TYPES OF CONFLICT AND CONFLICT HANDLING IN AN ACADEMIC SEMINAR

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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 in general and in relation to academic seminars exemplified through some types of conflict and conflict handling ocurring in one particular instance of a Swedish academic seminar. My study will, thus, have as its point of departure Swedish academic seminars. 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.   Types of conflict

2.1   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.

2.2   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 (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 could then further distinguish between different kinds of latent conflicts.

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.

2.3 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.

2.3.1 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 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.

2.3.2 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.

2.3.3 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.

2.3.4 Intra- and interpersonal conflict

As we have seen in sections 2.3.1 - 2.3.3, 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.

3.   Handling conflict

3.1   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.

3.2   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 paries "agree to disagree", where 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 the features to handle different aspects of the conflict. It is also the case that one type of conflict handling in a second stage can lead to another type. 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.

3.3   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 accidental 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. 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. Given that we live in a condition of partial information with regard to nearly everything it might even be claimed that the relation between truth-seeking and decision making is unavoidable. Since we never have complete information and perhaps never can be completely certain, our beliefs and opinions always involve mechanisms of decision-making. It might also be objected that perhaps there are forms of cooperative truth seeking that could be as effective as conflictual truth seeking. See further below (section 5).

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.

3.4   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 2.3.1, participants disagree about method, they still frequently attempt to justify their positions by reference to more abstract principles of method.

4.   Types of conflict and conflict handling in a Swedish seminar

4.1   Introduction

In the next section, I will try to illustrate the concepts and distinctions introduced above by analyzing two connected excerpts from a transcription of a videotape of a seminar. 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 were 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 present and discuss one of the themes in the discussion of the seminar. In section 4.3 and 5, I will then discuss and attempt to clarify some of the main types of conflict and conflict handling found in the transcription. Since the excerpt is fairly long, only its English translation is given. 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. Passages in the translation which are most relevant to the interpretive comments in the right column are underlined. 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.

4.2 Example - Disagreement about the role of imitation in language learning and language teaching

The discussion in the analyzed example concerns the distinctions "knowledge-that" - "knowledge-how", "declarative"- "procedural" and the role of imitation in language learning and language teaching. The excerpts contain 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.

Transcription of seminar	**Comments**
A: but this idea of C´s is of course tempting but I as you know have experience as a learner of swedish	acknowledgement to C building positive emotion -> conflict prevention
since many years back and what is problematic is that I have been able to use	giving personal experience as evidence for claim to come
this input that is try to do as the swedes rather late	counter claim to C. Imitation cannot be used
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 it is something else one as a learner is very concentrated on that is the message and the content	explanation and further support for counter-claim
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 very risky to generalize this way it must depend on who one is// there are people who are very sensitive to external form and behavior //	counter argument to A on the grounds that A has made a hasty generalization. No acknowledgement of positive quality of C´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 / /	submission admission of correctness of counter argument
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	attempts to argue against the role of imitation (counterclaim to C) by claiming that it is reduced to children´s handling of main clauses
B:	< --- >	inaudible
C:	no this I don´t believe at all, honestly speaking	counter 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	video recorded evidence for counter-counter claim
D:	yes but there is something [murky]	signal of counterclaim to C´s counterclaim

C:	[they HAVE] subordinate clauses plenty of them	restatement of counter-counterclaim
B:	yes	support
C:	(---)	
D:	but there is something murky in what you are saying C because what children begin by saying are, for example, nouns in non-inflected form	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 being 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:	[oh you mean] //no no OK they do they do both they also process independently of course [that is right]	insight implicit acknowledgement of the correctness of D´s claim jump to synthesis and compromise

4.3 Types of conflict and conflict handling found in the example

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

C1:   counter-A1
        counter example to
                                              A2: admission of C1

C2:   acknowledgement of admission

Passage 2
                                        E1: counter-C0 and C1. Counter
C2:   counter-E1
        denial of counter example
                                        (E2: silence admission?
                                        D1: counter-C0, C1 and C2.
C3:   affirmation of C0/C1
                                        D2: Reaffirmation of D1
C4:   Admission of D2
        (compromise, synthesis)

If we try to summarize the types of conflict occurring in the quoted passage, 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 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 or when C1 counters A1 to pursue the argument which is equivalent to opting for a win-loose or dominance-submission type of conflict handling) and sometimes they occur in sequence (A´s admission (compromise) is followed by E´s avoidance and C´s 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.

5 .   Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, I have given an analysis of conflict and conflict handling in general terms and as applied to academic seminars. I have also exemplified the analysis with reference to two excerpts from a specific instance of a seminar. If we combine the results presented here with a study where the seminar is examined more fully (cf. Allwood, forthcoming), it can be seen that when it comes to communication there are 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, 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. For example, a participant´s claim to a topic, to relevance or to the perception, understanding and acceptance of other participants can be conflictual. In the cooperative mode, one should go along with such claims unless they conflict with one's own well-being or good judgement in a non-trivial way. If one disagrees, this should be expressed as a friendly amendment for a joint purpose. In the competitive mode, these claims must instead be 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.

The main conflictual actions, we have found in the academic seminar which has been examined can be summarized as follows:

(i) **Conflictual positive claims**
controversial claim
defense or support of own claim
insistence or repetition of own claim

(ii) **Conflictual counter claims**
denial of another person´s claim,
counterclaim
indirect attack (irony)

(iii) **Conflictual relativizing of another person´s claim**
classifying
categorizing as a special case
categorizing as compatible in own position
relativizing validity

(iv) **Conflictual use of interactive management**
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** (prevention is a necessary feature 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 and relativizing 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 (like most other types of communicative activity). 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, 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. It is also the case 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.

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 adjust-ment 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

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 in competition, 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.

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.

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