Discourse and Identity

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Introduction

Background

Research on language and identity has experienced an unprecedented growth in the last ten years. The time when scholars in the field needed to advocate for the centrality of language in the study of identity (see for example, Benveniste, 1971 in linguistics or Bruner 1990 in social psychology) seems far away indeed. Research in fields as diverse as anthropology, linguistics, psychology, sociology, history, literature, gender studies, and social theory, among others, has now firmly established the fundamental role of linguistic processes and strategies in the creation, negotiation and establishment of identities. It is impossible to give a comprehensive view of the theoretical work in all of these areas and of how it has shaped identity studies. Our aim with this introduction is more modest: we want to briefly discuss some of the approaches and concepts that have had the greatest impact on current visions of identity, beginning with background perspectives and then turning to central constructs underlying the chapters in the volume. We then present an overview of the volume and a conclusion recapitulating some of the common ground among the contributors.

Background perspectives

Here we describe several approaches to the study of discourse and identity that pervade the chapters in the volume. We begin with those that have become widely accepted in research on discourse and identity and conclude with some that produce potential divisions in the ways scholars examine discourse and identity.

Perhaps the most general perspective, one that provides a very basic way of thinking about identity, is *social constructionism* (e.g. Berger and Luckman 1967; Hall 1996; Kroskrity 2000): the assumption that identity is neither a given nor a product. Rather, identity is a process that (1) takes place in concrete and specific interactional occasions, (2) yields constellations of identities instead of individual, monolithic constructs, (3) does not simply emanate from the individual, but results from processes of negotiation, and entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990) that are eminently social, and (4) entails "discursive work" (Zimmerman and Wieder 1970).

Social constructionism has generated a great deal of research on the use of linguistic strategies in discursive work to convey and build identities, on the emergence in interaction of conflicting versions of the self, and therefore on the existence of "repertoires of identities" (Kroskrity 1993), and on the effects of interlocutors, audiences and other social actors on the unfolding of identities in concrete social occasions. In brief, social constructionism has contributed to dissipating transcendentalist conceptions of identity and to directing the attention of researchers to social action rather than to psychological constructs.

Recent scholarship has also emphasized that identity is a process that is always embedded in social practices (Foucault 1984) within which discourse practices (Fairclough 1989) have a central role. Both social and discourse practices frame, and in many ways define, the way individuals and groups present themselves to others, negotiate roles, and conceptualize themselves. Taking the concept of practice as central to processes of identity formation and expression entails looking more closely at ways in which definitions of identity change and evolve in time and space, ways in which membership is established and negotiated within new boundaries and social locations, and ways in which activity systems (Goodwin 1999) impact on processes of identity construction.

Another defining trend in recent research has been the analysis of processes of *categorization and membership definition*. Taking inspiration from early work by Sacks on category bound activities and processes (1972, 1995), scholars in the Membership Categorization Analysis movement (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998b) have drawn attention to the fact that identity construction is often

related to the definition of categories for inclusion or exclusion of self and others, and to their identification with typical activities and routines. This, in turn, has prompted a reflection on the nature of identification categories and on the relationship between individual identity and group membership.

Recent approaches to categorization have highlighted the limitations of applying pre-established categorizations, emphasizing instead the locally occasioned, fluid and ever-changing nature of identity claims. Identity claims are seen as "acts" through which people create new definitions of who they are. Such a conception defies traditional sociolinguistic approaches that link already established social categories with language variables, regarding instead "the very fact of selecting from a variety of possibilities a particular variant (on a given occasion) as a way of actively symbolizing one's affiliations" (Auer 2002: 4). Thus identities are seen not as merely represented in discourse, but rather as performed, enacted and embodied through a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic means.

A third important trend in identity studies has been the development of an *anti-essentialist vision of the 'self.'* Work in gender studies and discursive psychology has been crucial in this respect. Gender studies have greatly contributed to our postmodern rejection of the self as something that people possess and that represents some kind of core essence of the person (Bucholtz *et al.* 1999). Gender scholars have shown that people can display "polyphonous" identities, i.e. simultaneously assume voices that are associated with different identity categories, and that they can "perform" identities, i.e. represent themselves as different from what their personal "visible" characteristics would suggest (Barrett 1999), therefore concluding that there is nothing given or "natural" about being part of a social category or group. The inadequacy of an essentialist notion of identity as being embodied in the 'self' has also been noted by discursive psychologists who move away from a "predefined model of the human actor" (Potter 2003) towards the investigation of how the psychological categories used to describe or define the 'self' are themselves configured according to specific social practices and relationships.

Work in these perspectives has also stressed the centrality of processes of *indexicality* in the creation, performance and attribution of identities. Indexicality is thus a fourth overarching concept

subsuming many of the theoretical constructs used to study identities: it connects utterances to extra-linguistic reality via the ability of linguistic signs to point to aspects of the social context. The connection between indexicality and identity has been a focus of attention in linguistics and anthropology since early work on deixis, particularly on shifters (see Benveniste 1971; Silverstein 1976) pointed to the indissoluble nexus established by these linguistic elements between the speaker and the utterance act.

Both linguists and anthropologists recognize the importance of pronouns in anchoring language to specific speakers in specific contexts and in signaling the reciprocal changes in the roles of interactants through their performance of, and engagement in, communicative acts. For example, linguistic signs at this referential level (Silverstein 1976) identify speakers not only in terms of their conversational roles or gender identity, but also in terms of how they orient to elements of the speech situation such as time and place. By using locatives and time expressions – as well as personal pronouns – language users point to their roles not only as speakers or addressees, but also to their location in time and space and to their relationship to others (present or absent).

Incorporation of the context is in itself a dynamic process through which speakers build their positions within what Hanks (1992) has named "the indexical ground." By carrying out acts of reference, interactants continuously constitute and reconstitute their positions with respect to each other, to objects, places and times. Thus, indexing aspects of the context can never be reduced to a simple act of orientation in physical space or to the mere signaling of alternations in speech roles. Indexicality is a layered, creative, interactive process that lies at the heart of the symbolic workings of language. The idea that signs are indexical goes beyond simple referential anchoring to encompass the ability of linguistic expressions to evoke, and relate to, complex systems of meaning such as socially shared conceptualizations of space and place, ideologies, social representations about group membership, social roles and attributes, presuppositions about all aspects of social reality, individual and collective stances, practices and organization structures.

The approaches and concepts briefly outlined above rest on basic, and generally accepted, assumptions about the relationships

between discourse, identity and social processes. However, scholars of identity are also deeply divided on several theoretical and methodological issues.

At opposite extremes are two approaches: the one sustained by scholars working within the frame of Conversation Analysis and the one advocated by scholars working within the frame of Critical Discourse Analysis. The division is not exclusive to the study of identity. Rather, it derives from different conceptions of the relationship between language and social life, of the role of the researcher, and of the methodology to be followed in data collection and analysis. Scholars in the field of Conversation Analysis advocate methodological restraint, according to which analysts need to "hold off from using all sorts of identities which one might want to use in, say, a political or cultural frame of analysis" (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998a: 5) and look exclusively for categories of identity membership that are made relevant in the local context by participants. In this view, identities are locally occasioned in talk-in-interaction, they are consequential for the interaction at hand, and therefore participants clearly "orient" to them. The researcher's task is then to reconstruct the processes of adscription and negotiation of identities as they are manifested within the activity in which participants are engaged. These arguments echo Schegloff's polemic stance against the imposition of ad hoc interpretive categories by "politically informed" analysts. Schegloff (1997: 168) argued that only after analyzing the interactional event "in its endogenous constitution, what it was for the parties involved in it, in its course, as embodied and displayed in the very details of its realization – can we even begin to explore what forms a critical approach to it might take, and what political issue, if any, it allows us to address." Accordingly, within this approach, the only relevant context to understand the emergence of identities in interaction is the local context.

At the other extreme of the spectrum are scholars who identify with Critical Discourse Analysis (Billig 1999). In their view, the contexts that are relevant to the expression, negotiation and perpetuation of identities are much wider, since identities are, in many ways, produced and often imposed upon individuals and groups through dominant discourse practices and ideologies. From their perspective, keeping the analysis at the level of the local interaction

only means ignoring how power struggles and wider social circumstances constrain and frame the way identities are perceived and projected in specific interactions. The consequence of such a stance is that Critical Discourse Analysts tend to privilege the analysis of political and ideological contexts in the formation of identities and concentrate on the representation of identities much more than on their projection or negotiation in interaction.

Our aim in this volume is not to argue for one position against the other, or to promote a particular agenda, but to offer analyses and reflections that can be taken as a basis for discussion by scholars who endorse different perspectives. In this sense, the volume differs from other collections in its inclusion of a range of approaches and its coverage of a variety of identities and texts/ contexts: rather than share a single theoretical orientation, contributors come from different traditions and fields and use varying methodological tools. As we describe in the next section, however, several constructs re-appear throughout the volume, thus providing some overarching theoretical and methodological frameworks for the volume as a whole.

Overarching themes, underlying constructs and persistent questions

Contributors to *Discourse and Identity* employ a variety of specific theoretical approaches and methodological orientations, including Narrative Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Interactional Sociolinguistics, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Yet all share an anti-essentialist orientation, a discourse and practice centered approach to identity, and a close focus on the interactional and local management of social categories and language along with consideration of the effects of global processes on the management of local identities. Before turning to an overview of the volume, then, we highlight some of the overarching themes and underlying constructs that find application in the volume and discuss their relevance to the linguistic analysis of identity. We present each construct as a general question that is answered through the concepts and methods (the tools, the "nuts and bolts") comprised through each construct.

Positioning: How do the relationships we "take up" through (a) linguistically realized action and (b) interactions with different facets of our social, cultural and ideological worlds contribute to "who we are"?

Analyses of positioning build on the insight that identity is socially constructed at several levels: through relationships between the speaker and what is being said (including both means of production and evaluative or epistemic stance); through relationships between self and other, or speaker and hearer, in face-to-face occasions of talk and interaction; through relationships represented in the propositional content of talk (what is one textual character doing to another textual character?); through relationships to the dominant ideologies, widespread social practices and underlying power structures drawn together as Discourse (Gee 1996). One of the goals of positioning theory is to more clearly identify the mechanisms through which linguistic and social processes become reified as observable products that may be glossed by others as "identities."

If the practices in which we routinely engage are viewed as central to processes of identity formation, what kind of personal agency is inscribed in these practices? While some researchers focus more strongly on social and institutional factors that constrain and delineate the radius of agency for individuals and groups of individuals, others credit groups and individuals with an agency that enables them to more than comply with such societal forces. This latter orientation is particularly interested in the agentive role of participants in interactions as being able to counter dominant practices, discourses and master narratives.

Scholars who have developed positioning theory (e.g. Bamberg 1997b, 2005; Davies and Harré 1990; Harré and van Langenhove 1999; Hollway 1984) investigate agency as bi-directional. On the one hand, historical, sociocultural forces in the form of dominant discourses or master narratives position speakers in their situated practices and construct who they are without their agentive involvement. On the other hand, speakers position themselves as constructive and interactive agents and choose the means by which they construct their identities vis-à-vis others as well as vis-à-vis dominant discourses and master narratives.

Positioning provides a central theoretical construct and valuable tool for analyzing identity in this volume. Authors investigate the linguistic mechanisms and discourse strategies that allow individual speakers to place themselves in positions of acceptance or rejection, for example, of ideologies of race, gender, or widely held conceptions about family roles and relationships (Bell, Moita-Lopes, Wortham and Gadsden). Linguistic strategies for projecting and constructing particular personas include modalization, constructed dialogue, meta-pragmatic descriptors and pronouns. Authors also suggest that speakers build positions vis-à-vis their former selves through the management of time categories in the reconstruction of their life experiences, since they look back at what happened in the past through the vantage point of their present experiences, therefore engaging in an ever evolving interpretation of their roles and lives (Bell, Mishler).

Authors also address the theoretical ramifications of the concept of positioning through discussion of the many facets of identity that can be the object of discursive work. Interlocutors can assume stances not only towards ideologies, but also towards absent others (e.g. characters and their actions in stories), and towards each other. Thus, in different chapters, interviewers and interviewees are shown using strategies such as the application of labels, the use of discourse responses or even silence after questions, to position each other in particular ways (Baynham, Bell, Johnson).

Investigating levels of identity construction as a process of positioning, and discovering the means adopted to enact various positions, leads to reflecting on the many ways of doing identity, ranging from the proclamation and open assignment of membership into social categories to the enactment of different kinds of selves, to indirect conveying of alignments and disalignments, to the implicit placement of social agents into pre-assigned roles. Analyses of positioning can thus productively connect the local focus of conversation analytic and the more global focus of critical discourse analytic approaches. They can also help elucidate the embrace of, or resistance to, imposed identities through narrative, as well as through other discourse genres, discursive practices and Discourse writ large. While positioning thus constitutes a sort of umbrella for different ways of constructing identity in discourse,

other more specific constructs are also used by contributors in this volume to account for particular aspects of identity work.

Interaction order: "Who are we" when we are interacting with one another in face-to-face talk?

The investigation of the interaction order as a central site for the construction of identities provides a significant site of analysis, and area of reflection, in the chapters collected in this volume. Many authors illustrate how a multiplicity of identities are managed through social interactions by building upon Goffman's work as a fundamental point of departure because of his insights on the importance of reciprocity in communication and on the fundamental presence of the 'other' in the public management of the self. This relational view of communication has an immediate relevance for the analysis of identity work through the constructs of footing ("the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (1981: 128)), and "face" (the positive social attributes that a person claims for him or herself in the course of social interaction (1967a)).

The management of this relational level underlies a great deal of identity work in private and public exchanges and conversations (Bastos and Oliveira, Holmes, Ribeiro). Authors illustrate how the presentation of a positive face to others underlies the choice of referring terms or the telling of stories or anecdotes and the provision of details within them: both can depict the self as a "figure" whose actions, interactions and relationships within specific story-worlds have potential relevance for the interaction. Also shown is how the identities presented by clients of public services, or by people in the work place, are shaped by the need to preserve an image of oneself which is consistent with the requirements and exigencies of the situation, the interaction, and the needs of the interlocutors. Problematizing and deconstructing face work, then, leads analysts to interpret the presentation and enactment of particular identities not so much as expressions of the 'self,' but rather as constructions that take into account both the objectives of interactional practices, and the constraints of institutional structures, that are "in play" when people communicate with each other.

Analysis of interactional processes is also based on a fundamental principle of intersubjectivity that allows identities to be achieved and built through reciprocal moves between interactants (Schiffrin). Partners in storytelling events may build dominant positions within close knit groups by consistently taking up roles as co-narrators or evaluators of the narratives told by others (Georgakopoulou). Interactants can project identifications or rejections towards their partners through cooperative or uncooperative management of conversation (Johnson, Holmes). They can also confirm and fine tune local identities that place them in relationships with others (such as "expert" versus "novice") through the use of repair in referring sequences (Schiffrin). Many chapters in this volume show how the management of interactional resources, such as those described above, can become central to people's intersubjective construction of identities.

Footing, multivocality and intertextuality: "Who" is speaking "whose" words and what role are they taking in the "speech"?

The question of "who" is speaking "whose" words – and the incorporation of other voices and texts in the here and now – has been examined from sociological, linguistic and literary perspectives, many of which underlie the chapters in this volume.

One perspective drawn upon by contributors to the volume is Goffman's work on participation frameworks and the deconstruction of the notion of "speaker" into more subtle distinctions. Goffman (1981: 128) distinguishes between different aspects of the self in discourse production: the author (the person who designs the utterance), the animator (the person who speaks the words that may have been designed by someone else), the principal (the person who takes responsibility for the sentiments underlying the words) and the figure (the character in a story or other text). These aspects of self define how people engage in identity work by taking up one or more relationships to an utterance. Speakers may signal or convey, through a variety of linguistic means such as reference, pronominal choice, or quotation, that they are assuming "authority" with respect to interlocutors, for example by claiming expertise in certain areas of knowledge or experience (Ribeiro,

Schiffrin). They can also signal their authority to represent others in a community, thus conveying that they are not just individuals animating their own stories, but also principals who are collectively committed to particular versions of the past (Baynham, De Fina, Schiff and Noy).

Goffman's differentiation among the speaker as the "author" of the present discourse, the "animator" as a participant in the interaction at hand, and the speaker as "figure" or character in a past world evoked in the discourse, also appears in many chapters as a particularly productive resource for the analysis of speakers' *stances* with respect to ideologies and behaviors through narrative discourse. Contributors who examine narrative, De Fina, Kiesling, and Moita-Lopes, for example, show that because narrators can use their own characteristics or actions as protagonists in story-worlds as a point of reference to express evaluations of many facets of social experience, they are able to convey their position on a variety of social problems such as gender roles, race and ethnicity without openly asserting their views.

Other perspectives on "who" is speaking "whose" words and what role they are taking in the speech stems from the research of linguists Becker (1984) and Tannen (1989) whose work also harks back to Bakhtin (1986) on multivocality and Kristeva (1980) on intertextuality. As suggested by Tannen, all interactions are made up of prior texts that we draw upon in new ways: "both the meanings of individual words. . .and the combinations in which we put them are given to us by previous speakers, traces of whose voices and contexts cling inevitably to them" (1989: 100). This notion of intertextuality has a long and rich history in literary studies. Kristeva (1980), for example, pointed out that texts have not only a horizontal axis that connects author to recipient, but also a vertical axis that connects a text to other texts. As Fairclough (1992: 84) explains:

Intertextuality is basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth. In terms of production, an intertextual perspective stresses the historicity of texts: how they always constitute additions to existing "chains of speech communication" (Bakhtin 1986: 94) consisting of prior texts to which they respond.

Just as an utterance can draw upon previous utterances from distant prior texts, so too, can it provide material for future utterances (and/or texts) by a recipient at a later time or place. The interchange between different interlocutors (the horizontal axis) is thus crucial, as stated by Bakhtin (1986: 68):

when the listener perceives and understands the [language meaning] of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it . . . Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker.

Bakhtin's view recalls an earlier point about how information is managed through the alternation of participant roles, as well as the shared sense of meanings, actions and knowledge that are grounded in the sequential organization of talk-in-interaction. The difference, of course, is the deictic center of information and participation: the listeners and speakers who draw upon intertextual connections with remote prior texts – rather than the just-completed utterance from a prior turn-at-talk – need not be co-present. And this reduces the potential for evidence of shared meanings and shared recognition of multivocality. Regardless of this (in)ability to trace the source of prior voices and texts, however, a multiplicity of voices and words is interwoven into discourse. Thus even when one individual appears to be responsible for the production of utterances, prior voices and texts are fundamental to our understanding of identity as a process.

Various contributors to the volume work with more explicit means of exploiting multivocality as a resource for identity construction. One way is the quotation of the words of others to stress an idea, to evaluate behavior, to summarize an opinion. In connection with this question, Bakhtin's work on constructed dialogue and on dialogism in general, is a theoretical framework widely referred to by authors in the volume. Bakhtin introduced the very central concept that reporting speech is not a passive enterprise, but an active process of transformation. Any act of reporting is, in his view, at the same time an act of appropriation of somebody else's words, and a reformulation of the original act. Bakhtin (1981b) showed, for example, how reported speech in narrative can be presented on a scale of "objectivity," from a clear separation of the narrator's voice with respect to that of the speaking character, to a subtle

mixing of different voices within the same text that may make it at times almost impossible to distinguish reporting from commentary. Thus, authors in the book apply Bakhtin's ideas about voice and dialogism to show that narrators can borrow the voices of others to construct their own identity in opposition to, or in agreement with, what figures of authority express in story-worlds (Baynham, Moita-Lopes, Ribeiro, Wortham and Gadsden) as well as to convey evaluations of their role and the roles of others within present and past experiences (Bell, De Fina).

Other contributors show dialogism, multivocality, participant framework and intertextuality working at a different level: as discourses or ideologies that confront interactants, as underlying voices surrounding their own identity construction and lending meaning to categories, metaphors or images that they use to describe themselves and others and to place themselves in the social world. Interactants evoke Discourses, and confront themselves with them, for example through recourse to shared cultural models (Holland and Skinner 1987) that allow the interpretation of experience, but also evoke the fixity of social roles and relationships.

Shared cultural models constitute preferred scenarios against which people interpret not only narratives and characters, but also the value and significance of terms and category-bound expressions. Thus identities are constructed in discourse through the subtle evoking of contexts that lend meaning to implicit gender and ethnic categorization of self and others (Kiesling, Moita-Lopes). Internalized, typical scenarios set expectations for the behavior and roles of individuals in both private and public spheres, determining certain interpretations about the identities of people occupying certain positions in domains of social interaction that range from restaurants (Lakoff) to schools (Johnson) to hospitals (Bell) and insurance companies (Bastos and Oliveira). And once public figures and processes begin to constitute the frame within which individual behaviors make sense (Schiff and Noy), they can become the basis for the interpretation and communication of highly personal experiences and identities. Processes of categorization also rest on the implicit construction of shared representations about self and others that are the basis for ideologies about race and ethnicity (De Fina). Thus contributors to the volume demonstrate that individual construction of identity is in constant