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## Racism and the analysis of cultural resources in interviews

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## **Racism and the Analysis of Cultural Resources in Interviews**

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My goal in this chapter is to illustrate a style of discourse analysis focusing on the cultural resources constituting racist ideological practices. I am interested in the way people tell stories, how they organise their versions of events and how they build identities for themselves and others as they speak. I am also interested in how powerful majority groups become constructed in discourse and how the members of those groups justify their position and how they make sense of their history and current actions in relation to their constructions of disadvantaged minority groups. In more general terms, my focus is on what Rosie Braidotti has called “the traffic jam of meanings ... which create that form of pollution known as common sense” (19??, p. 160). Meaning coagulates in a culture and becomes temporarily stuck or jammed. The study of ideological practices involves investigating what these sticking points look like and how they occur along with the social and political consequences.

As noted in the Introduction, the chapters in this volume have a common focus – transcripts from three interviews that I conducted in the 1980s and which form part of a larger corpus of over 80 interviews with white New Zealanders (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Since the data were taken from my own research project, I have a different relationship to it than the other contributors to this volume who have come to the re-transcribed interviews fresh. I will return to the advantages and pitfalls of this ‘insider’ knowledge in the last section of the chapter but one difference is that in illustrating my approach to the analysis of discourse I can draw on the history of the project and the data corpus as a whole.

My approach to the analysis of interview transcripts and other textual material falls within the general rubric of discursive psychology (Billig, 1987; Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Gillett and Harre, 1994; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Discursive psychology is a broad church, however (see Wetherell et al., 2001a for a description). It encompasses work on psychological topics and issues influenced by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, by the Bakhtin/Volosinov writings, Wittgenstein's language philosophy and Foucault's notions of discourse, power and subjectivity, among other sources. Other chapters in this volume from discursive psychologists (see Edwards and Antaki) develop a finer-grain mode of analysis more attentive to the methodological prescriptions of conversation analysis. But just how attentive the analyst should be to these prescriptions is a matter of debate in the field (see Billig, 1999a; Schegloff, 1997; 1999a; Wetherell, 1998). Like Edwards and Antaki, my approach aims to focus on people's situated activities in talk but I also try to locate the forms of making sense evident in talk within more global accounts of their place in the broader social and cultural context. To illustrate this approach, I will first describe in more detail the analytic assumptions and procedures behind this work. I will then outline a specimen analysis and will go on to discuss some of the methodological and theoretical issues involved in combining in this way the study of ‘small discourse’ (conversations in interviews) with conclusions about ‘big discourses’.

### **Analytic Assumptions**

What can be said about racism in a society like New Zealand from the analysis of interviews with members of the majority group white (Pakeha) New Zealanders? Conventionally, one might answer that such interviews can tell us about the cognitive states and the patterns of thought of those with racist attitudes. Such interviews might also provide us with descriptions about how things were in this society. The political climate in New Zealand has shifted considerably since the 1980s. But perhaps the interviews might be informative nonetheless about the way things used to be as people tell us about policy developments and discuss problem areas and points of dispute between the two main ethnic groups? These are reasonable expectations. Discourse analysis, however, explodes these comfortable assumptions of the social scientist and particularly the social psychologist.

If they share little else, discourse analysts share their scepticism about simple reference or correspondence models of language - the notion that language neutrally describes a world of entities whether those be external (policy developments, the state of play between groups) or internal entities (thoughts, attitudes and mental states). It is argued that the state of play, policies, groups, identities and subjectivities are instead constituted as the kinds of things they are as they are formulated in discourse. The criteria for truth (what counts as correct description) are negotiated as humans make meaning, within language games and epistemic regimes and, often, locally and indexically in interaction, rather than guaranteed by access to the independent properties of a single external reality.

Following this logic, racism is not first a state of mind and then a mode of description of others. It is a psychology (internal monologue/dialogues and modes of representing) that emerges in relation to public discourse and widely shared cultural resources. Similarly, inequality is not first a fact of nature and then described in talk. Discourse is intimately involved in the construction and maintenance of inequality. Inequality is constructed and maintained when enough discursive resources can be mobilised to make colonial practices of land acquisition, for instance, legal, natural and normal and 'the way we do things'. Or, to give another example, when affirmative action policies are successfully opposed through the meritocratic reasoning that 'everybody should be treated the same'. Less easily for the analyst, the definition of racism becomes a discursive practice also. To say that a mode of representing is racist is to engage in an argument. It is to make an interpretation. These I think are useful arguments for social scientists to get involved in but they are discursive acts nonetheless.

So in terms of these new formulations, characteristic of social scientific research after the 'discursive turn', what can interviews tell us? I think they can tell us crucial things about segments of a society's conversations with itself, about the ways in which the world is typically legitimated, organised and justified. These are often efficacious forms of making sense if simply because any policy is formed in relation to and has to take account of public opinion. Interviews tell us about the cultural resources people have available for telling their patch of the world. This is particularly so when the corpus of interviews is relatively large, there is a lot of homogeneity and repetition and clear patterns emerge. Indeed in the corpus of interviews from which the three studied in this volume were selected the same kind of constructions were very frequently repeated. In this sense the social (the collective voices of culture) were not outside but permeated the individual voice of the interview. The interview is a highly specific social production but it also draws on routine and highly consensual (cultural/normative) resources that carry beyond the immediate local context connecting local talk in with discursive history. The speaker weaves the available threads and voices differently on different occasions. They are worked up as an appropriate and effective turn in a conversation according to what is going on. But speakers do not invent these resources each time - the argumentative fabric of society is continually shaping and transforming but for recognisable periods it is the same kind of cloth. Such resources are both independent of local talk in a limited sense and need to be continually instantiated through that talk.

In effect, analysis proceeds through two related movements. One is the identification and analysis of pattern (cultural resources) while the other is theorising and explaining this pattern. And in developing an explanation of the broader social organisation of discourse, the analyst can draw on some familiar social scientific debates and concepts. Indeed, this kind of study of discursive practices was previously subsumed under studies of ideology and the history of ideas. The definition of ideology I have used, however, for my work is a particular one (see Wetherell and Potter, 1992, Chapter 3). It is a view of ideology as practical discursive action linked to power. This is a non-cognitive account (Billig et al., 1988). Ideology is not seen as defined through specific ideas or specific contents or through the categories or logic of thought. It is defined through a reading of the practical effects of the mobilisation of discourse. This is also a view of ideology that does not contrast false beliefs with, for instance, scientific truth. Following Foucault (although he preferred not to use the term ideology) the interest is in how the effect of truth is created in discourse and in how certain discursive mobilisations become powerful - so powerful they are the orthodoxy, almost entirely persuasive, that beyond which we cannot think. To describe a piece of discourse as ideological, therefore, is an interpretative act; it is a claim about the power of talk and its effects. Not every piece of talk needs to be interpreted in this way.

## Accounts of Social Influence

If I try now to make this approach to analysis more concrete through introducing one example taken from the broader project. In the various analyses we conducted of our corpus of interviews including the three that provide a common focus for this book (Potter and Wetherell, 1988; 1989; Wetherell and Potter, 1989; 1992), one theme was the ways in which our participants formulated various social processes. I am interested in how participants *talk about* society rather than the veracity or validity of these accounts of society. Just as people often act as lay psychologists they also often act as lay sociologists and as lay social theorists. Here I am taking constructions of social life and social relations in the interviews as a topic rather than as a resource following standard ethnomethodological procedure. How do people construct accounts of social processes and why were these accounts organised in the ways they were? A particular interest was in formulations of *social influence* and *social conflict*. How did the Pakeha people interviewed make sense of Maori protest? How did they formulate the influence process? What interpretative resources did they use to present and package Maori protest movements? And, then from a broader ideological standpoint, how do those resources function to protect Pakeha interests and reflect the playing out of colonial history?

My units of analysis were patterns across the whole corpus of eighty or so interviews rather than one interview or one section of an interview. The general procedure was to extract material that I saw as relevant to a particular topic such as, for example, accounts or descriptions of protest and protestors. And with a data file of this kind (say around 60 instances each consisting of several turns of talk before a topic change would occur) I would then look for common and shared ways of making sense across those instances - the interpretative resources. Given the research aims, commonality or pervasiveness was an important criterion for validity. I was looking for not the novel or idiosyncratic but for the routine arguments and standard rhetoric.

To try and illustrate the analytic procedures in more detail I want to focus now on three extracts, one from each of the three interviews used in this book. These extracts were all part of the same large original data file.

### Extract One - Interview No. 2

- MR: E:hm (0.2) I think this:- an' that's the biggest division (1.0) a:nd (0,4) a lot of the (.) racial (0.4) prejudice I-
- I: [ (Uh huh)
- MR: I think is brought on you know by the Eva Rickards that a
- I: Yes (0.4) mm mhm
- I: [
- MR: that stand up=I:='ve been out (.) time after time and played golf at- at Raglan
- I: [ Raglan
- I: Yes yeah
- MR: And (0.2) eh playing on the golf course there I've played with Maori
- I: Mm mhm
- MR: people and they said "Oh ya'know this the- this is the old burial- burial ground,=Hi'ya Roger" ya'know an'
- I: Yes
- MR: and'a ya'know "nobody minds you playing golf?" an' I'll say "No no no (.) It's fine"
- I: [ Yes
- MR: And it takes Eva Rickard to c(h)ome down from somewhere else
- I: [ ((laugh))
- I: Yeah
- MR: to ah to stir the whole bloomin pot (1.0) and ehm ya'know
- I: [ ( ) Mm mhm
- MR: then the government gets in and'a

I: Yeah  
 MR: buys the land (o:r well I don't know) they- they sorted it all out an given the- given them all a brand new ehm golf  
 I: [ Yes  
 MR: course there an' I haven't been down an' tried the new one  
 I: [ ((laughs)) yeah  
 (1.0)  
 I: Yes  
 (0.2)

**Extract Two - Interview No. 44**

I: >One of the-< The other thing that (.) I'm interested is the (0.4) multiculturalism and (0.6) what people think about sort of race relations (0.4) scene. >Sort of< There's been quite a change in that over the six years I've been away, There's a much greater emphasis now on ehm Maori culture and the use of the Maori language (1.0) an' so on. (0.6) Do you think in general that's been (0.4) uh constructive or (1.4) what do you feel about the way things are going (0.2) on that front?  
 (2.0)  
 FR: I think they'll end up having Maori w:ars if they carry on the way they have I mean no it'll be a Pakeha war  
 I: [ ((laugh))  
 I: Yes  
 FR: U::hm (1.6) they're ma:king New Zealand a racist cu- country uhm but ya'know you usually feel (.) think that racism is uhm (1.4) putting th- putting (.) the darker people down  
 I: [ Yes  
 FR: but really they're doing it (.) the other way around  
 I: [ ( )  
 I: A sort of reverse racism  
 I: [ [ I feel yes  
 FR: I feel yes  
 I: Yeah  
 FR: U:hm (1.4) everything (0.6) seems to be to help (0.2) the Maori people, (1.0) a::nd ya'know (0.4) I think (1.4) at the moment sort of (0.6) the Europeans are sort of (0.4) They're just sort of watching and putting up with it  
 I: [ Yeah  
 I: Yeah  
 FR: But (.) they'll only go so fa:r  
 I: Right yeah  
 FR: U:hm (1.0) tsk (1.0) ya'know we- we've got (.) Maori friends out he:re uhm who we have into the house so yu- ya'know they're friends  
 (0.6)  
 FR: U:hm (2.0) but when things happen an' they- they suddenly say "Oh they're going to make (.) M- Maori language compulsory"  
 I: Yeah (.) yeah  
 FR: U:hm (0.4) but that is an- antagonizing  
 I: Yeah  
 FR: And- (1.4) the Maori friends that we::'ve got (1.0) they don't agree with it  
 I: Yes (.) yeah  
 FR: U::hm (0.2) okay yu- you've got extrmemists there too  
 I: [ Mm mhm  
 FR: the ones who feel that ya'know that everyone should learn it but u:hm (2.0) I think the average Maori sort of perhaps is worried too

I: Yeah So there's a sort of split in the Maori community  
 FR: [ Yes  
 (0.6)  
 I: between the: yeah (.) yeah  
 (2.0)  
 I: Yes  
 (1.0)

**Extract Three - Interview No. 16**

I: Yea:h it's a difficult problem isn't it? .hh ehm (.) Finally (.) the last section of questions (1.0) is about'em (0.6) New Zealand as a multicultural society (.) Do you think there's still differences between Maori and Pakeha people in terms of temperament and interests (0.6) or are we really (.) o:ne- (0.4) one nation, one people (2.2)  
 MR: There is a lot of difference (1.0) uhm New Zealand is basically a whi:te (1.0)  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: a white society a::nd (1.0) some of the Maoris fit in  
 I: Mm mhm (1.6)  
 MR: And the ones- some of the ones in the cities fit in the ones in the country (1.6) are quite happy where they are  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: U::hm (2.6) so probly- (they don't/it may not) really bother them I don't really know.  
 I: Yeah  
 MR: But then you've got the misfits that don't fit in.  
 I: Yeah  
 MR: A::nd (0.6) and you've got- (1.4) Like (0.4) with this u:hm (2.0) Treaty of Waitangi thing  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: You've got a minority.  
 I: Yes  
 MR: that expect the- expect more  
 I: Mm mhm (0.6)  
 MR: A:::nd if you see that going to its full extent it will eventually go to an underground terrorist organisation.  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: That- because they don't get the:ir way >although probly with the Labour Party they will get their way<  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: A::nd (1.4) they will eventually start striking back an' blowin' things up  
 I: Yeah (0.6)  
 MR: We've got Joe- ( )- (we've/with) Joe Hawke at Bastion Point  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: When le:aders of the tribe  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: turned round an accepted the government's  
 I: Yeah (0.2)  
 MR: thing. >They accepted the land the government gave them an' two hundred thousand dollars compensation.<  
 I: Mm mhm  
 MR: Then Joe Hawke said "No we don't agree" He's not even recognized by the elders of the tribe.  
 I: Yeah  
 MR: Yet he's meeting with the- (0.4) with the Labour Party's lan- Lands Minister  
 I: Mm mhm  
 I: [

MR: And they're gonna work something out  
 I: Yeah  
 (0.4)  
 MR: Yeah sure they'll work something out it's just (his) pressure group  
 I: Yes (0.2) mm mhm  
 MR: And that's (0.4) whe:re a lot of Labour Party votes come from  
 I: Mm  
 MR: is from the Maoris and the Islanders  
 I: Yeah  
 (0.8)  
 MR: Because that's probly what they're told to vote so they vote it  
 I: Yes  
 MR: They probly don't understand  
 I: Ye:s  
 (1.4)

In the case of Extracts Two and Three, this is part of the interviewees' response to my first question about Maori/Pakeha relations. In Extract Two, the female respondent has been asked what she thinks about the greater emphasis now on Maori culture. While the male respondent in Extract Three has been asked whether there are still differences between Maori and Pakeha or whether they could now be described as one nation or one people. Extract One taken from Interview No. 2 comes at a different point in the interview, some way in on the set of questions on race relations. This is part of the male respondent's reply to a question about whether there is racial prejudice in New Zealand and he develops a narrative about a particular land dispute at Raglan (a small New Zealand town) - over the ownership of a golf course built on a Maori burial ground. In this case an action group led by Eva Rickard successfully campaigned for the return of the land. The male respondent, in a very common move, displaces the accusation of prejudice, and projects it outwards. Here prejudice is not so much a property of Pakeha. It is something that is caused by Maori activists.

The features that hold these extracts together and make them part of the same data file (although they do other things too and would also have been included in other topic files) is that each contains a formulation or account of Maori people defined as protestors or activists. These extracts all include accounts or versions of Maori demands for change. In common with the other instances in the same file, they contain an attempt to *discredit* movements for change and Maori people's attempts to obtain redress for land confiscation, for instance, or to introduce Maori language and culture in schools.

One of the things that interested me, then, was how the discrediting was done and the shared interpretative resources it seems to assume. What is taken for granted here? What counts as a good enough argument, as a telling point, as having done enough to establish or make one's claim, what kinds of appeals will do this? What is it sufficient to say to bring off a discrediting and what assumptions organise the interpretative resources people draw on? What seems to be at stake in each of these extracts is the construction of an impression of illegitimacy. There were a number of highly routine ways for doing this. I want to discuss here just two methods and some of their implications.

First, to develop their discrediting, the respondents in Extracts One to Three construct, in a condensed fashion, a social landscape populated with characters and social actors. In particular, a distinction is made between two kinds of Maori people. On the one hand there are what tend to be constructed as 'average', 'normal', 'representative' or 'majority' Maori and on the other side there are 'extremist', 'minority' and 'stirring' Maori. (The term 'stirring' has a number of connotations. In the New Zealand language community it became synonymous with 'protesting' - the very commonly repeated trope was protestors are people who 'stir for the sake of it'.) The male respondent in Extract One, for instance, makes a distinction between activists such as the Eva Rickards who stand up, and the Maori people he plays golf with, who are presumably local and thus ratified in comparison with Eva Rickard who comes from 'somewhere else'. The female respondent in Extract Two talks about 'average Maori' who like her are worried at the actions of extremists. While the male respondent in Extract Three makes a distinction between Maori who form a 'pressure group' and the 'elders of the tribe'.

Through the construction of these two categories, those Maori campaigning for change are presented as non-organic and as unrepresentative. They become represented as an oddity or extrusion from the main body of Maori and thus as hearably illegitimate. The speakers in Extracts One and Two could also be read as doing a bit of credentialling here. In other words, they are reinforcing their expertise as people who know about these things because they are in touch with majority Maori opinion. The male respondent in Extract One constructs some reported speech from Maori he knows and plays golf with to validate his perspective, while the female respondent in Extract Two constructs average Maori as also friends, people you have into the house.

Dualisms and binaries such as the average versus the extremist, the minority versus the majority, the moderate, normal and local versus the deviant agitator from outside, set up or depend upon a shared lay theory of what counts as proper and improper social influence. Proper influence is reasonable, rational, majority-based, asocial, unmotivated, factual, normal, moderate and practical. While improper influence is emotional, not authentic as a consequence, motivated, immoderate, and minority-based.

The identification of moderation is particularly interesting. As Michael Billig (1982) has pointed out, one peculiarity of moderate political positions is that their moderation can only be defined and identified through contrasts with extreme positions. Moderation is not simply there to be discovered. It has to be constructed through the binary. Why does moderation, however, acquire this rhetorical value? I have argued elsewhere (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, Chapter Six) that answering this question involves exploring the broader recognisable discourses that constitute liberalism and capitalism, modernity and Enlightenment politics. I also argue that these very same resources can be shown to be at work in nearly every professional academic social psychology of social influence. But that is a story for another day.

The second common move I wanted to note is related to this construction of proper and improper influence processes and influence agents. One other preferred way for the sample as a whole to establish illegitimacy was to construct a sense of suddenness, an out of the blueness, a sense of coming from nowhere. The female respondent in Extract Two, for instance, talks about an undifferentiated 'they' who 'suddenly' say they are going to make Maori language compulsory. While the male respondent in Extract One stresses the normality and everydayness of playing golf at Raglan - he says he has been out on the golf course time after time. In Extract Three, similarly, Joe Hawke's actions at Bastion Point are presented without context as an unexpected and inexplicable intervention.

What I find significant in accounts like these is who is seen as active and as powerful and the way in which the post-colonial activities and power of Pakeha people are made obscure. These extracts depend on what you could call a 'consensus' rather 'conflict' construction of society. What is being taken for granted here is the solidity of the status quo. Let me say a bit more about what I am getting at. Typically, across the sample, the majority were constructed directly or by implication as placid and passive, going about their everyday business, being normal, peaceful and quiescent, and as largely invisible, not social actors but reactive. In contrast Maori people and others seeking change became highly visible, the active irritants on the social body. It is they who initiated friction, division and disruption and who thus disturbed what is constructed as the harmonious resting state of New Zealand society. The notion of 'stirring' or 'stirring the whole blooming pot' in Extract One also conveys the flavour of this sense of disturbance from outside on a quiet mass.

As a consequence, the 'ordinary majority' being constructed here can seem rather weightless and powerless - all the power and energy appears to be elsewhere. Weight comes, however, from the ascriptions of normativeness, continuity, stability, cohesion and orderliness. Maori groups thus become like the bee that stings the elephant, the elephant may be slow to rouse and not unduly bothered but remains full of latent power which is not applied or exerted. The female respondent in Extract Two constructs, for example, Pakeha people as watching and putting up with it, she says, but only being prepared to go so far. This is a wonderfully efficient rhetoric in terms of obscuring power relations - Pakeha New Zealanders become inactive, doing nothing out of the ordinary, legitimate and invisible while Maori groups become visible, active and simultaneously deviant and illegitimate. Their behaviour becomes uncaused and anomalous. The discursive effect is similar to the one Reicher (1987) notes for theories of crowds - the social context is surrounding such action (Maori protest) is magically stripped away. The other social groups involved and the history of

conflict disappear. While the actions of those one disagrees with become meaningless, frenzied and inexplicable.

### **Some Objections**

With this brief example, I have tried to indicate how a discourse analysis of the cultural and ideological resources people have available for making sense of a charged political situation might proceed. My interest has been in the transcripts as examples of racist discourse, that is, in how the discourse of the white New Zealanders interviewed sustains and legitimates social inequalities and the injustices originating from colonialism. I assumed that to properly understand any one extract, it must be placed within the broader discursive context. I also assumed that part of the analyst's task is to develop theories and concepts for explaining that broader context and the notion of ideology has been one such theory.

Few other chapters in this volume, however, share this focus or these aims (although see Buttyn and Verkuyten). Most are concerned with the interviews in themselves and with 'internal' features of the talk rather than the wider discursive pattern. This is for good reasons. It is difficult to provide an analysis that goes beyond the immediate data if you are unfamiliar with the broader social and historical context of New Zealand/Aotearoa. Or unless you are have a good working knowledge (either explicitly or more tacitly) of the representational patterns found in similar discursive contexts where race is the topic. But there is also another, less contingent, reason why some discourse analysts stick as closely as possible to the text. For many analysts, this is a core epistemological and methodological principle. These principles have been extensively discussed in recent years (Billig, 1999a and b; Schegloff, 1998; 1999a and b; Weatherall, 2000; Wetherell, 1998 and see Wetherell, 2001b, for an overview), and in this section of the chapter I want to take up this debate. I want to review the kind of objections that have been made to the mode of discourse analysis I am advocating.

The conversation analyst Emmanuel Schegloff (1991; 1992; 1997) has argued that analysis should only be concerned with the activities found in the stretch of talk in the interviews in front of us and with the participant orientations these activities reveal. In his view this is the only analytic focus that can be justified, and this would be the first main objection. Schegloff suggests that analysts should not impose their own interpretations or their own frame of reference on the data. The participants have already interpreted the events of consequence for them and the analyst's task is simply to show how this has been done as part of the study of the regular ways in which people organise their talk. At the most extreme, these principles would suggest that contextual factors are only relevant and should only mentioned by the analyst when they are demonstrably relevant to the participants. An analyst, for example, should bracket or put to one side their knowledge that in an interaction, one speaker is a child and the other speaker is an adult, unless is some visible way this knowledge is relevant to the speakers themselves. Speakers might make it relevant through direct reference or it might be made relevant because the sequencing and organisation of the turn taking and other conversational features confirm that one or both of the participants are orienting to this knowledge when designing their responses. Without those signs of relevance, in Schegloff's view, these participant statuses must be outside the frame for the analyst and cannot be used as an explanatory resource.

From this general perspective, my form of analysis or any analyses that study 'racist discourse' risk three basic mistakes. First, analyses that work across large samples and reach general conclusions about the patterning of racist discourse in a community are in danger of ignoring the specificity of the local and immediate discursive contexts. These analyses involve working at quite a high level of abstractness and generality. Prevalent constructions and versions are summarised with some attention to how they are typically organised in rhetorical activities such as 'discrediting' but they are not studied in terms of the specific conversational activities evident on each occasion of use.

Second, such analyses seem to risk making a 'category error'. I noted earlier that discourse analysts share in common their scepticism about correspondence theories of meaning. Discourse is not analysed referentially (as an accurate or inaccurate description of the world) but as a form of social action. Interviews, for instance, are analysed as joint productions or constructions of a meaningful social world. The discourse analyst is interested in the process of production or

construction and not in verifying whether any specific description or account the participants offer is true or false. This stance assumes a particular theory of language and action and it also offers a consistent and coherent epistemological procedure. Critical analysis seems to depart from this consistent procedure, however. When we describe discourse as racist and talk about colonisation, for instance, or 'powerful majority groups' and 'disadvantaged minority groups' are we drawing upon social phenomena outside discourse? Is this a category error in the sense that we have shifted by stealth from a constructionist to a realist or referential theory of meaning? Can discourse analysts only be consistent with their constructionist meta-theory if they stick with just what is demonstrably relevant to participants?

Finally, the form of analysis I am advocating seems to risk 'knowing better than the participants'. Indeed ideological analysis (as defined earlier) or any form of 'critical' discursive analysis involves an *evaluation* of discourse. It puts that discourse in a broader context. This ideological critique is not intended to be 'ad hominem'. It is directed at the broader political climate, the organisation of society and the discursive resources available to its members not at the individual speaker. It is a political rather than a psychological critique. For Schegloff, however, this violates the notion that the role of the analyst is simply to study how the world has already been interpreted. He suggests that to offer a critique is to engage in 'analytic imperialism'. It is to privilege the interpretations of the analyst above those of the participants and who is to say that analysts know best especially if their interpretations are no longer grounded in the actual back and forth of the data?

### Some Responses

I have described these various objections at length since they are so central to the conduct of discourse analysis and explain a great deal about the topics, foci and organisation of many of the subsequent chapters in this volume. In response I want to argue that these prescriptions about what analysts can say about interview data rely on a misleading conception of context and discourse (see Wetherell, 1998, for a more elaborated account). My approach like those of many other discourse analysts (particularly those influenced by post-structuralism) sees productive and constructive discursive processes as extending way beyond the bounds of the activities in the immediate conversation. The constructive process emerges historically. Past and current collective negotiations organise the spaces (physical, institutional and symbolic) in which conversations take place, for example, as well as the ways in which people and events can be represented within them. As Michael Shapiro notes,

Intelligible exchanges are always situated. ... the context-meaning relation subsumes a complex history of struggle in which one or more ways of establishing contexts and their related utterances has vanquished other competing possibilities. (1992, p.38)

Indeed, the complete *absence* of certain possible constructions of Maori/Pakeha relations in our corpus of discourse is as revealing as the constructions that dominate and are most taken for granted.

The insistence found in Schegloff's work, in conversation analysis and in some ethnomethodological research on focusing only on the activities evident in the talk under investigation rests in part I believe on a mistaken theory of discourse and context and an unsustainable distinction between 'talk' and 'society beyond the talk'. It suggests that the discursive can be easily distinguished from the extra-discursive and broadly these are marked by the boundaries artificially created by the analyst around an extract isolated for study. Thus some context is relevant and some distal contexts outside the talk are beyond discourse. As a sociology, this assumes a constructed world of conversations, interviews, talk of all kinds where meanings are jointly produced and a world outside conversation of real objects (roles, groups, physical environments) with a different kind of status. An important consequence of Foucault's work, however, has been to explode any simple categorisation of the real and the constructed. Foucault's work draws attention to how every social practice (even the most obviously 'material') is also a discursive practice. He suggests a much broader definition of discourse as a consequence as the making of meanings in general. Adopting this reasoning, Laclau and Mouffe (1987), for example, argue for a conceptualisation of all social practices as comprising a vast, inter-linked,

argumentative cloth. And, indeed, when we locate particular bits of discourse from white New Zealanders in the context of colonisation, for example, we can see how threads woven through colonial history are worked afresh. At its most extensive we are linking the present instance to a continuous and historically changing constructive process that has involved huge movements of people and radical changes to landscapes.

I am suggesting therefore that if we make the kinds of connections that are central to the type of analysis I proposed earlier, then no epistemological shift is required. There is no appeal here 'beyond discourse'. I am also suggesting that if we take this broader perspective we can see how interview talk can be generalised beyond its immediate occasioned activities. When over a large corpus of data the same kinds of constructions are repeated it becomes apparent, as noted earlier, how the social (collective practices) are not outside but infuse the individual voice of the interview. Interview talk is in no sense self-contained. The interview is a highly specific discursive genre but it also often rehearses routine, repetitive and highly consensual (cultural/normative) resources that carry beyond the immediate local context connecting talk in with discursive history. Speakers do not invent these resources each time - the argumentative fabric of society is continually shaping and transforming but for recognisable periods it is the same kind of cloth. Such resources are both independent of local talk in a limited sense and need to be continually instantiated through that talk.

Part of what is attractive about the conversation analytic stance is that it offers a clear approach to validating discourse analyses (through pointing to where things happen in the transcript). If we take a broader approach and locate specific instances in the wider social discursive context, methods of justification and validation become more varied. Developing an analysis, in my view, always involves making an argument. Often that argument is grounded by demonstration (by pointing to some pattern in the data) and given the authority of empiricism that can be pretty persuasive. There is more to the knowledge game of scholarship than argument by demonstration, however. When an interpretation is developed of the more global patterns in discourse and then of their effects and consequences for power relations, different resources are usually marshalled such as historical arguments, reference to other lines of research, accumulation of examples from different contexts, and so on. I disagree, therefore, with Schegloff. He implies that when an analyst goes beyond the participants' interpretations, nothing of value can be added. It is a strong claim to maintain that an analyst might know 'better' than the participants and I am suggesting simply that analysts know different things but in the past these forms of knowing derived from scholarship have been useful and powerful. And I believe scholarly critique and investigations of ideological practices will continue to be so.

### **Insider Knowledge and Constructing the Object of Study**

Against some contemporary strands of thinking in conversation analysis, I have argued that it is valid for the discourse analyst to go beyond the immediate data. Indeed I have suggested that a complete analysis of extracts such as those from our racism project *needs* to do so because participants draw on cultural resources which have a history and the repetition of these resources has important social consequences which we need to study. Analysis in this sense depends on external knowledge outside the immediate talk. But what about the other kinds of knowledge an interviewer might possess? What about the 'insider' knowledge which comes from being an actual participant in the interview?

Social science data are not often shared. The norms of the scientific community include openness, transparency and accountability but due to publishing conventions and for a range of often good and sometimes not so good practical reasons, data tend to remain private. It is usually left to the researcher to control what enters the public domain. Sharing three interviews from our project in New Zealand for the purposes of this book has thus been a new and challenging process. One of the most intriguing things is having one's own discourse analysed. As my colleagues came to focus (rightly and appropriately) as much on my discourse as the interviewees, I have often wanted to say - 'oh but what I was really doing there was ....'. 'And that laugh there that didn't mean that I was ....' and so on, and so on. But my utterances have mostly trailed off because what would be the point in saying these things?

Why have I censored myself in this way? Why is this type of knowledge or contribution different from drawing on social analysis and critique to understand the cultural resources evident in the talk? I think the difference is that when I say 'what I was really doing there was ...' I have stopped analysing the discursive context and begun making experiential or factual claims. I would be making the kind of category error discussed earlier. I would no longer be in the business of making interpretations about the patterning of discursive resources (whether at a global or local level). I would be in the business of arbitrating truth and deciding on what actually happened. I don't believe, however, that accounts of experience have this privileged status. I don't accept, in other words, that by asking people about their intentions and beliefs we can close things off with the conclusion 'now we know what that was really all about'. There is no 'horse's mouth', just more discourse.

Interviewers may not be able to close off further analysis and offer a definitive account but we do construct the object of study through our actions and we are accountable to the wider scientific community for that construction. One of the distinguishing features of science as opposed to other forms of knowledge making is self-conscious reflection on method. And so in the last section of this chapter, I want to discuss in a bit more detail the particular organisation of these interviews. If the research aim is to identify cultural resources what is the best way of conducting interviews to that end?

When considering this in advance of the project, we decided that we wanted to produce a situation that would encourage those interviewed to rehearse as extensively as possible all their typical and usual ways of making sense of the issues at stake. In line with the social psychological theories of racism and discourse we were developing, we wanted to focus on the collective common sense of the ordinary middle-class members of the white community (and the sample was selected for their 'typicality' in this respect). We thought that explanations of racism focused on psychological pathology had not been very productive and instead we wanted to look at the ways in which racism was linked to everyday, unexceptional discourse. The aim, therefore, in the interview was to facilitate in the most ordinary of ways, the emergence of the everyday common sense of our participants. We hoped that they might say the kinds of things that they would regularly say in other contexts such as around their own dining tables with friends.

Other decisions followed from these preliminary views. The ideal interview should be a series of monologues in response to questions rather than a dialogue. Questions about race and protest over the Springbok Tours (the main foci) should be embedded in a longer series of questions about recent politics in New Zealand and some of the current salient 'burning issues'. I felt my role as the interviewer should be self-effacing. My own views were irrelevant, to expound them would be self-indulgent, my task instead was to be a 'good listener', to be attentive and supportive. I should give the (correct) impression that what they said was important to me while bracketing the content for consideration later. This felt appropriate given that my aim was not to develop a critique of them as people but to develop a critique through the analysis of the discursive resources their culture offered them. Further, where interviewees (such as the female participant in Interview No. 44) were nervous, hesitant and doubtful whether they had anything interesting to say, my task was to reassure them that their voice was important and enable them to speak.

These procedures were effective by and large in allowing us to identify the available stock of tropes, arguments, common-places, version and repertoires in the community we were studying. But all procedures have advantages and disadvantages. The interviews were conducted in the mid 1980s at a time when debate was beginning about the impact of discourse theory on method. Social scientists were beginning to explore the notion that the interviewer's discourse was as relevant as the respondent's, that there are no neutral questions and the interviewer was active and not an objective measuring instrument (see Potter and Mulkay, 1985, for an early exploration of these ideas). Subsequent work has made it very clear that the interviewer's orientation is unavoidably a factor in the unfolding interaction (e.g. Antaki et al., 2000; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki, 1998; Rapley and Antaki, 1998). Some of the specific effects of 'friendly interviewing' have also become apparent (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1997) and in line with the general epistemological shifts, interviewers have become freed up to depart radically from conventional notions of interviewing.

There is no reason why an interviewer should remain faceless, for instance. It might be highly productive for interviewers to express 'strong views' themselves, rehearse their own opinions in depth, challenge and argue with their participants. This might be particularly important when interviewees are expressing racist views that the researcher finds offensive. It could be that with these styles of interviewing, research would proceed in a more honest fashion (see Hak this volume), less complicit with those identified as racist. Whether this is a more ethical procedure than 'friendly interviewing' and the most caring and constructive response to those who have agreed to help you with your research is a matter of debate. It would make the position of the interviewer more comfortable certainly, but it violates the implicit contract and expectations of those about to be interviewed. It is also problematic when interviews take place in people's homes and are seen as an act of hospitality. Complicity, invisibility and lack of authenticity might be the price one pays for the privileges of the ethnographer. There needs to be much more discussion, however, among discourse researchers about creative ways of doing research and indeed watching skilled interviewers at work it is evident that there are ways of expressing disagreement that might be registered and be productive without been heard as 'arguing back'.

A researcher does not just construct the object of study through choices about interviewing styles, choices about the level and style of transcription are also important. One of the benefits from sharing data for this volume is that there were resources to re-transcribe the three interviews selected for discussion to the fine grain level required for conversation analytic studies. The new analyses enabled as a consequence have been rich and insightful. The re-transcription of the interviews has been a reminder of the ways in which transcription is a theory of the data. Transcription constructs what the data is. For pragmatic (financial) reasons, our original transcription of the sample of 80 interviews could not be so fine grain. The focus for that transcription was on content with some relatively minimal attention to features of the interaction. The validity of the level of transcription chosen of course depends on the research questions. I believe our original transcription was valid for the questions we asked of the data. Re-transcription has not altered any of our substantive conclusions. What is exciting, however, is to see what other researchers and readers make of the interviews. Although the contributors to this volume have to work with the object of study I constructed through my activities as the interviewer, their different emphases, backgrounds and interests have also created new objects of study. The subsequent chapters report their discoveries.

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