pairs of conversational turns" (p. 367). But he limited his further discussion of elementary units in dialogue to research that pursued a "consistently dialogically based analysis of discourse" (p. 367). We interpret Rommetveit's neglect of conversation analytic research as a consequence of his search for a firm theoretical basis of his hermeneutic-dialogical approach and his preoccupation with basic *psychological* presuppositions in such a framework.

By contrast, Rommetveit engaged a number of H. H. Clark's publications. On the one hand, he criticized Clark's (1977) assertion that "the Given-New distinction is a syntactic one" (p. 412) on the ground that it belongs instead to "crucial semiotic distinctions in a systematic analysis of already *presupposed and irrelevant* versus *contextually realized* com-

ponents of meaning potentials of single words and expressions" (Rommetveit 1983b, p. 22). On the other hand, he acknowledged Clark et al. (1983) as scholars who "seriously engaged in research on previously largely ignored social-interactional and 'pragmatic' aspects of individual language processing" (Rommetveit 1983a, p. 91). Farr and Rommetveit cited Clark and Schaefer's (1987) notion of *grounding* of individual contributions as "essential in the synchronization of the two streams of consciousness" (Farr and Rommetveit 1995, p. 271). Finally, Rommetveit (2008) argued, again critically, that Clark (1996), in his individualistic cognitive theory of conversation, took instrumental rationality to be a prerequisite for the interlocutors' conversational activity. According to Rommetveit (2008), Clark therewith assumed erroneously that interlocutors are equipped "with an impressive logical capacity" (p. 106; our translation). It should also be mentioned that both Rommetveit and Clark have made the concept of (*mutual* or *joint*) *commitment* on the part of interlocutors basic for successful spoken dialogue. For both authors, although without mutual reference, the concept seems to imply a moral dimension. We note finally that Clark does not refer at all in his work on dialogue to Rommetveit.

Rommetveit himself would certainly agree that his approach in many other respects is no more than a modest beginning for a psychological conceptualization of everyday spoken dialogue. In fact, he stated that his "aspiration . . . has been that of 'the informed dilettante, the polypragmatic, Socratic intermediary between discourses' rather than 'the cultural overseer who . . . knows about the ultimate context' (Rorty [1980, p. 317])" (Rommetveit 1987, p. 77). Perhaps not surprisingly, the present authors have found no references to Rommetveit's work in Anglo-American psycholinguistic or social psychological research on dialogue (but see Krauss and Fussell 1996). Instead, his work has been referenced extensively in dialogically oriented language research (e.g., Linell 2009; Marková and Foppa 1990) and in various applied research areas: e.g., information science (Albrechtsen and Hjørland 1994), teacher-student interaction (Wertsch and Kasaz 2005), E-learning (Amhag 2009), software development (Fugelli 2010), and learning and teaching in higher education (Anderson and McCune 2013).

Rommetveit's limitation to an idiosyncratic conceptualization of everyday spoken dialogue from within, i.e., to crucial *psychological* aspects of the sharing of consciousness between two or more individual minds, constitutes his very methodology in appealing to concocted, fictitious dialogues and applying the logic of casuistry to them. And if the warnings of Miller (1980) are to be taken seriously at all, Rommetveit must be taken into account. At that time, Miller stated:

> I believe that consciousness is the constitutive problem of psychology. That is to say, I am as dissatisfied with a psychology that ignores consciousness as I would be with a biology that ignored life or a physics that ignored matter and energy. (p. 146)

In his response to Miller, Pylyshyn (1980) agreed:

> We not only lack an approach that seems equipped to clarify the mystery of conscious experience (certainly neither a functionalist approach like the computational one, nor a biological approach has even succeeded in formulating the problem coherently)—we don't have the faintest idea of what it would be *like* to have such a theory (e.g. what kinds of well-defined puzzles it would solve), so that we might recognize an adequate theory if one were proposed. (p. 166)

Again many years later, Schober (2007) addressed the dealing of social psychologists with language and communication. On the one hand, he stated that "more and more social psychologists are recognizing just how important language and communication are in people's social

lives and inner world" (p. 435). On the other hand, he deplored the fact that they have seldom chosen "a *bilateral* (rather than unilateral) and *collaborative* (rather than autonomous) view of the nature of social cognition and interaction" (p. 439). Major reasons for this preference, he maintained, are "psychology's focus on individual minds," "our methodological commitment to experimental manipulation, which makes it hard to look at this sort of thing", i.e., at the "authentic bilateral mutual influence" of interlocutors on one another, and finally "our legitimate interest in generalizability" (p. 439):

> By using group averages as the proxy for what the individual does, . . . we run the risk of ignoring subtler forms of inter-individual variability and influenceability that may, in the long run, prove to be the more interesting story. Certainly the generality of stories about subtler interactive phenomena from fields that do close case-level analyses . . . needs to be questioned . . . But the group averaging that social psychologists do can make these phenomena invisible. (p. 439)

It should be noted that even among dialogically oriented researchers, a certain modesty about unequivocally dialogical methods can be observed. Thus, Linell (2009), in his summary of examples of such methods, concluded that "it is indeed impossible to be 'completely dialogical,' if one wants to be systematic and contribute to a cumulative scientific endeavor" (p. 382). Rommetveit has chosen to invent his dialogical examples. The casuistic approach, however, leaves it open as to how to bridge the gap between "close case-level analyses" and "the interest in generalizability" (Schober 2007, p. 439).

Nonetheless, what Rommetveit has succeeded in doing, has been to show us what it might "be *like*" to even engage an attempt to "clarify the mystery of conscious experience" (Pylyshyn 1980, p. 166) in dialogue. This tentative clarification constitutes the basic rationale for the present article. It provides an opportunity for Anglo-American psycholinguists to appreciate a different perspective on everyday spoken dialogue. Meanwhile, Herrmann's (2003) "communication-process-dilemma" (p. 81; our translation) remains a challenge for future scholars.

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