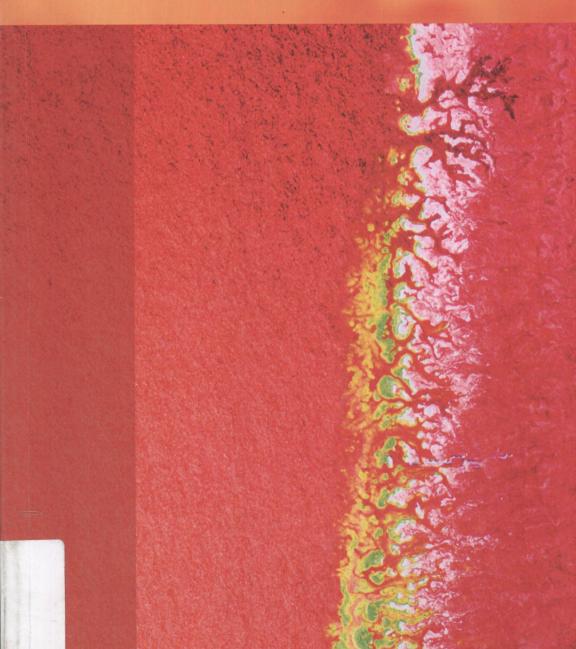# THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION
OF NATIONAL IDENTITY
SECOND EDITION

Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl
and **Karin Liebhart**

The Discursive Construction of National Identity

Second edition

Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia,
Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart

Translated by Angelika Hirsch, Richard Mitten
and J. W. Unger

Edinburgh University Press

The Discursive Construction
of National Identity

Reviews of the first edition

'Ruth Wodak is one of the most important critical discourse analysts and her work has contributed significantly to our understanding of contemporary political discourse. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity* constitutes both an important analysis of the ways that national identity is formed through discourse and also is a major exemplar of Wodak's work. Experts will welcome a new edition of such a well regarded book.'

Professor Michael Billig, Department of Social Sciences,
Loughborough University

'I have cited this work and consider it to be a foundational work in critical discourse and sociohistorical analysis. The book's main contribution is in its ground-breaking, richly textured methodology which can be applied to the ever changing circumstances of Austria, Europe, and indeed the entire world.'

Thomas Ricento, Professor and Chair, English as an
Additional Language, University of Calgary

'Without exaggeration, the re-edition of the book is crucial. As a founding editor of four international journals and as thesis director, I often have to recommend students to read up on discourse and national identity, and there are virtually no books on the topic. This book has become the standard reference, and I was very glad it was translated into English.'

Teun A. van Dijk, Visiting Professor, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona

Preface to the Second, Extended Edition

Ten years after the publication of the first edition of the present book, many of the claims we made in 1999 are still valid. However, we have also observed new, salient developments that deserve our critical attention. This is the reason why we decided to write an additional, eighth chapter in which we describe and assess how the 'story' continues. We were able to compare across almost twenty years commemorative events that show both continuities and discontinuities in the discursive construction of national identity, and particularly in the construction of the Austrian past, present, and future. Due to Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995, the Austrian nation and Austrian identities have had to be repositioned in the transformed political context in many novel and distinctive ways. Related to new forms of nationalism and transnational orientations, national populist parties have been gaining support across Europe, not least in Austria. They have even joined government coalitions in several European states. These parties have challenged and continue to challenge democratic values, and they oppose European Union policies. These tensions between national and supranational identities are the focus of our new chapter.

Picking up three significant socio-political developments and related 'discursive events', we examine changes since 1995 that relate to the construction and transformation of Austrian national identity. We analyse how the official commemorative year 2005 was dealt with in Austria in public and in semi-public spheres (focus group discussions) in 2005 and 2006, and compare the analytical results with our studies on national commemoration in 1995. We look at how Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995 affected its national self-understanding, focusing among other things on Austria's EU presidencies in 1998 and 2006. Furthermore, we analyse the rise of national populism in Austria and its consequences for conceptions of Austrian as well as European identity, particularly concentrating on national populist argumentation. Thus, we hope to further refine and differentiate both our theoretical approach and empirical research in various respects.

We are very grateful to Edinburgh University Press, and specifically to Sarah Edwards, who provided us with the opportunity to publish an extended version of our book. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their supportive comments. Finally, we are extraordinarily grateful to Johnny Unger who translated and edited most of the new chapter.

Vienna and Lancaster, August 2008

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to many people in many different capacities for making this book possible.

First of all, we would like to express our gratitude to two institutions which have supported our work: the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften (IFK) generously financed the research project from which the present book emerged, as well as two workshops where we were able to discuss the preliminary results of our studies with scholars from around the world; the Zentrum für Internationale und Interdisziplinäre Studien of the University of Vienna (ZIIS) was also involved in the organisation of the initial international workshop which provided invaluable feedback at an early stage.

Two colleagues, Dilek Cinar and Bernd Matouschek, were associated with the research project in its initial phase. The many ideas and suggestions they contributed during the study's first year proved stimulating throughout the entire period of research. In addition, it was Bernd Matouschek who, along with Ruth Wodak, developed the original research proposal. At this early stage Richard Mitten and Peter A. Ulram offered valuable comments on earlier drafts of this proposal, from which it benefited enormously.[1] To all these we would like to express our deepest appreciation.

The present volume is a considerably abbreviated version of the German edition, published by Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, in 1998. Maria Kargl and Klaus Hofstätter, two members of the research team and co-authors of the German book, deserve special mention here for their earlier work and their assistance in preparing the German edition.

The original unabridged final report, and the Suhrkamp volume, have both benefited greatly from the criticism and suggestions we received from Michael Agar, Gertraud Benke, Peter A. Bruck, András Kovacs, Lutz Musner, Anton Pelinka and Christoph Reinprecht. We would like gratefully to acknowledge their contributions, while underlining that they bear no responsibility for any remaining deficiences the book might possess.

The translation of the German manuscript book would not have been possible without grants from the Austrian Ministry of Science and Transport (Bundes-

1. Rudi de Cillia directed the project during Ruth Wodak's sabbatical in the autumn of 1995.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

In *The Xenophobe's Guide to the Austrians* (James 1994) author Louis James writes: 'When a Stone Age Austrian popped out of a glacier in Tyrol in 1991, he was claimed by the Italians as one of them. A learned commission established that maybe he was lying just over the border by a metre or two, and a television reporter inquired satirically why they didn't just look at his passport' (1994, p. 11).

The moral of this story is that even after all those years in cold storage, the iceman (Ötzi) suffers from a certain confusion as to his identity, a trait he ostensibly shares with all other Austrians. Of course, this nationalist tug-of-war between Austria and Italy, to which James ironically refers, really tells us nothing about Ötzi's identity, for national(ist) ideas and sentiment did not emerge before the age of modernity, centuries after Ötzi's demise. Still, the attempts by both Austria and Italy to adorn their respective 'national pasts' with a historically highly significant archaeological find reveal a typical strategy, metaphorically described by Rudolf Burger (1996, p. 40) as the 'nationalist dilation of time'. In this view, similar problems of identity seem to beset the English too. Past contingencies (in this case, a casual discovery) are appropriated by the contemporary nation by mythically expanding the nation into a transhistorical, and thus eternal, entity.

In a companion volume, *The Xenophobe's Guide to the English*, Antony Miall writes: [As far as] 'the English are concerned, all of life's greatest problems can be summed up in one word – foreigners'. And he continues: 'English views on foreigners are very simple. The further one travels from the capital in any direction, the more outlandish the people become' (1993, pp. 5–6). It is obvious that the ego-, ethno- and nation-centric view described by Miall with respect to English people is not so much an English peculiarity as a general cross-cultural feature of ethnicist and nationalist patterns of perception of others.

We could go on almost *ad infinitum* with such more or less serious anecdotal remarks about nationality or the alleged mentality of nations. While this can be amusing to a certain extent, we are also aware of how often nationalist attitudes and ethnic stereotypes articulated in discourse accompany or even determine political decision-making, and we note with concern the increase in discriminatory acts and exclusionary practices conducted in the name of nationalism in many parts of Europe.

This book is about the manifold attempts to imagine and construct national identity. Although our study focuses on Austria, it is by no means restricted to it. Many of its insights, especially its theoretical and methodological approach, which was specially developed for this investigation, are equally applicable to other western European states.[1]

Austrian national identity has been exposed to particularly strong challenges in the wake of the opening up of eastern Europe in 1989 and the subsequent geopolitical transformations in Central Europe. Similarly, in the run-up to Austria's referendum on whether or not to join the European Union, the Austrian population was frequently reassured that nothing was going to change and that there was no cause for concern about a possible loss of identity. It is the aim of this book to investigate the tension in Austria's attempts both to maintain and to transform its national identity, a phenomenon that can be observed across Europe.

Two important Austrian anniversaries, both of which were characterised by intensive identity management and increased public self-reflection, prompted this study: the year 1995 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Second Republic, and 1996 was dedicated to the 'Austrian millennium', celebrating the thousand-year anniversary of the first documented occurrence of the country's name. The mention of the word *Ostarrichi* in a 996 Roman document was eagerly taken up as the basis of an Austrian 'myth of origin'.

Our investigation was carried out within the tradition of Critical Linguistics (Wodak 1995, Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Van Dijk 2001), and in particular Critical Discourse Analysis, as it has been developed in a number of previous studies on topics such as postwar Austrian antisemitism (Wodak et al. 1990), Austria's 'coming to terms' with its Nazi past in the context of the commemorative year 1988 (Wodak et al. 1994) and the political and discursive exclusion of Romanian refugees after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Matouschek, Wodak and Januschek 1995). In contrast to many studies carried out within the framework of Critical Linguistics, we do not limit ourselves to theory-building, but place great emphasis on the analysis of our empirical data (cf. Wodak 1996). Our analytical working model integrates both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions (cf. Wodak 1996, Harvey 1996) and combines social science methodologies of data collection and fieldwork with the 'discourse-historical' approach developed by the Vienna School of Discourse Analysis, which in many ways transcends the concerns of traditional sociolinguistics. In turn, our theoretical concepts derive from detailed analysis of our empirical data. We do not, however, regard our findings as conclusive and definitive, as the emergence of new information may always entail the reconsideration and re-evaluation of data (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). However, it is important to state at the outset that our research is grounded in the political and ethical grid of values of Critical Theory.

'Since every search for identity includes differentiating oneself from what one is not,' writes Seyla Benhabib (1996, pp. 3f.):

identity politics is always and necessarily a politics of the creation of difference.

One is a Bosnian Serb to the degree to which one is not a Bosnian Moslem or a Croat. ... What is shocking about these developments, is not the inevitable dialectic of identity/difference that they display but rather the atavistic belief that identities can be maintained and secured only by eliminating difference and otherness. The negotiation of identity/difference ... is the political problem facing democracies on a global scale.

The prime objective of our study, therefore, is to conceptualise and identify the various macrostrategies employed in the construction of national identities and to describe them using a hermeneutic-abductive approach. We understand the concept of identity on which we base our study to be context-dependent and dynamic (cf. Chapter 2). We assume further that the various discursive constructs of national identity are given different shapes according to the context and to the public in which they emerge, all of which can be identified with reference to content, strategies and argumentation patterns, as well as according to how they are expressed in language (linguistic realisation). The publics we investigate are not separate entities, but interrelate in highly complex ways, a fact we have tried to account for, at least at certain points of our study, by including reception analysis (cf. Chapter 7). In order to trace some of these interrelations, what are called 'intertextualities', we look at how different types of discursive practices on one and the same topic interconnect and how individual argumentation patterns are reformulated and recontextualised in different contexts (Bernstein 1996, Fairclough 1995, Iedema 1997, Wodak and Van Leeuwen 1999). Readers might ask why we have included group conversations and qualitative interviews to illustrate such an eminently political topic as the construction of national identities, why we have not instead just analysed political speeches or samples of media discourse. The answer is simple: our concept of 'political' is far broader than that in common usage and not only concentrates on the language of the powerful élites, but also includes discursive acts which, according to Paul Chilton and Christina Schaeffner, 'involve power, or its inverse, resistance' (1997, p. 212) in many different contexts, including non-official and informal ones. To be able to understand the impact of the discourse of the élites, we believe that it is necessary to investigate its reception and recontextualisation in other domains of society, in other words, in the lifeworld (in Habermas's sense). We hope that our study will demonstrate that methods such as focus groups and topic-oriented interviews are excellent tools in Critical Discourse Analysis, which allow us, for example, to observe the processes through which important concepts like 'nation' are being 'co-constructed' during an ongoing discussion.

At this point, we would like to introduce several hypotheses which underlie our analytical framework and to which we will frequently have occasion to recur in the course of our study.

Firstly, following Benedict Anderson (1983, pp. 15f.), we assume that nations are mental constructs, 'imagined communities', which nationalised political subjects perceive as discrete political entities.

Secondly, we assume that national identities, as special forms of social identities,

are produced and reproduced, as well as transformed and dismantled, *discursively*.

Thirdly, we assume 'national identity' to imply a complex of similar conceptions and perceptual schemata, of similar emotional dispositions and attitudes, and of similar behavioural conventions, which bearers of this 'national identity' share collectively and which they have internalised through socialisation (education, politics, the media, sports or everyday practices). This conception of national identity relates to Bourdieu's concept of habitus. In our case, the common *conceptions* shared by Austrians include ideas of a *homo Austriacus*; of a common culture, in the past, present and future; of a distinctive national territory; and of notions of and attitudes towards other national communities and their culture, history, and so on. The shared *emotional dispositions* relate to the attitudes members of a given ingroup have towards other members of that ingroup, as well as those towards members of an outgroup. In our case, disposition would be towards solidarity with one's own group as well as towards excluding the 'others' from this constructed collective.

Fourthly, we assume that the institutional and material social conditions and practices interrelate dialectically with discursive practices. Different social fields of action can, however, conflict with each other; for example, if official political ceremonial discourse attempts to justify, gloss over or obscure discriminatory practices and thus helps to maintain the status quo.

Fifthly, we assume that discursive constructs of nations and national identities – and here we also draw upon research conducted within the field of Cultural Studies (cf. Hall 1996a, 1996b, Martin 1995) – primarily emphasise national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity but largely ignore intra-national differences. In imagining national singularity and homogeneity, members of a national community simultaneously construct the distinctions between themselves and other nations, most notably when the other nationality is believed to exhibit traits similar to those of one's own national community, similar to what Freud called the 'narcissism of small differences' (1982 [1930], p. 243).

Sixthly, we assume that there is – in an essentialist sense – no such thing as *one* national identity. We believe rather that different identities are discursively constructed according to audience, setting, topic and substantive content. National identities are therefore malleable, fragile and, frequently, ambivalent and diffuse. In order to trace the reciprocal relations between the models of identity formulated by the political élites or the media and those forged in 'everyday discourse' (the recontextualisation of élite discourse), we investigate five different sets of data from public, semi-public and private spheres, of which three are represented in detail in this book; for reasons of space the other two are only briefly addressed (cf. Wodak et al. 1998).

We distinguish certain core areas in the discursive construction of national identities at the content-level, i.e. a collective past, a collective present and future, a common culture, a common territory, and a *homo nationalis*. Again, for reasons of space, we have confined ourselves to the discussion of four main content-related areas we feel to be of particular relevance, as they can easily be applied to other countries: the concept of nation, the *homo nationalis* (in our case, the *homo Austriacus*), the construction of a collective past, and 'Europe and Austrian neutrality'.

Finally, we assume that the clear dichotomy between the concepts of *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation*[2] is an idealised abstraction. If *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation* are viewed as mutually exclusive concepts, they cannot adequately account for the national processes of identification in a particular nation-state. Discourses of national identity constructed by residents of any given state will always contain or imply both cultural and political elements. The principal reason to maintain the distinction is to highlight differences in national self-perception within a country – be it between different political or ideological camps or even within one and the same political group.

The above-mentioned assumptions were developed on the basis of a critical survey of the relevant social science and historical literature, and tested on our data. Thematically, this study highlights the general tension between nation-state and globalisation more generally and its effects on the conceptualisation of Austrian identity. Moreover, although Austria has always had close ties with Germany, since 1945 it has attempted more self-consciously to differentiate itself. Finally, Austria has been trying to find its place in the European Union, which it joined in 1995. Its membership in this organisation has led to a reformulation of one of the pillars of Austrian identity – neutrality – within the larger context of European integration.

If, as argued above, many of the theoretical insights gained are applicable to any number of national cultures, it is important to emphasise that for these concepts and tools to be useful, they must take careful note of the historical and cultural features specific to the nation being investigated. Accordingly, we would like to sketch here some of the features that are unique to the Austrian case we have studied.

At the intersection between identity and history, both the 'Austro-fascist' period (1934–8) and the National Socialist era (1938–45) have shaped the 'collective memory' of the Austrian nation, each in its own specific way (cf. Botz and Sprengnagel 1994). In Austria, the 'victim thesis', which defines Austria as having been the first victim of Nazi Germany, occupied a central place in the construction of Austrian identity up to 1986, the year of the Waldheim affair (cf. Wodak et al. 1990, 1994, Mitten 1992). Since the celebrations commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi occupation and the 'November Pogrom' (*Reichskristallnacht*) in 1938, the pendent 'perpetrator thesis' has increased in significance. One consequence of this has been a rewriting of recent Austrian history and the emergence of new patterns of argumentation in public discourse. The denial of Austria's participation in Nazi crimes was the principal reason for its particularly strong differentiation from Germany, which has taken an altogether different course in dealing with its Nazi past (Stern 1991). However, a closer inspection reveals that the relationship between Austria and Germany has remained rather ambivalent, and that the autonomy of Austrian identity with respect to the 'German question' has proved to be fragile. This is particularly evident in the evaluation of German as a national language in Austria. Although the German language is crucial in the construction of Austrian identity – even for members of linguistic minorities whose native languages do not have equal status – the primary linguistic level of identification of German-speaking Austrians is the dialect, which results in a low awareness of an independent

(Austrian) standard variety of German (de Cillia 1996, 1998a). For reasons of space, these dimensions of the Austrian identity could not be considered in this book; they are, however, dealt with extensively in the German edition.

Similarly, two case studies dealing with Austria's decision to join the European Union – an analysis of the advertising campaigns preceding the 1994 referendum on membership of the EU, and an analysis of the media coverage of 'security policy and neutrality' in Austrian daily newspapers immediately after the referendum – could not be included here. The most salient findings of these two case studies are, however, briefly summarised in the concluding chapter.

Taking the current scholarly literature as a point of departure, Chapter 3 explores the dimensions of Austrian national identity and introduces the thematic blocks of Austrian identity which are central to our study. The subsequent three chapters test the analytical tools we have developed and the assumptions outlined above by examining three case studies of the construction of Austrian national identity in different publics. Chapter 4 analyses political speeches commemorating the foundation of the Second Republic during the celebrations in April and May 1995; Chapter 5 investigates semi-public discourse on the basis of seven focus groups in different Austrian provinces; and Chapter 6 is based on twenty-four extensive topic-oriented 'deep' interviews.

The concluding chapter presents what in our view are the most important theoretical and methodological findings of our study, which, leaving aside certain Austrian particularities, can also be fruitfully applied in the investigation of other western European nation-states. What has emerged in the course of this study is that strictly disjunctive and static concepts such as *Staatsnation* or *Kulturnation* have proven analytically insufficient. Moreover, a nuanced discourse-analytical apparatus which systematically combines contents, strategies and linguistic realisations is much more valuable than the usual exclusively quantitative procedures of social science. Finally, we would like to point out that the purpose of this study is not to provide definitive answers, but to open up and enrich discussion in a field which holds great potential for future work.

NOTES

1. The present book is an abbreviated English version of Ruth Wodak, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, Karin Liebhart, Klaus Hofstätter and Maria Kargl, *Zur diskursiven Konstruktion nationaler Identität*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998. Chapter 8 was added in 2009.
2. See Chapter 2.2.6.1. for a discussion of these concepts. The use of the terms 'discourse', 'discourses', 'discursive practices' and 'texts' is extensively discussed in Chapter 2.1 and in Wodak 1996 as well as in Wodak and Reisigl 1999.

Chapter 2

The Discursive Construction of National Identity

2.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DISCOURSE AS SOCIAL PRACTICE[1]

Since the 1970s, the term 'discourse' has become common currency in an everyday research sense in a variety of humanities and social science disciplines, including the applied branches of linguistics. Because of the wide-ranging use of this term, a variety of meanings have been attributed to it (see Ehlich 1993, p. 145, and Ehlich 1994), which has led to considerable semantic fuzziness and terminological flexibility. In the following we will briefly describe the concept of discourse as it is currently employed in the context of the research activities carried out at the University of Vienna, which have also informed the present investigation, and place this usage within the international research context (for an overview of research on discourse analysis in Austria, see Menz 1994).

The paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis is not homogeneous. The British variety, represented by such figures as Gunther Kress, Robert Hodge, Roger Fowler, Norman Fairclough and Theo Van Leeuwen, has drawn upon Foucault's theory of discourse and, in its linguistic dimension, is closely associated with the systemic linguistic theory formulated by William Firth and M. A. K. Halliday, as well as with Halliday's social semiotics. The cognitive-oriented approach of Dutch Critical Discourse Analysis, exemplified by the work of Teun van Dijk, uses a triadic model to show how personal and social cognition mediates between social structures and discourse structures. German Critical Discourse Analysis, as practised by Utz Maas, Siegfried Jäger and Jürgen Link, has been influenced even more strongly by Foucault's concept of discourse than has the British.

The Vienna School of Discourse Analysis, which also has roots in Bernstein's sociolinguistic approach, situates itself within Critical Discourse Analysis (cf. among others Fairclough and Wodak 1997, Fairclough 1995, Wodak 1995, Wodak 1996, *Discourse & Society* 4/2/1993) as well as within the philosophical and sociological tradition of Critical Theory. In the analysis of historical and political topics and texts, the historical dimension of discursive acts is considered in two ways. Firstly, the discourse-historical approach always attempts to integrate as much available information as possible on the historical background and the original historical sources in

which discursive 'events' are embedded. Secondly, a number of investigations (Wodak et al. 1990, Wodak et al. 1994, Matouschek, Wodak and Januschek 1995) have traced the diachronic change, which particular types of discourse undergo during a specified period of time.

Critical Discourse Analysis centres on authentic everyday communication in institutional, media, political or other locations rather than on sample sentences or sample texts constructed in linguists' minds. Critical Discourse Analysis regards both written and spoken 'discourse' as a form of social practice (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). It assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive acts and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded: the situational, institutional and social contexts shape and affect discourse, and, in turn, discourses influence social and political reality. In other words, discourse constitutes social practice and is at the same time constituted by it.

Through discourses, social actors constitute objects of knowledge, situations and social roles as well as identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups and those who interact with them. Furthermore, discursive acts are socially constitutive in a variety of ways. Firstly, they are largely responsible for the genesis, production and construction of particular social conditions. Secondly, they can contribute to the restoration, legitimation or relativisation of a social status quo (ante). Thirdly, discursive acts are employed to maintain and reproduce the status quo. Fourthly, discursive practice may be effective in transforming, dismantling or even destroying the status quo. In view of these social macrofunctions, we distinguish in this book between constructive, perpetuating and/or justifying discursive strategies as well as strategies of transformation and dismantlement or disparagement (cf. section 2.3.3.2 and table 2.5).

On a social level, through linguistic representation in various dialogic contexts, discursive practices may influence the formation of groups and serve to establish or conceal relations of power and dominance between interactants, between social groups and classes, between men and women and between national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political, cultural and subcultural majorities and minorities. The aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use. In contrast to other types of discourse and conversation analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis does not pretend to be able to assume an objective, socially neutral analytical stance. Indeed, practitioners of Critical Discourse Analysis believe that such ostensible political indifference ultimately assists in maintaining an unjust status quo. Critical Discourse Analysis, which is committed to an emancipatory, socially critical approach, allies itself with those who suffer political and social injustice. Its aim is therefore to intervene discursively in given social and political practices. In this book, this 'intervention' is primarily analytical, in contrast to previous, more practically oriented studies on communication in various institutional contexts carried out by researchers in Vienna. The earlier work aimed, among other things, to break down language barriers in hospitals, schools, courts, public authorities and the media. In