Boundary maintenance during interaction and in professional conduct. A matter of ”frame” and ”footing”?

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This paper concentrates on "boundary maintenance” as an aspect of how interactants engage with potential and actual frame breaks in interactional contexts (Slembrouck 2012, Slembrouck and Hall 2013). As the paper aims at a broader discussion which invokes the theoretical relevance of the Goffmanian notions of ”frame” and ”footing” (Goffman 1974, 1981), the data will be drawn from a number of different institutional contexts, including (i) social worker home visits (e.g., how do social workers during such visits respond to client-initiated topics beyond their professional remit), (ii) media interview data (e.g., attempted role reversals between interviewer and interviewee) and (iii) educational data (e.g., teachers and pupils’ engagement with contributions in a language other than the dominant language). My analytical and theoretical mainstay will be both with how interactants invoke and justify the introduction of frame-alien/challenging elements and how such moves are subsequently responded to (accepted, rejected, incorporated, modified) in the light of mutually establishing and/or maintaining a particular definition of the situation as a legitimate instance of a particular type. The paper will also consider a number of implications for how we conceptualize normativity, not only in the light of interactional behavior with effects of inclusion/exclusion, but also that of professionally-accountable conduct.


Keywords: boundary maintenance, Goffman, analysis of institutional interaction.