

## THE ACADEMIC SEMINAR AS AN ARENA OF CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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### 1. Introduction

The academic seminar is a communicative and cultural institution of long standing. Today, its ideal purpose is often said to be the promotion of free and critical inquiry, in relation to a selected topic, in an academic scientific setting. Ideally, it should supplement the finding, teaching and learning of facts by providing teachers and students an opportunity to participate in a systematically critical discussion. Etymologically, the term 'seminar' comes from Latin *semen* (seed) and *seminarium* (school of plants). Historically, the seminar has connections with the Platonic academy, its dialogues and the Aristotelian idea of a dialectic discussion (cf. Clark 1989). Together with the lecture, the debate and the disputation, the seminar is one of the favored types of communicative activity in a university setting. Terms related to the word seminar occur in most European languages and since these terms have been used for a long time, they have sometimes taken on a slightly different sense from the one described above. Thus, for example, in Germany the term "seminar" can be used for a university department and in Swedish the term "seminarium" has, besides the meaning given above, also been used to denote training colleges for teachers ("småskoleseminarium") or for priests ("prästseminarium"). Here, I will, however, be concerned only with a seminar in the sense indicated above.

The main purpose of the paper is to study what types of conflict and conflict handling occur in a seminar. I will, therefore, present typologies of both conflict and conflict handling. These typologies will then be used to classify and discuss types of conflict and conflict handling occurring in one particular instance of a Swedish academic seminar. Swedish academic life more in general has been analyzed in Gerholm and Gerholm (1992). In my analysis, I will try to discuss both normative and descriptive aspects of the academic seminar, trying to contrast ideas about how an academic seminar ideally should be conducted with ideas of how it really is conducted. As a consequence, there is an attempt to bring out the influence of the surrounding culture (Swedish) and the surrounding social institution (university). This, I hope, will facilitate comparison with studies in other cultural settings of both the academic seminar and conflict (cf. Grimshaw 1990) and, thus, contribute to our understanding of how language and culture influence socioepistemic processes.

## 2. The academic seminar as a communicative activity

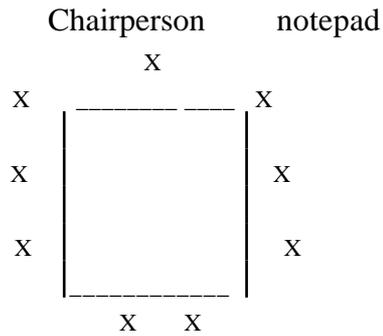
### 2.1 Influences on the academic seminar

Using the parameters for characterizing the communicative aspects of an activity, given in Allwood (1984) and Allwood (1991), the particular instance of the academic seminar to be studied in this paper can be seen as influenced by at least the following parameters:

- (i) Collective - global
- (ii) Collective - local
- (iii) Individual - global
- (iv) Individual - local

#### 2.1.1 Influencing collective global parameters

Type of parameter	Value in the investigated seminar
<b>(Natural) surrounding:</b> <b>Culture:</b>	Indoors in a recording studio, evening Swedish
<b>Language:</b>	Swedish
<b>Social institution:</b>	University, humanities, linguistics
<b>Type of activity:</b>	Seminar: The specific procedure to be followed during the seminar is not totally predetermined in the case at hand.
<b>Purpose (formative):</b>	Critical discussion of a given topic. In this case a predistributed article on language teaching.
<b>Other purposes functions:</b>	Meeting between participants in weekly seminar to promote personal contacts and integration of department.
<b>Roles:</b>	Participants in seminar. One participant acts as chairperson. Superimposed on the roles of the immediate activity, are the communication roles of speaking and listening, which are distributed according to the rules of turn taking of the seminar. Besides these roles, participants also carry the roles given by the surrounding socio-cultural environment., i.e., such roles as gender roles, positional roles, professor, lecturer, student. etc.
<b>Physical (artifactual) environment:</b>	Participants are seated round a rectangular table. The chairperson has a big note pad by his side. The seminar takes place in a recording studio. See figure below



### 2.1.2 Influencing collective local parameters

Local influences are of two kinds;

- (i) Influences which are given by changes in the status of the global parameters (discussed and exemplified under A, below).
- (ii) The cumulative discourse build-up (discussed and exemplified under B below).

**A. Type of activity:** The seminar goes through a series of phases or subactivities and topic shifts.

**Purpose:** Subactivities and topics are to a certain degree connected with different purposes (questions and topics to be discussed).

**Roles:** The seminar is characterized by the rule of one speaker at a time. Thus, the successive local change of speakers is very important.

**Physical (artifactual) environment** Because of lack of space, pages with writing on the note pad have to be turned. At any one time participants can only see the page visible then.

**B. Accumulated** The successive contributions of the *discourse*: participants is to some extent stored in their memories and exerts an accumulating influence as the interaction progresses. A special position of influence is always held by the utterance immediately preceding any particular utterance under scrutiny.

### 2.1.3 Influencing individual global parameters.

**Physical and biological characteristics:** Men and women. Ages between 19 and 64.

**Psychological**

A mixture of introvert and *characteristics*: extrovert personality types with different beliefs and values. In addition, the participants can be assumed to have characteristics which are generally attributed to rational, motivated agents.

**Social characteristics:**

Culturally given gender and age roles and institutionally given roles such as: professor, lecturers, graduate students, one undergraduate student. Besides, Swedish ethnic cultural background, participants have Finnish and French backgrounds.

**2.1.4 Influencing, individual, local parameters**

Again, the local influences are due to changes in the status of the global parameters, but no clear data on this is available in most cases: For example, see the following two psychological parameters:

Individual moods:	No clear data available
Individual purposes:	No clear data available

**2.2 Aspects of communication in the academic seminar**

The same four-fold division which was used to classify factors influencing communication in the academic seminar can be used to classify aspects of the resulting communicative behaviour itself. Thus, we can speak both of collective and individual traits and of global and local traits. Collective features require interaction between at least two individuals, for example, taking turns at speaking can only occur if there are at least two individuals wishing to speak. Collective features, thus, presuppose the occurrence and combination of individual communicative behavior. Global features of communicative behavior are features which hold throughout an interaction. They occur in all or in all relevant individual local communicative acts. For example, it holds globally in the seminar that participants use phonemes, prosody and body movements to communicate. For expository purposes, I will reverse the order of presentation used above. I will start by characterizing individual communicative behavior (2.2.1 and 2.2.2) and then turn to the collective communicative patterns resulting from a combination of individual communicative acts (2.2.3 and 2.2.4). To avoid confusion it should perhaps be pointed out that the dimension global - local can be distinguished from a dimension type - instance (or general - specific). Both features which occur globally and features which only occur locally have types and instances. The only difference is that in the local case the occurrences of a feature are locally restricted while in the global case they are not. In the tables below, 2.2.1 and 2.2.3, I will comment on whether the instantiations of a given parameter of communication in principle are available and on whether they have been studied or not.

### 2.2.1 Individual, global features of communication

<b>Type of parameter</b>	<b>Value in the investigated seminar</b>
<b>Body movements</b>	Available but will not be studied
<b>Phonemes</b>	"
<b>Prosody</b>	"
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Available but will only be studied holistically in relation to communicative acts
<b>Phrases</b>	"
<b>Grammatical structure</b>	"
<b>Functions</b>	
<b>Own com. management</b>	available but will not be studied
<b>Communicative acts</b>	will be studied
<b>Referential content</b>	will be studied
<b>Explicit/implicit</b>	will be studied
<b>Focus</b>	will not be studied
<b>Emotional content</b>	will be studied
<b>Semantic-epistemic categorization</b>	will not be studied

### 2.2.2 Individual local features of communication

Local communicative features are features which only hold locally in a certain phase of a dialogue. Which features appear locally in a given utterance or sequence of utterances will depend on the locally relevant influencing parameters and on what communicative opportunities are locally available.

The local features which are studied will also depend on the purpose of a particular study. In this case, we will study features of utterances which are relevant to conflict and conflict resolution, in the setting of an academic seminar.

### 2.2.3 Collective global features of communication

<b>Type of parameter</b>	<b>Value in the investigated seminar</b>
<b>Sequences:</b>	
<b>speakers</b>	will be studied
<b>subactivities</b>	"
<b>topics</b>	"
<b>communicative acts</b>	"
<b>inferences</b>	will not be studied
<b>Turn management:</b>	
<b>turn/utterance</b>	will not be studied
<b>overlap</b>	"
<b>turn assignment</b>	"

<b>Feedback:</b>	<b>types of expression</b> <b>types of functions</b>	will not be studied "
<b>Rhythm:</b>		will not be studied
<b>Spatial position:</b>		"(only seating arrangement is noted)

#### **2.2.4 Collective local features of communication**

The relation between global and local collective features is the same as the relation between global and local individual features. Thus, local collective features are features which only occur locally, appearing as they become relevant through the gradual development of the seminar.

### **3. Types of conflict**

#### **3.1 Sources of conflict**

Among the several ways of classifying conflict which have been put forward (see for example Rapoport 1960, Kihlman and Thomas 1977 and Friberg 1990), the one which will be adopted for the present purposes is one which is based on the following three types of causal factors generating conflict:

- (i) Potential conflict generating factors. These are actual differences between persons which could be conflict generating, e.g. differences in distribution of wealth, power, love, beauty, etc.
- (ii) Experienced grounds for conflict, i.e. differences or actions which are experienced by persons as conflict generating.
- (iii) Conflictual action, i.e. action which is taken to affect the interests of another agent in a negative way.

Out of these three types of influence on conflict, the second (experienced grounds for conflict) is the only directly causally efficient one. Conflictual action or real differences in the distribution of resources do not necessarily lead to conflict, unless they are experienced as conflict generating, and as a result of this, conflictual counter action is taken. On the other hand, it should also be noted that experienced grounds for conflict do not have to correspond to any real grounds for conflict.

#### **3.2 Modalities of conflict**

Conflicts can be classified in many ways. Using the modal categories suggested in von Wright (1951) and in a somewhat different fashion in Allwood (1989) we can, for example, attempt to determine conflicts modally along the following lines:

Alethic	Deontic	Epistemic
possible	permitted	imaginable
impossible	forbidden	unimaginable
unnecessary	non-obligatory	uncertain
necessary	obligatory	certain
actual	occurring	aware of
non-actual	non-occurring	not aware of

The three types of modality are not totally analytically separable. It might, for example, be doubted if something impossible can be obligatory and certain. However, to some extent they clearly are separable. For example, something alethically possible can be deontically forbidden or epistemically uncertain., Using some of the modalities, we can now distinguish the following three modalities of conflict (others are also distinguishable.).

- (i) **Latent conflict.** This is a state where conflict is both possible and expected (a combination of alethic and epistemic modality) because of unequal distribution of resources or conflictual action but neither of the two is actually experienced as conflict generating and no countering conflictual action is taken. On deontic grounds, we can further distinguish between different kinds of latent conflicts, such as forbidden or permitted latent conflicts etc.

As a contrast to latent conflicts, we have actual conflicts and among these we can, for example, distinguish those which some agent(s) is aware of (overt conflict) from those which some agent(s) is not aware of (covert conflict)

- (ii) **Overt conflict.** Two agents are in overt conflict if they both experience grounds for conflictual action against the other and as a result take such action. As has already been noted, the experienced grounds for conflict can, but need not, correspond to any actual grounds for conflict.
- (iii) **Covert conflict.** This can either be an actual two-party conflict which is concealed from another interested party or a case where conflictual action is taken by one agent against another agent, who is unaware of the action, but who would, if the action were discovered, experience it as conflict generating and take countermeasures.

We can here note that a conflict can be overt and covert at the same time since information about the undertaken conflictual actions might not be equally shared by all involved parties.

### 3.3 Factors generating and influencing conflict in the academic seminar

I will now apply the above given analyses of sources and modalities of conflict to the academic seminar. In order to do this, I will suggest four broad areas, all of which contain factors which can potentially generate and influence the kinds of conflict which occur.

### **3.3.1 The seminar itself**

The first area is the seminar itself with a particular topic, purpose and procedure. Ideally, all three should be presupposed and agreed on by the participants. The grounds for conflict should be disagreement as to whether contributions to the topic conform to the standards of truth and scientific method. Frequently, however, it turns out that participants, in fact, do not agree on the presuppositions and start to discuss the purpose of the seminar, what topic should be discussed, what procedure to follow and what methodological principles are relevant. The conflict generating differences are, in all cases, differences of opinion. These differences may, just as in the general case, be experienced as grounds for conflictual action or not. If they do and are followed by conflictual action - what the conflictual action, in this case, amounts to is some form of counter argument concerning one of the presuppositions of the seminar, for example, what the topic should be.

As in the general case, such a conflict may be latent, if no conflictual action is taken, or covert, if it is concealed. The conflict is only overt when conflictual action is taken and is combined with experienced differences of opinion. These differences may be real but need not be. One may also imagine a case where there is neither experienced differences of opinion or real difference of opinion but only exhibited conflictual action. An example of this would be a simulated conflict, which, for example, could occur in a seminar with an officially appointed opponent whose job it is to test a candidate's strength by presenting (potential) counter arguments and difficult questions.

### **3.3.2 The relation between the environment and the seminar**

The relation between the environment and the seminar provides another source of conflict influencing factors. Let me only discuss two examples.

Academic seminars are usually promoted and attended by people from a university setting. This means that over and above the roles given by the seminar - participant and participant/chairperson - most of the persons will have social identities (roles) given by the surrounding social institution. They will be, for example, professors, lecturers, graduate students or undergraduate students. It is quite likely that these extra-activity relationships will influence the relations in the seminar. A graduate student might, for example, abstain from a counter argument against a professor because of the difference in social position and power between them. We, thus, here see a conflict between the ideal goals of an academic seminar and individual goals given by restrictions of the surrounding social environment.

Similarly, facets of culture and common human ethics may influence and come in conflict with the "truth-seeking-through-argumentation" goal of the academic seminar. In some cultures "respect for the elderly" might prevent students from questioning and arguing with teachers. On the same grounds, "gender roles" might prevent women from presenting counter arguments. Common human ethics may also come into conflict with the goal of a seminar, since participants may abstain from giving counter arguments on the grounds that they do not want to hurt each other's feelings. This is so, since, in spite of massive propaganda in the west against "ad hominem arguments" and for the "separation of person and issue" ( i.e. an argument can be good and valid, even if the person who presents it is bad and a person can be good and respectable even if the

argument he or she presents is bad), many persons continue to feel that such a separation cannot be made.

### **3.3.3 The relation between individual-environment and activity**

The goals of single individuals, influenced or non-influenced by the institutional environment, may influence and in some cases even come into conflict with the goals of an optimal seminar. Some individuals are very ambitious, extrovert and wish to be dominant. Such emotions and needs may lead them to present more counter arguments than is called for. Sometimes, this tendency is strengthened by the tradition in academia to use behavior of this type as a basis for career promotion. Likewise feelings of like and dislike, love and hatred between participants which may be based on phenomena which are completely extraneous to the particular seminar, at hand, may lead participants to agree or disagree with each other, independently of what would best serve the interests of truth seeking.

It needs perhaps also to be said that private emotions of the type I am now discussing (ambition, love and hatred) are not necessarily negative to the pursuit of truth. In many cases, they provide an energy source, which if properly harnessed by the requirements of scientific method might, in spite of its origins, lead to a valuable contribution.

### **3.3.4 Intra- and interpersonal conflict**

As we have seen in the examples given in 3.3 - 3.3.3 the conflicts which occur in an academic seminar can be both intrapersonal and interpersonal. Intrapersonal conflicts occur, for example, when a person both wants and does not want to present a counter argument against another person. If this inner conflict is left unresolved, it might in some cases be overtly expressed in formulations such as "you are totally right but ...." or "this is not meant as a criticism but ....".

Intrapersonal conflicts are, thus, often related to interpersonal conflicts and can tend to promote ways of handling conflict such as compromise and avoidance.

## **4. Handling conflict**

### **4.1 General**

In general, conflict may be handled in many ways. It may, for instance, be prevented, pursued, restricted, avoided, managed or resolved. If we use the analysis of the sources of conflict which I presented above, we can say that the general goal is to move toward non-conflict by removing or preventing the existence of any of these sources. This is usually (there might be people who pursue conflict for its own sake and who don't care if they win or lose) the case even if a conflict is pursued, since the goal of pursuing a conflict presumably is to get rid of the conflict by winning it. If we want no conflict, there should be no actual conflict generating differences, there should be no experienced grounds for conflict and there should be no conflictual action.

## 4.2 Types of conflict handling

The source of conflict handling is conflict. It is therefore natural to expect that different types of conflict and different sources of conflict will lead to different types of conflict handling. Since most kinds of conflict are unpleasant or even painful we will also expect, given the tendency of most human beings, to try to escape pain and seek pleasure (cf Allwood 1976), that there is a universal tendency to try to get rid of conflict when it arises. The means chosen to do so might, however, have the opposite effect.

On the basis of two types of semantic analysis of words related to conflict and conflict handling (semantic field analysis and analysis of meaning potential); cf Allwood 1993, I would now like to suggest that the following five types of conflict handling can be distinguished:

1. **Prevention of conflict;** Conflict can be prevented by taking action, before an actual conflict has developed, to prevent conflict generating features from occurring. Some of the methods for doing this consist in encouraging mutual consideration and building mutual obligations, i.e. "If I help you/are nice to you, you will help me/be nice to me" and vice versa. In general, creating similarities between people tends to remove the risk for conflict.
2. **Avoidance of conflict.** Avoidance of conflict, in the specific sense intended here, refers to a case in which conflictual action is expected (because of actual conflict generating features or experienced grounds for conflict), but does not, in fact, occur. It also refers to the case where the parties "agree to disagree" and avoidance is used to prevent the continuation of a conflict.
3. **Compromise.** Compromise is a symmetrically regulated type of conflict handling, where all parties inhibit their claims and demands to some degree, so that mutual compatibility between the claims can be reached and conflictual action can cease.
4. **Dominance and submission.** Dominance and submission occur when conflict is terminated by one party winning and another party losing. If the conflict and what is to be gained or lost is kept fairly restricted and regulated, we have a case of competition. Competition is, thus, a way of regulating conflict with the goal of restricted dominance and submission. If the conflict is unrestricted (as in war) victory, defeat and extermination appear as other ways in which conflict can be terminated.
5. **Conflict resolution.** A conflict is resolved if the experienced causes for the conflict are removed. This usually means that it is not enough to only cease conflictual action to resolve a conflict. The conflictual parties should also feel that there are no more grounds for conflict. Resolving a conflict, thus, often involves changing attitudes of revenge and hatred by excusing and forgiving the other party.  
(cf. Burton 1987).

Again we should note that these types of conflict handling are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Handling a conflict can potentially involve using a combination of types to

handle different aspects of the conflict. It is also the case that one type of conflict handling can lead to another type in a second stage. For example, if A honestly admits that he is wrong in an argument, this would be a case of submission followed by resolution at least as far as the issue of the argument is concerned.

### **4.3 The academic seminar and conflict handling**

We have seen above that the cases of conflict in the academic seminar that we are primarily interested in usually involve differences of opinion concerning the topics or questions raised in the seminar. These differences in opinion often derive from differences in cognitive and sometimes also emotive perspective. In addition, there are both intra- and interindividual conflicts which derive from matters external to the seminar.

With regard to conflict handling, all the five types discussed above are, in principle, possible. Also disagreements of a (more or less) scientific nature can be prevented by building similarity of opinion and strong mutual obligations and considerations. In the worst case, this leads to a stifling consensus which can be detrimental to innovation and correction of faulty assumptions. Unfortunately, this type of conflict prevention is sometimes characteristic of the climate within a well established scientific school of thought. A more appealing way to use conflict-preventing measures within the setting of the academic seminar is to try to prevent emotional and personal conflict while maintaining and encouraging cognitive conflict. One way of achieving this is to combine (i) measures promoting the maintenance of emotional trust and mutual emotional obligations with (ii) measures promoting a distinction between an idea and the person promoting the idea and (iii) measures promoting adherence to ideals of truth seeking which involve impersonal methodological standards.

Since living up to the above mentioned ideals is difficult, avoidance is a fairly common way of handling conflicts in academic seminars. Rather than trusting adherence to impersonal ideals or trusting the ability of the seminar participants to distinguish between person and argument, when an argument against another participant in the seminar is presented, it is often easier and safer to keep quiet or talk of something else in order to avoid a cognitive conflict, which could run the risk of triggering a personal or social conflict.

Another possible outcome is compromise. This form of conflict handling is really better suited for conflict concerning interests and decision making than for conflicts occurring in truth seeking, yet it occurs fairly commonly in academic seminars, which perhaps shows us that also cognitive disagreement, in reality, often involves conflict of interests and decision making.

A classical, probably mostly occidental idea, is that the process of finding out what is true and what is false, perhaps harmonizes best with the type of conflict handling we have called dominance and submission. Other names which perhaps are more appropriate would be win-lose, correct-incorrect or pro et contra argumentation. In this method, the truth of a particular claim (proposition) is to be determined through the outcome of an argument between one (or more) person who proposes (defends) the claim and another (one or more) person who opposes the claim. Ideally, in this way of handling cognitive disagreement (conflict) the correct argument wins and the incorrect

argument loses and the person who was putting forth the incorrect argument admits defeat and revises his beliefs accordingly.

Against this idea, it might be objected that perhaps there are forms of cooperative truth seeking that could be as effective as conflictual truth seeking. See further below. A perhaps more serious objection is the following. In reality, unfortunately, arguments are often only partly right or wrong or it is difficult to determine by objective methods which argument is right, so settling the argument becomes a matter of decision, which is why compromise often becomes a reasonable way of handling an argument.

More generally, it might even be claimed that since we live in a condition of partial information with regard to nearly everything, a close connection between truth-seeking and decision making is unavoidable. Because we never have complete information and perhaps never can be completely certain, our beliefs and opinions will always have to involve mechanisms of decision-making.

An interesting form of compromise which is part of the classical approach and which could also be seen as a type of cognitive "conflict-resolution" is "creating a synthesis". In creating a synthesis, what is right about one position is combined with what is right about another position, to create a third new position which supervenes and combines the best of the original positions.

If the term "conflict-resolution", in the narrow sense characterized above, is to be applied to cognitive conflict, it should be the case that the disagreeing persons no longer experience any grounds for disagreement. One such case could be conflicts which are resolved by the involved parties discovering that the conflict is based on a misunderstanding. Another case, could occur when one person discovers that he has made a mistake and therefore submits to the other person's argument. This last case shows us that "conflict-resolution" as here characterized overlaps with other types of conflict handling. Resolution can, in fact, be the outcome of both compromise and dominance/submission if they also lead to a disappearance of experienced grounds for conflict. Resolution can, of course, also occur independently of compromise and dominance/submission, as in the case where a conflict is seen to be based on a misunderstanding.

#### **4.4 Conflict handling - control and standards**

In studying how conflicts are handled and settled, it can have some interest to determine who controls this process. In principle, at least three cases can be distinguished.

- (i) The parties themselves (one or both): This is probably the most frequent case. If the settlement is symmetrical, both parties participate in the control. If it is asymmetrical, one of the parties dominates and dictates conditions.
- (ii) Third party: Third party control occurs when a conflict is handled and settled by bringing in a third party, for example, a negotiator, a therapist or a judge. Disputes in court are typically settled by a judge. In the case we are studying - the academic seminar - the chairman can, to some extent, have this third party role.

- (iii) Impersonal standard: Both when the conflicting parties themselves or a third party is controlling a conflict settlement, they can make use of impersonal standards such as the law, scientific method or a lottery. They, in a sense, abdicate some of their power to these standards. In the case of the academic seminar, reference to an assumed impersonal standard of scientific method is very important and in all types of conflict handling in the seminar, considerations of method will be brought in to justify the outcome that is being proposed. When, as we have already noted in section 3.3.1, participants disagree about method, they still frequently attempt to justify their positions by reference to other more abstract principles of method.

## **5. Types of conflict and conflict handling in a Swedish seminar**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the next section, I will try to illustrate the concepts and distinctions introduced above by analyzing parts of the transcription of a videotape of the seminar for which an analysis of influencing parameters was given in section 2. The purpose of the seminar was to discuss a paper on language acquisition which was making use of the distinction between procedural and declarative knowledge. In the beginning of the seminar, it was organized around 7 main topics suggested by the participants. These topics and various subtopics are then discussed roughly in sequential order. However, a topic can appear several times if it becomes relevant, even if it has been concluded earlier on in the discussion. The seminar contains roughly 70 smaller disagreements. Most of these concern distinct subtopics relating to the seven main topics. The discussion is fairly informal and allows relatively free turn-taking.

In order to give a flavor of the seminar. I will first, in sections 5.2 and 5.3, present and discuss two different themes in the discussion of the seminar. In section 6, I will then discuss and attempt to clarify some of the main types of conflict and conflict handling found in the transcription. Both section 5.2 and 5.3 contain types of conflict and conflict handling. Since the excerpts are fairly long, only their English translations are given. The Swedish original can be found in Appendix 1. The persons appearing in the dialogues have been named with the Roman characters A, B, C..... etc. X means that the person who made the remark could not be identified. Overlapping speech is indicated by matching square brackets [ ] in two adjacent utterances.

Since the examples which are presented are extracted from a seminar which lasted 2 hours, they might contain references and presuppositions which are hard for the reader to follow or judge. I will therefore with each excerpt try to supplement information about the local context in which it occurs. The analysis has been checked by two participants in the seminar.

## 5.2 Example 1 - Disagreement about the role of imitation in language learning and language teaching

Our first example concerns the distinctions "knowledge-that" - "knowledge-how", "declarative"- "procedural" and the role of imitation in language learning and language teaching. The excerpt contains several types of conflict and conflict handling.

The excerpts start after a passage where C has introduced imitation as a counter-example to a claim by D that you always need "knowledge-that" to teach. C is claiming that in the case of imitation, the "knowledge-that" involved can be reduced to the "procedural command" "follow me". A starts the excerpt by taking issue with the idea of imitation as a method of language learning. The underlined parts of an utterance are especially relevant to the aligned interpretive comments.

Transcription of seminar	Comments
A: but <u>this idea of C's is of course tempting</u> but I as you know have experience as a <u>learner of swedish since many years back</u> and what is <u>problematic</u> is that I have been able to use <u>this input</u> that is try to do as the swedes <u>rather late</u> in the beginning I could not even if I wanted to imitate eh swedish I did not perhaps I could not even do it so that if we take this reality where we have language learners I think that eh procedural way of eh learning things is not there but <u>it is something else one as a learner is very concentrated on that is the message and the content</u>	acknowledgement to C building positive emotion -> conflict prevention giving personal experience as evidence for claim to come counter claim to C. Imitation cannot be used
B: [yes] (laughs)	supports A.
A: [that] is what counts	emphasizes claim
B: interest it is interest it is use of [...]	reinterprets and supports A's claim
A: [exactly you are very] eh I don't want to bring in psychological things	acknowledgement
B: what you get creates what you get when you use an expression or a	support
A: yes exactly	acknowledgement
C: but this seems <u>very risky to generalize</u> this way it must depend on who one is// there are <u>people</u> who are very <u>sensitive to external form</u> and behavior //	counter argument to A on the grounds that A has made a hasty generalization. No acknowledgement of the positive quality of A's argument attempt to support argument by providing counter instance
D: // m	support

- C: who often go in for /m eh like the more theatrical type (laughs).  
<General laughter>
- A: yes actually we had well actually we had an example of what you have now described we had a language learner an adult language learner who did and eh learned very quickly eh Swedish by imitating //
- C: yes support
- A: people and he described his his way of learning also in that way
- C: in that way yes acknowledgement

Here follows a passage where C, A and D collaborate on describing the role of imitation for children learning languages and dialects. They also stress the role of individual variation and variability, and the role of age for the ability to flexibly adapt. In the second part of the excerpt, E enters the discussion by claiming that children can only imitate simple syntactic structures.

- E: but does it not also have to do with that that type of young children's language/which you are talking of here/ there it is possible to imitate it is often main clauses in my old school vocabulary while if you come to more complicated with subordination and such things then// then it will be very difficult to manage without
- B: < --- > inaudible
- C: no this I don't believe at all, honestly speaking counters E's counter claim to C
- D: but aborted objection
- B: they are mostly [school examples]
- C: [here you may see] recordings with children who are eh three four five years old who in no way know what a main clause is or any such things they have only picked up things intuitively right
- D: yes but there is something [murky] signal of counterclaim to C's counterclaim
- C: [they HAVE] subordinate clauses restatement of counter-counterclaim plenty of them
- B: yes support
- C: (---)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| D: <u>but there is something</u> murky in what you are saying C because what children begin by saying are for example <u>nouns in non-inflected form</u> | no acknowledgement counterclaim to C, against the role of imitation                                     |
| C: yes but I said three, four five years old//well   | counter-D, defends own claim, claims D and E have inaccurate counter example                            |
| D: WELL YES but if it is a general mechanism then they should begin by imitating   | counter-C own counter example OK against general thesis   |
| C: yes but isn't that what they do   | maintaining claim about the role of imitation   |
| D: well where do they then for example get eh a [nouns in uninflected form from]   | counter-C repeating counter example   |
| C: [ <u>oh you mean</u> ] //no no <u>OK</u> they do <u>they do both</u> they also process independently of course [that is right]                        | insight<br>implicit acknowledgement of the correctness of D's claim<br>jump to synthesis and compromise |

Perhaps the quoted passage in shorter form could be described in the following way starting from an implicit claim by C about imitation - not quoted in the passage.

### Passage 1

- |                                  |                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| C0: C's: claim about imitation   | 2. A1: A's counterclaim counter-C0 |
| C2: acknowledgement of admission | A2: admission of C1                |

### Passage 2

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| C2: counter-E1<br>denial of counter example           | E1: counter-C0 and C1. Counter<br><br>(E2: silence admission?<br>D1: counter-C0 and C1 and C2. |
| C3: reaffirmation of C0 and C1                        | D2: Reaffirmation of D1  |
| C4: admission of D2 and D1<br>(compromise, synthesis) |  |

If we try to summarize the types of conflictual action occurring in the quoted passages, the following might be a possible description.

1. Denial and counter claims:  
A1, C2
2. Attempt to provide counter example to generalization  
C1, E1. D1
3. Reaffirmation of claim or counter claim C3, D2

We have three conflicts, i.e. C-A, C-E and C-D and the outcomes of these conflicts are:

1. Submission with implicit compromise A2. (C-A)
2. Submission with explicit compromise C4.(C-D)
3. Unclear outcome or avoidance (hypothesized) E2. (C-E)
4. Conflict prevention (C-A and C-E). A1 (acknowledgement to C), E1 (open questioning form of counter argument)

In both the cases of submission, we have admission of the validity of a counter example. Since admitting the validity of a counter example, only amounts to withdrawing a generalized claim and not to a total withdrawal of a stated claim, in fact, both cases of submission can also be seen as compromises. A counter example to a generalization is compatible with a kind of compromise since it leaves the door open to a restriction of the claim from the other party. This is also what happens in A2 and C4. In the case of the conflict with E, the outcome is unclear. It could be counted as a local victory for C2 but it could also be seen as a case of avoidance on the part of E. We also have conflict preventing measures in the various types of acknowledgements parties give to each other.

More generally, the example shows that conflict and conflict handling are interwoven throughout the quoted passage. Sometimes the two occur simultaneously as when A1 acknowledges C's contribution, perhaps to prevent conflict (soften blow), while continuing to present a counter claim which at the same time means opting for a win-lose (or dominance-submission) solution. Sometimes they occur in sequence as when C's attack (counter claim) is followed by E's avoidance and C's eventual admission (compromise). Thus, different kinds of cognitive conflict and conflict handling occur together and not neatly separated even though it also seems as if certain types of conflictual argument restrict what options exist as to conflict handling. Let us now consider a second example.

### **5.3 Example 2 -Disagreement about the nature of linguistic knowledge ("lexicon" vs. "encyclopedia")**

This excerpt is preceded by a section in which C, who is the chairman, has persuaded the participants of the seminar that the distinction "declarative" - "procedural" knowledge has been sufficiently discussed and that they should now attempt to find out what the author of the article they are discussing has meant by the concept "procedural words". Various suggestions are made and C now attempts to test one of these suggestions, i.e. that procedural words are words that you use to explain other words with.

Transcription	Comments
C: so if we start with that intuition then words that we use to explain other words we can start with water we can explain it by saying that is a che/ chemical compound of oxygen and hydrogen [then I have	purpose to mock the proposed characterization of the distinction declarative/procedural by pointing to consequences regarding the distinction "lexicon" - "encyclopedia" which amounts to a counter example
A: [smiles and laughs silently]	consensus possible recognition of underlying purpose
D: [then you must ... is ]	
C: used] chemical compound	
D: yes but it was only is which <laughs> you can [not only]	consensus
E: [...]	
G: but that is only interesting to a chemist	attack on relevance of C's claim
E and D laugh	consensus
H: yes exactly	support
D: yes	support
X: yes	support
X: m	
G: not to anyone else	reaffirmation of point
C: [oh so certain persons certain	building up counter claim
H: [it would be a bad explanation	continued attack on relevance
C: may not participate] when one	defence of relevance by faked support for democracy
E: [no but not all words are used]	defending original distinction
C: [chemists right]	
H: no but (...) important to	
X: (...)	
H: that explanation you would	reaffirmation of irrelevance claim
F: no exactly (silently)	support
D: [no]	support
B: [or what water is]	support
C: <u>[but is not chemistry] a part of</u>	reaffirmation of relevance by casting doubt on distinction
G: but it concerns learning a new	reaffirmation of irrelevance claim
J: but is it not so that a	interrupted attempt
C: so chemistry is not a part of	reaffirmation of relevance by ironic statement of counterclaim to own position
J: but but is not (.....)	interrupted attempt
E: a little is always added	consensus compromise
D: laughs	consensus
C: laughs	consensus
J: but is it not so that a	avoidance new claim about distinction procedural declarative

F: exactly (silently) support  
 J: yes and then before there is a  
 E: m  
 C: yes

In shorter form, the argument in the quoted passage could be described as follows:

C1: challenge to the idea that	G1: claim that C's challenge is H1: claim that C's challenge is
C2: defends counter example by appealing to democracy	H2: reaffirms irrelevance claim G2: defends irrelevance claim by
C3: defends counter example by	E1: admission to some degree of J1: change of topic, avoidance of

The types of conflict are:

1. Challenge by counter example C1
2. Attempt to disqualify counter example as irrelevant G1, H1
3. Defence of claim by giving additional argument C2, C3, G2
4. Reaffirmation of claim C2, C3, H2, G2

The outcomes of the conflictual actions are:

1. Submission with compromise E1
2. Counterclaims G1, H1, C2, G3, C3
3. Avoidance and new topic J1
4. Conflict prevention. The eight laughs which occur in the transcription probably serve to build a jovial atmosphere and to show awareness of the somewhat mocking character of the argument

Again we see how conflict and conflict handling are interwoven and how conflict preventing features such as smiles and nods are added to mitigate and harmonize.

## 6. Classifying conflict and conflict handling

### 6.1 Introduction

One of the difficulties in studying conflict and conflict handling is their relational and contextual nature. Depending on its relation to context, a given gesture or utterance may be conflict generating or conflict removing. For example, a given statement may, in one context, be supportive of one speaker and non-supportive of another. Or to take a different kind of example. A speaker may change the topic in order to avoid a topic that will lead to conflict or he may change the topic in order to gain control, thereby preventing another speaker from having control. In the one case changing the topic is conflict removing, in the other case, it is conflict generating.

Another problem is that objections, corrections and disagreements do not always have the same import. There seems to be a scale of possibilities from *cooperation* (collaboration) to *competition* (win-lose, dominate-submit). Thus, an objection can be raised to pursue a common goal, but it can also be raised competitively to win an argument over another person. In order for a cooperative objection also to count as a conflictual move, we would have to extend our notion of "conflict" from action which affects the interest of another agent in a negative way to action which in some sense is incompatible with actions or interest of another agent. Since this kind of action is not conflictual in a true sense, I will generally refer to it as an incompatible but cooperative action

The difference between a cooperative and a truly conflictual mode can be characterized the following way. I draw here on the definition of ideal cooperation given in Allwood (1976). Two persons are said to cooperate ideally to the extent that they:

- (i) take each other into cognitive consideration
- (ii) share common goals
- (iii) take each other into ethical consideration
- (iv) trust each other to act according to (i) - (iii)

In conflict, only condition (i) is met. In order to pursue a conflict, the conflicting parties must take each other into cognitive consideration, otherwise they could not effectively act against each other. They do, however, not take each other into ethical consideration nor do they share any common goals except the abstract goal of winning over the other person.

This means, for example, that the actions of one agent can be incompatible with another agent on the surface but on a deeper level be seen to be compatible and cooperative rather than conflictual. Non-conflictual action will correspondingly be action which in some sense is compatible with the actions or interest of another agent. This, in turn, has the consequence that different aspects of the same activity can simultaneously be conflictual and non-conflictual with various aspects of another agent's activity and interest.

Below, I will, in the cases where we are dealing with cooperative interaction, avoid talk of conflict since "cooperative conflict" seems somewhat self-contradictory. Instead, I will use terms such as "cooperative objection" or "cooperative correction", etc. I will also talk of incompatible action rather than conflictual action.

It can be noted that the distinction between a cooperative and a competitive mode also holds for conflict handling. Accepting a cooperative correction is something different than accepting that one is wrong in a competitive argument, where it can be seen as a kind of submission.

Another feature which seems important, for how we classify both conflict and conflict handling, is whether a given contribution is *initiating* or *responsive*. Thus, one can initiate a conflict by opening a topic with a controversial claim or one can respond to another person's claim by a denial and a counter claim.

We must also consider what functional and structural features of discourse are used in order to initiate, pursue or handle conflict. Following Allwood, Nivre & Ahlsén (1992), we may, for example, subdivide spoken discourse into:

- (i) Features connected with the focussed (main) message (FM)
- (ii) Features connected with own communication management (OCM)
- (iii) Features connected with interactive communication management (IACM)

To simplify somewhat, the focussed or main message concerns what is stated, queried or requested while the management aspects concern mechanisms which exist in order to manage and control both individual contributions and the flow of the interaction.

Focussed message as well as management features can be used for conflictual and for conflict removing communicative action.

## 6.2 Conflictual communicative action

### 6.2.1 Introduction

Abstractly speaking, it seems that conflict when applied to communicative action can be reduced to two main types:

1. Making a positive claim which is incompatible with someone else's actions or interest.
2. Denying another person's positive claim. The denial can take at least the following forms:
  - (i) Explicit denial often combined with a counterclaim
  - (ii) Implicit denial often by satire or irony
  - (iii) Denial by relativizing the claim of another person
  - (iv) Denial by appeal to management or procedural features.

### 6.2.2 Positive claims

Any positive claim provides a potential source of conflict if it can be experienced by an interlocutor as incompatible with their interests or with what they believe. A claim becomes an actual source of conflict if anyone experiences it this way and subsequently responds, as if to a conflictual action. A claim, similarly, becomes an intended conflictual action if the person who makes the claim believes it to be incompatible with someone else's beliefs or interests. The sense in which a claim may affect someone else's interests covers at least the following aspects of communication:

A claim to	truth	(consistence, exhaustiveness, economy, perspicuity)
	the floor	(the interlocutor's attention, perception and attempt to understand)
	the interlocutor's acceptance	
	the topic	
	activity relevance	

In at least these and probably other ways, a speaker may do something which can be incompatible with the interests or beliefs of another speaker.

Let us now consider some examples, from the transcriptions of the seminar, of conflictual action which is based on positive claims. First, we will consider an example of a controversial claim, i.e., a claim which by the person who makes it is expected to cause controversy.

**(1) Controversial claim**

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
C: Well let's start by analyzing what the distinction "procedural" - "declarative" amounts to now I will say something someone can disagree with it seems to be a reformulation of the distinction between "imperative" and "declarative"	C initiates discussion by making an analogy claim which he explicitly admits is controversial

Next we will consider some ways in which one can positively follow up a claim which has not met with support or which has been negated. In the transcription, the following examples are found of which the two first are exemplified below: (i) reformulating and insisting on a claim (ii) defending and supporting a previous claim, (iii) controversial conclusions and controversial summaries of earlier claims

In the example and excerpt analyzed above, D challenges C by insisting on her point which he responds to by also insisting on his own claim.

**(2) Reformulating and insisting**

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
D: yes, but if it is a general	D insists on the validity of her counterexample
C: yes but isn't that what they do	C maintains his claim by challenging validity of counterexample

Let us now take a look at how one defends and supports a previous claim.

In the "lexicon" - "encyclopedia" example, C three times defends the relevance of his counterexample to the thesis that procedural words are words which can be used to explain other words. In this excerpt vertical dots (:) indicate that some utterances have been left out. For the full version compare section (5) above.

**(3) Defending and supporting a previous claim**

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
G: but that is only interesting to a :	claiming irrelevance of example
C: oh? so certain persons certain :	defending relevance by appeal to democracy and to the generality of the claim being disputed
E: no but not all words are used	

C:	chemists right	
:		
C:	but is not chemistry a part of	defending relevance by appealing to generality
:		
C:	so chemistry is not a part of	defending relevance claim by ironic statement of the opposite to his own claim

### 6.2.3 Denial of another claim

However, the major type of communicative conflictual action is not the controversial claim but the denial of a previous claim. This denial can be done explicitly or more implicitly by use of satire, by relativizing your opponent's position or by appealing to procedural or management routines. The denial is often accompanied by a counterclaim, especially if it is an explicit denial.

This kind of communicative act is exemplified by C in the beginning of the second excerpt in the imitation example where C starts by a denial, followed by support for a counter claim, followed by an actual counterclaim.

#### (4) Denial & counterclaim

Transcription (translation)	Comment
C: no this I don't believe at all	denial
D: but	
B: they are mostly [school	
C: [here you may see] recordings	support for counterclaim
	counterclaim
D: yes but there is something	signal of counter - counterclaim
	counterclaim
C: [they HAVE] subordinate clauses	counterclaim continued

Denials do not have to be explicit. We have already above seen in example (3) how C defends his claim by irony.

#### (5) Ironic denial of a claim

Transcription (translation)	Comment
C: so chemistry is not a part of	C makes the hypothetical statement he is arguing against. The effect is irony and an attempt to tease or to bait other participants to a counterattack

Let us now consider an example of how the validity and force of another's contribution can be denied by relativizing it. D makes a claim and G attempts to modify its validity by relating it to two different kinds of learning situations.

**(6) Relativizing another's claim**

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
<p>D: but here perhaps now now I want to come in with my question about teaching and learning because if you must teach things then it is perhaps necessary that you have the degree of awareness "to know-that" to be able to explain and describe but for the person who is learning it is required I mean the goal of learning is perhaps only "to know-how" to learn to use the language but in teaching you need extra to be able to define and explain and have that sort of knowledge and that is why I think that it does not seem as if teaching and learning were the same process but perhaps have different requirements on the different descriptions</p>	<p>D claims that teaching is associated with "knowledge that" and learning with "knowledge-how"</p>
<p>F: but does it not also have a lot to do with whether you are learning a second language naturally in the country in the natural environment so to speak or if you are learning in a classroom</p>	<p>F wants to relativize this claim taking into account whether one is teaching or learning in a classroom or in an outside classroom situation</p>

A special case of relativizing another's claim is to show that it is compatible with your own point of view and thus, that the difference of opinion is unnecessary

**(7) Pointing out compatibility of**

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
<p>D: yes but AND is not just</p>	<p>D claims that "and" is not just something you write down but something which functions in language</p>
<p>C: yes for example by writing A-N-D</p>	<p>C points out that writing something down is a way of functioning in language</p>

Finally, we will consider an example of how one can appeal to management (procedural) features of speech to question or deny another person's claim. The first example has to do with activity relevance. As we might remember the purpose of the seminar was to discuss a particular paper on language acquisition and the distinction "declarative" - "procedural". In the next excerpt we find G questioning the relevance of something J says about writing programs in a declarative or procedural mode

## (8) Questioning relevance

Transcription (translation)	Comment
G: but are we not missing his point : G: since it is precisely those words which you use when you do it which he uses the term (procedural) for he doesn't bring in sentences or vocabulary or he just says words so that it is within a vocabulary that he is making this distinction so I don't know what you gain by	G questions the relevance of J:s comments to the author's distinction between declarative and procedural words

### 6.3 Communicative action oriented to non-conflict

#### 6.3.1 Introduction

On an abstract level, we can distinguish three basic ways of responding to conflictual communicative action.

1. acceptance
2. rejection
3. avoidance

Besides these three, I will also consider action which aims at preventing conflict.

Just as incompatible action can be generated for a conflictual (competitive) purpose or for a cooperative purpose, so responses to incompatible actions can be seen in a conflictual (competitive, win-lose) perspective or in a cooperative perspective. Thus, acceptance of another person's argument can be seen as submission if viewed in a competitive, conflictual way but as acceptance of collaborative help when viewed from a cooperative perspective. Similarly, rejecting a counterattack can be seen as opting for dominance when seen conflictually but as corrective adjustment work when viewed cooperatively. "Compromise" and "resolution" are terms which in effect come close to cooperation but emanate from a conflict perspective. You reach a compromise when you are in conflict about something not when you are cooperating. Similarly, conflict resolution presupposes conflict rather than cooperation.

Just as with conflictual communicative action, in handling conflicts, speakers can make use of focussed message features as well as management features and in accepting a conflicting point, the acceptance can be explicit or implicit even ironical. Let us now consider some examples.

#### 6.3.2 Prevention of conflict

Prevention of conflict is done by building agreement, e.g. by supporting other speakers, giving illustrations of or expanding other speaker's arguments, explicitly agreeing with people one has earlier disagreed with, explicitly acknowledging compatibility with other

speakers, giving credit and looking friendly. Another means is self belittling and laughter. Especially joint laughter, in the seminar we are analyzing, seems to be used regularly to relieve tension and promote a good atmosphere. The example below illustrates how laughter can be used in a rather complex way to prevent further conflict

### (9) Preventive laughter

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
H: I think this analogy with computer programs is somewhat lacking	makes claim which questions J's claim
J: m	Attention marker
H: because when they in those situations you talk about declarative or procedural descriptions but in both cases you see it as descriptions but I believe that at least one way to look at this distinction between "knowledge-how" and "knowledge-that" is that it is only "knowledge-that" which in some sense is	continues claim
C: knowledge (laughter)	supplements conclusion

C is here supplementing a conclusion which refers back to a disagreement between C and H. The conclusion which seems compatible with what H is claiming now, is counter to what H was claiming then. The laughter accompanying the supplementation probably indicates the non-serious character of the intervention and can be supposed to have a preventive effect on a rebuttal from H, which it in fact also did.

### 6.3.3 Avoidance of conflict

Several ways of avoiding conflict are exemplified in the seminar. Some of these are: (i) postponement of a topic (by the chairman), shifting the topic, aborting a comment, ignoring a contribution. Below we will consider an example which contains both an aborted utterance and a topic shift. B has made a claim supported by D which both C and K wish to avoid since they do not want to disagree with it, at this point. They later do.

## (10) Avoidance; aborted comment and topic shift

Transcription (translation)	Comment
B: before we need to say something here because I I saw it I saw it intuitively, that is I saw procedural as something empirical while declarative could be more normative that is that which one should learn that is either words I am thinking of grammar of course which I should not do in this connection but it is the same thing for words make a word list you should learn these their meaning etc while procedure is mere empirical one learns in everyday life what it means	makes claim about analogy procedural - declarative with empirical - normative
C: but	aborted utterance
D: learning by doing	supportive exclamation
K: but this distinction which is usually employed in connection with computers J should tell us more about this since J means that it usually is so that one says that procedural means giving the steps one has to go through in order to achieve a certain result and	topic shift

### 6.3.4 Submission, compromise and resolution

If incompatible action is responded to in a conflictual (competitive, win-lose) mode, then acceptance of a claim, which is or has been incompatible with one's own position is the same as "submitting" or "losing". If both parties yield a little but still retain incompatible positions we get "compromise" and if both parties from incompatible positions remove their differences, we get "resolution".

Submission can be indicated by such communicative acts as agreement with an incompatible claim, lack of protest against an incompatible claim or reformulation of one's own claim in a direction which is incompatible with the original claim.

Compromise can be indicated by partial agreement, partial reformulation of one's own claim, relativizing one's own claim, restricting the validity of one's own claim, making one's own claim vaguer or by synthetically affirming a conjunction of one's own and an incompatible claim.

Resolution can not easily be observed in single communicative act but should rather be regarded as the outcome of a more lengthy interactive process of diminishing conflict.

Below, I will give examples of submission and compromise. The outcomes of excerpt 1 and excerpt 2 in the imitation example, in fact, serve well as illustrations of submission and compromise. In the transcription I can find no examples of resolution in the sense just given.

### (11) Submission (from excerpt 1)

Transcription (translation)	Comment
C: but this seems very risky to generalize	counterargument to A on the grounds that A has made a hasty generalization
D: m	
C: who often go in for eh:: like eh the	provides support for counterargument by giving a counter example with a laugh to mitigate effect
several persons: <general laughter>	
A: yes actually we had well actually we had an example of what you have now described we had a language learner an adult language learner who did and eh:: very quickly learned eh:: Swedish by imitating	submission admission of correct counterargument, compensates by connecting admission with personal experience
C: yes	
A: people and he described his way of	
C: in that way yes	

### (12) Compromise

Transcription (translation)	Comment
D: well where do they get then for example get eh [nouns in uninflected form from]	insists on a counterclaim
C: [oh you mean] no no OK they do they do both they also process independently of course [that is right]	begins to realize point of counterexample realizes point acknowledges point and proposes a compromise in form of a conjunctive synthesis of D's and C's own opinion

#### 6.3.5 The cooperative mode

As has already been suggested, both incompatible and compatible communication seems to vary along a scale from win-lose competition to cooperation. This has as a consequence that conflictual moves such as denial, counterclaim and relativization of another person's claim can all be toned down and done in a cooperative rather than a conflictual spirit. The same is true for the communicative acts we have above called submission and compromise which both, if done in a cooperative mode, become kinds of mutual adjustment which is undertaken in order to reach a common goal under joint ethical consideration.

On a conceptual level (cf. Allwood 1976 and section 6.1 above), cooperation can, in fact, be distinguished from other types of interaction through the extent to which participants meet the criteria of ideal cooperation.

If all four criteria hold, we have ideal cooperation. If fewer criteria hold, we have less ideal forms of cooperation. For example, conflict and competition both require cognitive consideration and are thus cooperative in a very wide sense, which might be better labelled "coordination".

Cooperation in the transcription, is noticeable through such features as agreeing to provide a clarification which has been asked for, relativizing your own claims, correcting your own claim, suggesting alternatives acceptable to all parties and adding information to a claim made by someone else in order to strengthen it.

Let us consider two examples of cooperation. In the first example (13) the participants jointly and cooperatively specify the notion of procedural words. C's suggestion is not a way of winning over K, as in example (7) above, but a contribution to a joint formulation.

### (13) Cooperatively working out

<b>Transcription</b> (translation)	<b>Comment</b>
E: yes they should they should be useful it is not possible to take something which is only useful in specific [situations] rather it should be	makes suggestion as to the nature of procedural words
H: [no right]	gives support
C: generally useful words	helps with formulation
H: yes (nods)	gives support
E: mm	accepts

In the second example the participants are jointly giving examples of words that could be counted as procedural.

### (14) Cooperatively giving examples

<b>Transcriptions</b> (translation)	<b>Comments</b>
K: [but pronouns you and I]	makes suggestion
D: [yes] needed very quickly	supports suggestion
C: [yes them] you need relatively quickly	supports suggestion
E: yes exactly they	supports
K: I you here	elaborates suggestion
C: yes	accepts
K: there	elaborates

## 7. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, I have given an analysis of the academic seminar, both in general terms, and in particular terms applied to a specific instance of a seminar.

In order to highlight the various parametric features of the seminar, I have made use of the approach of "communicative activity analysis". I have also presented typologies of conflict and the sources of conflict in an academic seminar as well as of conflict handling.

The framework which I have presented was first given on a general level in sections 3 and 4. In sections 5 and 6, it was then somewhat modified in order to fit the requirements of conflictual (incompatible) and conflict handling communicative action in an academic seminar.

In fact, it was found that when it comes to communication there were two main types of conflictual action (claim and denial of claim) and four main types of conflict handling (prevention, avoidance, acceptance and denial).

To be more specific, we have found that the general definition of conflictual action as action which affects the interest of another agent in a negative way has to be contextually attuned to the purposes and actions relevant in an academic seminar in the following way: Given that the general purpose of an academic seminar is the pursuit, through discussion, of a true view of some part of reality, we see that this goal can be realized more or less cooperatively. If it is done in an ideal cooperative manner, truth is a joint goal which is pursued through a discussion in which one takes fellow participants into both cognitive and ethical consideration. Ethical consideration (cf. Allwood 1976), in particular, implies providing other participants with the opportunity to be rational motivated agents, giving them the opportunities to take initiatives, to participate, to seek pleasure, avoid pain, etc.

If it is done in a coordinated but conflictual and competitive manner, one might say that truth is a joint final goal which is pursued through claims to truth made by individual participants. Each participant wants to find the truth but would also like to persuade other participants that his/her version is the correct one.

In both cases one is attempting to find truth by making claims to it, in the cooperative case, these claims are joint collective efforts, in the competitive case, the claims are individual efforts. In the cooperative case, conflicts can arise only with other collectives or with individuals who opt out, for instance, because they do not believe that strict alethic (truth related) standards are being observed. In the competitive case, any claim which denies or limits the validity of another claim is a conflictual claim.

The cooperative mode, thus, basically handles conflict by preventing it. It is essentially preventive of conflict. The competitive mode, on the other hand, promotes conflict.

Any claim which limits or denies the validity of another claim could come into conflict with the goal of a certain individual to lay claim to the truth which means that he/she has to face the decision of whether to respond by avoiding, accepting or denying the other persons claim.

The basic action of an academic seminar, in both the cooperative and competitive modes, is to make claims to truth, together with claims about features like consistence, exhaustiveness and economy, which traditionally go with truth. In the competitive mode not only claims to truth but also other claims can be challenged. For example, a participant's claim to a topic, to relevance or to the perception, understanding and acceptance of other participants can be challenged and responded to by avoidance, acceptance or denial or some combination of these. If one wishes to take up the

competition, this always involves some form of denial of the sufficiency, appropriateness or correctness of the other's claim. Thus, one can deny the truth, consistence, exhaustiveness etc., of the other's claim or one can deny its relevance, refuse to attend to it or refuse to continue on a proposed topic. A denial can be made with or without a counterclaim. The explicitness and nature of a denial can also vary through means such as irony, relativization or by attention to management problems. In the cooperative mode the claims of other participants are accepted as long as they don't interfere seriously with one's own interests and corrections are seen as contributions to common goals.

The main conflictual actions, we have found in the academic seminar which has been examined can be summarized as follows (only the three first types have been exemplified above):

- (i) **Positive claim related**  
 controversial claim  
 defense or support of own claim  
 insistence or repetition of own claim
- (ii) **Counter claim related**  
 denial of another person's claim,  
 counterclaim  
 indirect attack (irony)
- (iii) **Relativizing another person's claim**  
 classifying  
 categorizing as a special case  
 categorizing as compatible in own position  
 relativizing validity
- (iv) **Management related**  
 giving and asking for clarification  
 claiming unclarity or non-comprehension  
 claiming irrelevance  
 questioning, asking for relevance  
 correction  
 questioning correctness  
 topic shift  
 interrupting, holding floor

When it comes to "conflict handling" we have found the following types which can apply to both focussed message and management features.

- (i) **Prevention** (is a necessary features of the cooperative mode but can also be combined with the competitive mode.)  
 The cooperative-collaborative mode  
 building agreement, consensus  
 creating a good atmosphere

Cooperation involves friendly corrections and amendments, nonsubmissive acceptance and agreement, contextualizing your own position, suggesting alternatives, friendly additions.

- (ii) **Avoidance** (can be both cooperative and competitive)
  - postponement of topic
  - topic shift
  - aborted comment
  - ignoring
  
- (iii) **Competition** (pursuing conflict)
  - win - dominate (be right)
  - lose - submit (accept, agree)
  - compromise (partially win, partially lose)
  
- (iv) **Resolution** (presupposes conflict)
  - resolve (remove grounds for conflict)

It was also found that the communicative activity which underlies conflict and conflict handling is multifunctional, contextual and relational in its nature. This has a consequence that one and the same communicative act can in one situation be conflictual and in another situation conflict resolving. An act can also simultaneously in a particular situation be both conflictual and non-conflictual. Successive acts of conflict and conflict handling can occur in the same interaction. As an aspect of the relational, contextual nature of communicative activity, we have seen that it is important to note whether the activity is initiating or responsive and whether it is generated in a cooperative or competitive win-lose (truly conflictual) mode. We have also seen that conflicts can take as their point of departure the main message content of the contributions made in the seminar as well as management features of the interaction or the manner in which a contribution is made.

In the diagram below, I give an overview of how some of the dimensions of academic communicative conflict and conflict handling correspond to each other. The types of action are aligned so that initiating and responsive modes match both with regard to conflictual and cooperative mode.

The table shows the two modes of pursuing truth - the competitive and the cooperative. In both cases, the reactions to a claim are compared. In the two top responsive squares we compare a conflictual with a cooperative denial of a claim. Denials, for example, correspond to friendly corrections, etc. In the two lower responsive squares competitive avoidance, acceptance and compromise are compared to cooperative avoidance, acceptance and compromise. Prevention of conflict as an initiating move is also compared and it is claimed that prevention to the extent that it occurs has a more limited scope in the competitive mode than in the cooperative.

Taking a more holistic structural view of the seminar, the general impression is that topics do not follow each other in simply structured ways. Rather the topics show a complex meandering course through the seminar, where an issue is debated between two participants, causing a third participant to bring up a side issue, which after having been discussed for some time might bring up another side issue. The structure of the particular seminar investigated, thus, seems to share many features with a more informal discussion.

**Diagram 1. Correspondence between dimensions of conflict and conflict-handling**

	Conflictual competition		Cooperation	
	Initiating	Responsive	Initiating	Responsive
Incompatible confrontative communicative action	Controversial claim	Denial ----- Counterclaim ----- Irony ----- Relativization of another's claim ----- Management based counterattack	Claim	Correction ----- Correction ----- Other adjustment of another's claim ----- Management
Conflict handling	Prevention of some aspect in order to pursue conflict	----- Avoidance to dominate ----- Accept submit ----- Partially accept compromise	Prevention of conflict	----- Avoidance to help ----- Accept adjust ----- Adjust

Another holistic question concerns whether participants can be seen as orienting toward any normative goals. I think it can be claimed that there are perhaps two such goals towards which an orientation can be seen:

- (i) The ideal of traditional alethic scientific method; this tends to promote the ideal of right or wrong, win or lose.
- (ii) The ideal of friendship and cooperation.

As has been discussed above, both orientations are in evidence and it is also clear that some attempt is made to reconcile the two by combining incompatible communicative contributions in a cooperative way.

Finally, it might be fitting to point to some areas which need further investigation

- (i) The roles of individual participants and the nature of their contributions. The dynamics of the interaction - who influences who and why? To what extent do friendships, power and status, besides quality of arguments play a role for the influence, which is exercised during a seminar?
- (ii) How do consensus and main conclusions develop? Given that the seminar takes a meandering course through 70 topics, one can ask whether the participants walked away with any main conclusions at all. If they did, it would be interesting to try to see if there are any systematic reasons for why.
- (iii) The last future issue I want to point to is a need for a better understanding of how to preserve the positive energy of academic conflict, while at the same time limiting its scope. This can be done, for example, by adhering to the traditional distinction of "person" and "issue" as discussed above. Since many people find it hard to respect this distinction, i.e. it is hard not to get emotionally involved when your own ideas are criticized, this is perhaps not so easy. Another solution is, therefore, to make the bounds of the academic seminar clear. What goes on in the seminar room, goes on there, and should not influence relations outside. Again this is easier said than done and perhaps only realistic when one is dealing with people who already on independent grounds have a good relation.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank SAREC (Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) for support of the project *Cultural Models of Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, of which this study is a part.

I would also like to thank Elisabeth Ahlsén, Joakim Nivre, Jamaliah Mohamad Ali and Mats Friberg for comments on and discussion of the paper.

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