

Discourse and Identity

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Identity

“Who people are to each other”

(Benwell, Stokoe 2006:6)

- Self, selfhood, role, personality, person description, subject, person formulation etc.

“We speak our identities”

(Mishler 1999:19)

*(how different kinds of identities are produced in
spoken interaction and written texts)*

- Examination of **identity construction** across a variety of discursive contexts
- Discursive environments in which identity work is being done, e.g.
 - everyday conversation
 - institutional settings
 - narratives (stories)
- Range of discourse & interaction analytic methods which are put to use in the study of identity, e.g. **performativity, conversation analysis (CA), membership categorisation analysis (MCA), critical discourse analysis (CDA), narrative analysis**

TOC

- **Conversational Identities** (everyday conversation)
- **Institutional Identities** (institutional settings)
- **Narrative Identities** (personal narratives)

Micro-level analysis

Ethnomethodological perspectives:

- conversation analysis
- membership categorization analysis

Micro-level analysis + macro-level theorizing

- critical discourse analysis
- narrative analysis

CONVERSATIONAL IDENTITIES

Conversational Identities

Two approaches to the analysis of identity in conversation (*here*: in everyday interaction):

1) Performativity

2) Ethnomethodological (EM) approaches:

- Conversation analysis (CA)
- Membership categorisation analysis (MCA)

Performativity

- Theorizes identity (especially gender) as discursively produced and ‘performative’ (Butler 1990)
- Identity is a discursive practice, a discourse we both inhabit and employ but also a *performance*
- Interaction as ‘performance’:
 - shaped by the demands of setting and addressee
 - constructed to maintain a mode of presentation consonant with participants’ goals (Goffman)

Performing Feminine Identities

- Coates has written extensively about the ‘performance’ of femininity and masculinity
- Focus: ‘construction of gendered subjectivity’, ‘construction of femininity’, performance of hegemonic masculinity (Coates 1999: 123)
- “all the ways of being[which culture offers to us] are gendered” (only different kinds of woman/man, NOT different kinds of person) (Coates 1997: 285)

Example:

white, middle-class girls trying on make-up

GWEN: doesn't she look really nice/

KATE: yes/

EMILY: she DOES look nice/

GWEN: [I think with the lipstick

KATE: you should wear make-up [more often. Sarah/

GWEN: it looks good/ [Sarah your lips . s- suit lipstick/

KATE: [

EMILY: yeah looks [nice/

GWEN: ((I'm saying)) what you said- big lips suit [lipstick

KATE: ooohh yes/ [[share it

EMILY: [you should be [a model

GWEN: yeah/ looks good to me/ Sarah you look really nice/

KATE: yeah/

EMILY: models have big lips/

Performing Feminine Identities

- Coates focuses on the way these girls *do* or *perform* their identity, in the way they present themselves as gendered beings
- The sequence works to produce a particular kind of appearance-oriented, traditional, heteronormative femininity
- Talk is characterized by a range of linguistic patterns (e.g. sustained topical talk, supportive rather than interruptive overlapping talk)
- Women's talk is like a 'jam session' and functions to develop the cooperative 'connectedness' and support of their friendship

Performing Feminine Identities

Identity-relevant features in the data:

- 1) Overt compliments (routine friendship-maintenance work)
- 2) Co-construction of a shared world (wearing make-up is part of 'doing femininity')
- 3) High status afforded to looking 'nice' or 'good' (looking like a model)

Performing Masculine Identities

- **Men's stories** (recognizable as such)
- *Perform* dominant masculinity via their choice of topic (e.g. themes of power and machinery, display of physical strength), focus on action, competitive style, taboo language etc.

COMPARE !

- **Women's stories:** choice of personal topics, displays of sensitivity

Problems with Performativity

- Studies rely heavily on analysts' rather than participants' categories
- *Assumptions* about what the speakers are doing rather than what the speakers *display* to each other as relevant to their conversational business

Conversation Analysis

- The study of technical transcripts of recordings of everyday talk (*naturally occurring data*, e.g. telephone conversations, dinner talk)
- Focus lies on the turn-by-turn (sequential) organization of interaction
- Analysts do not assume any specific relevance ahead of their analysis; instead they focus on what members orient to **in talk** (no theoretical position on members' identities prior to analysis)

4 basic concepts that underpin the study of talk's patterns and practices (Drew 2005):

- 1) Conversations are made up of *turns* that are arranged one after another; turns are built out of TCUs
- 2) *Turn design*: what goes into a turn
- 3) Conversation is not 'just talk'; it achieves *social actions*
- 4) *Sequence organization*: turns do not appear in isolation, are connected to each other

Conversation Analysis

- Questioning *how* conversational actions are accomplished as the systematic products of sequentially ordered interactions rather than *why* they are performed
- Grounded in what participants *do* and *say* rather than in what analysts take to be relevant as a function of their hypotheses or theory
- See how participants themselves analyse and classify the business that a turn in dialogue is attending to (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995:81)

Membership Categorization Analysis

- Concerned with the organization of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities and through talk (Francis and Hester 2004: 21)
- local management of speakers' categorizations of themselves and others
- Based upon **MCD** (membership categorization device), which explains how categories may be linked together
 - *Category*: man, teacher etc.
 - *Collection*: male/female, lawyer/teacher/doctor ('profession')

Membership Categorization Analysis

- Categories (including 'members') are linked to particular actions ('category-bound activities'), characteristics ('natural predicates'), 'rights and obligations' that are expectable for a category incumbent
- Categorization process occurs via the rich inferential resources which are carried in specific categories, that are available to members of a culture

Membership Categorization Analysis

Example:

The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.
(Sacks 1972a)

- **MCD**: 'family', allows the categories 'mommy' and 'baby' to be collected together

... but category membership is deniable.

Varieties of Identity in CA and MCA

- Tracy (2002) describes several possibilities for understanding what 'identity' can mean for interaction analysis, including 'obvious' kinds of 'master identities' (gender, class), as well as 'interactional identities' (roles people inhabit in specific contexts), 'relational identities' (friend, partner, wife)

Relational Identities

- How people display their relationships through the occasioning of relationship categories and the duties and obligations that are bound to incumbents of those categories
- Any CA study of relationship identity categories (e.g. friend-friend, mother-daughter) should address the following questions:
 - 1) How does explicitly invoking a relationship category operate with respect to accomplishing a locally relevant conversational action?
 - 2) How does performing certain conversational actions relate to enacting incumbency in specific relationship categories?

((music thumping in background))

- 431 (9.0)
- 432 Sophie: > I COULD've gone < spa::re when we was out that Saturday
433 though. = I could've gone spare. (.) when he, - (.) you
434 reme:mber when he jus' kinda like wa:lked pa:st.
435 (0.8)
- 436 Sophie: An' said hi: an:: jus' walked off.
437 (1.2)
- 438 Chloe: Y[eah.]
- 439 Sophie: [YOU KNOW] how say like you see people y[ou know]=
440 Chloe: [What on]=
- 441 Sophie: =[but] aren't really friends with,
442 Chloe: =[Saturday?]
443 (0.2)
- 444 Sophie: When we was in Echoes:
445 Chloe: Ye:ah,
446 Sophie: An' y'know how sometimes y'see frie::nds,
447 (0.6)
- 448 Chloe: Oh:[ye::ah]
- 449 Sophie: [Like people y'] not friends ↓with [but you jus' go]=
450 Chloe: [You jus' go you]=
- 451 Sophie: =[up,]
- 452 Chloe: =[all right.]
- 453 Sophie: Yeah an' walk off.
454 (0.2)
- 455 Sophie: ↑HE did ↑↑THAT to me! I thought that is so fuckin'
456 ru:de,
457 (0.3)
- 458 Chloe: That is ru:de.

Example: Any Ideas???

INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITIES

What are Institutions?

- “a socially legitimated expertise together with those persons authorized to implement it” (Agar 1985:164)
- Physical buildings
- Organizational settings (e.g. hospitals, schools)

- Power relations
 - not restricted to material locations
 - Binary oppositions
 - asymmetrical roles
- Power reflected as a process or action

*Institutional identity is a function
of power relations*

Institutional talk (IT)

- Speakers have institution-specific goals to achieve and the kinds of contributions are limited
- the practices of ordinary conversation are put into a more specific and restricted context

Asymmetrical speaking rights

- Asymmetrical speaking rights

ex. 1: Institutional representative/ client

- Institutional representative has the right to ask questions (helpline interaction, medical encounters)
- Client → ‘moral obligation’
- Predetermined structure, turn-taking different

Asymmetrical speaking rights

ex. 2: interviewer/ interviewee

- pre-allocated turn-types (question/answer)
- IR is likely to control, IE is trying to gain control
- Limiting the disadvantages put up by institutional roles

Macrostructures and goal orientations

- IT has always an institutional goal
- IT less open ended than OT
- E.g. Opening, request, interrogative series, response, closing

Extract 3.5: From Zimmerman 1984: 214

1 911: Midcity Emergency::,
2 (.)
3 C: U::m yeah (.)
4 somebody just vandalized my car,
5 (0.3)
6 911: What's your address.
7 C: three oh one six maple
8 911: Is this a house or an apartment.
9 C: I::t's a house
10 911: (Uh-) your last name.
11 C: Minsky
12 911: How do you spell it?
13 C: M I N S K Y
14 911: We'll send someone out to see you.
15 C: Thank you. =
16 911: =Mmhm=
17 911: =bye.=
18 C: =Bye.

Identity alignment with institutions

- Role categories: addressing a teacher as *Miss/Sir* or a judge as *M'lord*
- Index at institutional identity rather than personal identity
- First person plural forms *we* and *us* in order to underline membership
- Setting specific and appropriate lexical choice

Institutional vs. ordinary talk

- In institutional settings, the speakers may move between IT and OT
- Institutional identities are not omnirelevant
- Institutionality is oriented toward and produced by interacting patterns
- Institutionality not presupposed

The two levels of institutional talk

- ‘pure’ CA: treats conversation itself as an institution and is concerned with explicating generalities about the mechanics and intelligibility of social action
- ‘applied’ CA: method to study interactions with an institutional purpose
 - discourse roles, sequence, turn-types, activity types
 - outcome related
 - bottom up
 - context is produced

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The meaning of a text cannot be derived from the text itself

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- Limitations of CA often criticized
- Many procedures of institutions are embedded in the wider context of institutional practices and ideologies
- CA → *How*
- CDA → *Why*
- Broader context
- CDA rejects restriction to empirical basis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- Discourse analysis challenges us to move from seeing language as abstract to seeing our words as having meaning in a particular historical, social, and political condition
- Language produces, reproduces and changes social structures, relations and identities
- Attempt to mediate between social and linguistic causes
- Bridge the gap between micro and macro

CDA and Identity

- Identity is...
 - Representation in language
 - Position within discourse
 - Expression of language
- CDA analyses identity

NARRATIVE IDENTITIES

Narrative identity

- “We speak our identities.”
(Mishler 1999:19)
- Selves and identities are constituted in discourse, therefore also in *stories*
- narrators can produce ‘edited’ descriptions and evaluations of themselves and others, making identity aspects more salient
(Georgakopoulou 2002)
- *Storied selves*

Narrative analysis

- Interpretative tool designed to examine people’s lives holistically through the stories they tell.
e.g. Why was the narrative developed in that way and told in that order?
- No one agreed method for going about analysing narrative data
- Many different versions/approaches to narrative analysis
(Structuralist approaches, psychodynamic approaches, conversation analysis)

Murray's 'life story interview' (2003)

- Interview-based research
- Telling of extended personal narrative
- Social context essential in narrative analysis
- Interviewer influences the telling

(1) Descriptive phase: structure and content

(2) Interpretative phase: broader theoretical literatures

When the surgeon told her she had cancer she was very upset:

Mrs. B: It really flipped me right out.

Int: Yeah.

Mrs. B: It really flipped me out, but it was so quick.

Int: Hmm, hmm.

Mrs. B: Like, I never had time to stop and think.

Int: Right.

Mrs. B: Like, he told me, and then I cried for weeks, and then next week I was in hospital and had it all done.

She had a lumpectomy, and on discharge from hospital she found it very difficult to cope:

Int: Was it a mastectomy or a lumpectomy?

Mrs. B: No, it was just a lumpectomy.

Int: Ok.

Mrs. B: Right, and so I went through all that, and then I went through a year of chemo and radiation and went through hell, but like by myself.

Int: Hmm. Hmm.

[...]

Mrs. B: And it was terrible, it was absolutely terrible. I had no moral support. I had no one here to help.

Example

- Differentiation between regressive, stable and progressive narrative (*Robinson, 1990*)
 - Similar structure: life in health (beginning), diagnosis of cancer (middle), being healed (end)
 - Levels of analysis:
 - 1. Personal: individual experiences
 - 2. Interpersonal: emphasis, organization
 - 3. Societal: broader context
- + Narratives interactively produced
- No detailed analysis of the interviewer's role

Extract 3.16: University tutorial

((Tutor has been explaining postmodernism))

1 T: >↑What I'd like you< to do:, (0.8) immg:diately
2 is to spe:nd (0.3) 'bout a mi:nute >an' a half.<
3 (0.4) <wri:ting do:wn:.> the answer to this
4 question.

5 (0.4)

6 T: Which you might well be a:sked by somebody.

7 (2.0)

8 T: WHhat is the Aleppo Button about,

9 (2.4)

10 T: (Y-) write as <DEtailed> a response to that >as
11 you can< without consulting anybody else:

12 (5.9)

13 T: Say you're reading it, (0.4) at ho:me an'
14 somebody at ho:me says t'ye, (0.3) ↑↑what's
15 ↑↑that ↓sto:ry abo:ut ↑you're ↑reading.

16 (0.9)

17 J: I *didn't re:ad* the Aleppo Bu:tton,

18 (0.3)

19 T: O:h::

20 J: Was it- I di'n't real- [I thought it was just=

21 T: [WELL okay:, right =

22 J: =[Lenin's trousers ()] (okay.)

23 T: =[don't you write anything t(h)hen]

24 (0.2)

25 S?: Didn't read it either.

26 S?: fneither did I£ heh:::

27 T: Hhhh

28 (0.6)

29 T: Handouts that nobody reads. ↑h:mmm.

30 ? (.hhhh)

31 J: I thought it was jus' the um:: Lenin's Trousers.

32 (0.2)

33 J: Collection °cos you:- °

34 (0.4)

35 J: °Obviously not°

36 T: WELL yeah *bu-* (.) uh- ↑never ↓mind. (0.2)

37 okay.

38 (1.3)

39 T: I did say at the lecture (hm) (.) here's a
40 handout read it before next we:ek. (.) >bu'
41 anyway.< (0.3) some of us have *read it* I take
42 it.

43 (0.5)

44 T: *°Right.°* (0.2) *°kay.°* C'd those who have
45 read it, (0.6) write down, (0.9) the: answer to
46 that que:stion.

47 (1.4)

48 T: So that we can enlighten: (0.2) people who
49 ha:ven't¿

50 S?: °Heh heh heh heh heh heh°

51 (4.2)

52 T: You might want to skim: through it¿

53 (3.33.7) ((papers rustling throughout
54 this time))