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1

Investigating the Negotiation of Identity: A View from the Field of Workplace Discourse

Meredith Marra and Jo Angouri

Introduction

Through language we enact who we are and where we belong; our social lives are linguistically and discursively mediated (Sarangi and Roberts, 1999). Language offers us the flexibility to index our various identities, directly and indirectly, as we interact with others. These identities, however, do not exist in a social vacuum. They come into existence through our linguistic choices, choices that encode a dialogic relationship with a complex matrix of social structures and ideologies. We draw on a range of linguistic resources in claiming, negotiating and renegotiating our emerging identities in interaction.

This interactionally based conceptualisation of identity is shared by all the contributors to this volume. Moving beyond unhelpful static universalities about how all women, all English speakers, or all old people behave, the dynamic and discursive approach we describe emphasises the contextualised nature of our everyday lives. And despite differences in analytic models and methodological approaches, the contributions share three underlying themes. First, all argue that identity does not pre-exist language. Identity is something we actively do, rather than something we passively are; both personal and social identities are achieved in negotiation with others. Second, the complex and multilayered relationship between the situated nature of the 'here and now' of interaction and more stable social structures is reflected in language use. The discourse strategies we use in our enactment of identities draw on the inextricable link between individual linguistic behaviour and the societal context. Third, there is a strong conceptual relationship between role and identity, terms that are often collapsed or used interchangeably. The operationalisation of the former can,

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however, shed light on the elusive nature of the latter. In sum, and as the authors aptly demonstrate, the construction of identity is complex and subtle, worthy of the considerable attention it is currently receiving in the research literature.

Our particular focus in this edited collection is identity construction as it occurs in talk at work. Analysts of workplace discourse are interested in how we negotiate our professional lives, from getting things done (managing, leading, resolving conflict), to getting on with people (relational work, small talk and humour). From humble beginnings, this sub-field of sociolinguistics has grown exponentially. Rather than comprising a few scattered researchers working on discrete data sets, workplace discourse analysts are on an inward trajectory away from the periphery, with developing dialogues regarding theoretical stances and an increasing number of data-driven analyses reported in the literature.

Below we present an introduction to the key ideas described in attempts to theorise identity, outlining recent developments in how we understand identity construction at work.

Identity across the social sciences

There are many iterations of 'identity'. These have emerged gradually in parallel with advances across the wider social sciences. Our aim could not, and should not, be to critically review and synthesize all attempts, a task that would require a multidisciplinary team comprising sociologists, psychologists and linguists at the least. Instead we focus on two terms that are often used interchangeably and with great relevance for the workplace context, namely role and identity (see also Sarangi, 2010).

Role and identity

Two frameworks are particularly influential for understanding the potential interplay of role and identity: Identity Theory and Social Theory. Hogg, Hardie and Reynolds (1995) bring the two approaches together in a seminal article that attempted to illustrate their similarities and differences, and subsequently a strong claim has been made for their incorporation to form a 'more fully integrated view of the self' (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 224). As Hogg et al. (1995, p. 255) argue there are clear parallels between the two, without much cross-fertilisation. While both theories focus on the tightly knit relationship between individual action and social structures, they differ in one central aspect: role and role behaviour is the key concept in identity theory, while social identity theory foregrounds group behaviour and intergroup relations.

In identity theory, roles are viewed as a resource for self-identity, and 'provide a sense of distinct individual identity within a group' (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 264). An individual has as many identity roles as roles in society, where identity derives from these roles (the term identity and role often being combined). Thus, categorisation is based on the roles that we 'occupy' and the associations of those roles as tied to related performances (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 225, drawing on Thoits, 1986). Roles come with expectations of performance that influence behaviour; hence the individual tailors role enactment to expectations (see Biddle, 1986; Hindin, 2006). These role-identities are rooted in shared societal structures acquired through socialisation but also brought into scrutiny by individuals.

Social identity theory, deriving from work by Tajfel and colleagues (for example Tajfel, 1974, 1975; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) has had a tremendous influence on studies of group membership (that is, in/out-group) and on language and identity studies (particularly in sociolinguistics, see Joseph, 2004 for an overview). Here the focus is the way in which individuals enact 'belonging' to and membership of social groups, be it a national group or a choir. Individuals adopt behaviours they perceive as conforming to the systems of belief that sustain in-group, 'collective' definitions of self, as opposed to out-groups, which are often presented in a negative light (see Burke, 1991 on conformity). These systems of belief are ideological constructs that reflect an individual's understanding of the group's normative behaviours and which the individual adopts in the process of developing or enacting group membership. Categorisation is plainly an essential part of social identity theory and stereotypical perceptions of out-groups become an important resource in enacting in-group identity (see also membership categorisation analysis as discussed by Sacks, 1972, 1992).

In this approach, identity is seen as dynamic and constantly evolving in relation to contextual factors, including both the immediate context and group relations which are also constantly developing (Linell, 1998). Accordingly social identity theory resonates with sociolinguistic research (take as an example Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985, who refer to 'acts of identity' that highlight language use and group belonging).

In the workplace context, which is our focus here, employees negotiate and co-construct performances of individual role identities within the wider socio-cultural context of their group, department or company. Taking up and performing roles always includes the negotiation of common ground between participants in a given setting. Both individual

and group understandings of how the 'world works' are brought to the fore, yet at the same time role identity is not separated from group belonging and membership (Ochs, 2005). From this point of view then we do not see identity theory and social identity theory as mutually exclusive. As noted by Stets and Burke, '[i]n most instances the differences are a matter of emphasis rather than kind. For the most part, the differences originated in a view of the group as the basis for identity (who one is) held by social identity theory and in a view of the role as a basis for identity (what one does) held by identity theory' (2000, p. 234, citing Thoits and Virshup, 1997, p. 234). In line with these researchers we take the stance that 'doing' and 'being' are inextricably linked and an integrated approach can provide us with a better understanding of the complex relationship between the individual and society (see also Lemke, 2008; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). As such, a holistic view of self and personal identity that draws on both theories has valuable contributions to make in the analysis of workplace discourse.

Identity and 'self'

The significance of 'self' regularly surfaces in these theoretical discussions. Goffman's (1959) work is central in this respect and particularly the dramaturgical dimension of performing 'self'. People as actors perform roles through 'personal fronts' according to setting and audience and 'expressive equipment' (for example age, clothing, register and so on). What is particularly important is that the credibility of role performances relies on an audience's understanding of the acceptable/expected spectrum of performances and an individual's manner in enacting these. The Goffmanian concept of impression management, as an umbrella term, encapsulates the range of strategies that people/actors use to perform roles and to anticipate or guess the roles of others.

The focus on self and the place of multiple selves was not new when Goffman's influential work appeared. Even though Goffman's focus is on performance, it is important to mention Mead's (1934) work which positions self in an inseparable node-relationship with society, where self is constructed through and cannot be abstracted from the 'social experience'. This alludes to work by Cooley who as early as 1902 (Adams and Sydnie, 2002; see also Turner and Billings, 1991) suggested that a social self is a 'looking glass-self', where people develop their sense of self through identities projected on them by their social environment. The way in which society positions the individual is critical from this perspective, for both the construction and definition of self. Self, however, is not passively shaped by societal structures; self lives in,

but also actively shapes, these structures. Overall then the perspective puts emphasis on the constant negotiation and construction of roles in relation to other relevant roles.

Pertinent to this discussion is the understanding that social interactionist theories contributed to the development of ethnomethodology and later to Butler's (1990) approach to performativity. In her work, which specifically focuses on gender performances, Butler argues that language expresses action (drawing on the underlying premise of speech acts by Austin, 1962) and identities are thus something we 'do'. Rather than being male, female or intersex, gender is something we perform, that is, we 'do being female, male etc' (while remaining dependent on 'hierarchies of constraint' (Butler, 1993, p. 133)). In the workplace context this could be our gender identities or equally our roles, 'doing being a team leader' or 'doing being a cooperative colleague', as achieved through discourse. This discourse is in turn shaped by the way in which we express these performances; building on our previous experiences, 'stable' norms and shared understandings of how such identities are enacted, we perform and (re)negotiate their enactment anew in each context and at each time. This focus similarly highlights the emergent nature of identity and its negotiation within discourse.

In recent work, Bucholtz and Hall (2010, 2005) aim to operationalise this discursive view of identity as construed in interaction (in contrast to identity as pre-existing language). They propose five principles for the study of identity as follows: Emergence, Positionality, Indexicality, Relationality and Partialness. Bucholtz and Hall approach identity as context-bound (positionality principle), indexically rooted in ideological structures, beliefs and values (indexicality principle), always partial and discontinuous (partialness principle) and, perhaps more importantly, as 'intersubjectively constructed through several, often overlapping, complementary relations' (relationality principle). This approach conveniently and productively straddles the dynamic relationship between the 'self' and 'society' that has remained central to understandings of identity (Stryker and Burke, 2000). As Bucholtz and Hall suggest '[o]n the one hand, the subject is the agent, the subject OF social processes; on the other hand, the subject is the patient, subject TO social processes' (2004, pp. 493–4, emphasis in original).

Indexicality, one of these principles, is at the core of many recent discussions of identity in sociolinguistic research (see, for example, Eckert, 2008), research that makes use of conceptualisations by Silverstein (1993, 2003). Current discussions extend to the related notion of stance and stance taking (see, for example, the papers in Jaffe, 2009a). While

indexicality considers the correlation between linguistic/discursive features and social identities, Jaffe (2009b) argues that identity results from multiple stances taken over time, where stances are likewise achieved through the mediation of sociolinguistic variables and social identities. The habitual and cumulative nature of stances is what leads to certain 'subject positions', including social roles and identities, inherently deriving from cultural, ideological and social fields.

We see again the connection between micro-perspectives of dynamic language use and macro-level social identities, a common theme and one that we embrace in our own view of identity construction (Angouri and Marra, 2010; Holmes, Marra and Vine, 2011). The different theoretical approaches and frameworks briefly discussed here, and the ongoing academic debates, show that the concept of identity remains elusory and its operationalisation across social sciences contested. However, the concepts of self, role and identity, and their enactment in interaction, remain at the heart of linguistic research in general, and in professional settings in particular.

A sub-field of workplace discourse

Complex and multiple views of identity construction are well embedded within the literature on workplace talk. A key goal of this volume is to represent the range of research that fits under a heading of professional and workplace discourse. As the field has emerged, locating the growing group of scholars working in this area has not always been straightforward. Neither can we hope to capture all the work in the field. A common goal, however, has been an interest in what people actually do with talk at work, rather than what people say they do.

Since the 1980s/1990s scholars have been increasingly interested in the discourse used in the workplace, riding on the waves of the 'turn to discourse' prevalent across the social sciences (see, for example, Harré, 1995 for social psychology). In the last 15 years researchers have investigated the myriad ways in which language is used in the workplace context, including the place of discourse in the negotiation of power and politeness (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003) and for both transactional and relational functions.

In early sociolinguistic research, analyses reflected an interest in everyday talk at work (for example Clyne, 1994; Holmes, Stubbe and Vine, 1999; Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Sarangi and Slembrouck, 1996; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris, 1997; Roberts, Davies and Jupp, 1992, and so on). Already in existence at the time of this explosion within

sociolinguistics was a set of studies on institutional discourse, with Drew and Heritage's *Talk at Work* (1992) providing an extensive and influential body of research that specifically adopted a Conversation Analytic perspective. In the workplace (or institutional) talk, which is the focus of these scholars, the emphasis is placed on the interaction between expert and lay participants, for example doctor–patient interactions (Cicourel, 1992), courtroom interactions (Drew, 1992), and so on. This interest in institutional talk remains significant to the field. The analysis of sequencing and the relevance of micro-level detail in the instantiation of workplace talk has provided a rich and productive basis for important understandings of institutional interaction (see, for example, Boden, 1994; Barnes, 2007; Ford, 2008; Heritage and Clayman, 2011).

The overview of identity (and role) presented in this chapter has exposed the range of theoretical and methodological approaches that the rich and growing body of research in professional settings has brought to the fore. Despite their differences, workplace analysts continue to reveal the complex ways in which 'things are done' at work.

Constructing identity at work

The selection of chapters in this book builds on our position that identity is (not exclusively but to a large extent) a linguistic phenomenon, dynamic and constantly evolving. It bridges the 'here and now' which is central to constructionist positions and a more stable social base. In terms of our interest in workplace talk, we aim to illustrate the range of foci and methodologies taken within the field. The chapters fall into three categories: leadership identity in business contexts; rhetoric, expertise and ideology in identity construction; and professional identities in institutional contexts.

Leadership identity in business contexts

The first part of the book consists of four chapters which present analyses of identity enactment in naturally occurring data recorded in corporate workplaces. In each chapter the focus is the construction of a leadership identity, mostly represented through the role of meeting chair. These chapters thus provide exploration and exemplification of the role/identity interdependence described above, as well as discussion of the significance of role expectations. The identity of leader inherently stands in relief to follower, and the authors highlight the relationship between individual and group identities using micro-level details

to describe the ways in which leaders are co-constructed in the group context. The chapters are distinguished by the analytic approach of the authors and the datasets on which they draw.

Jan Svennevig takes Conversation Analysis as his method, analysing the micro-level instantiation of the enactment of leadership. His data consists of video-recorded meetings between Scandinavian expats and local colleagues in the overseas subsidiaries of a Scandinavian manufacturing company. The analysis he provides concentrates on the feedback provided by these expat managers as response in reporting sequences, representing a typical meeting activity. His analysis deftly illustrates the situated nature of leadership.

In Chapter 3, Stephanie Schnurr and Olga Zayts also explore the construction of leader identity, but take a social constructionist stance in their analysis. Demonstrating the complex interactional processes involved, they draw specifically on two of the principles outlined in Bucholtz and Hall (2005): the principles of relationality and intersubjectivity. An element of the complexity they describe lies in the influence of institutional roles within the interactions. Their examples (taken from recordings of a new team leader in an administration department of a Hong Kong financial organisation) illustrate the ways in which a leader identity is explicitly co-constructed by drawing on a more fixed understanding of role and a fluid view of identities.

In the next chapter, Pamela Rogerson-Revell identifies the discourse strategy of humour as a resource for enacting a leadership identity. This leadership is tied to, and plays off, the role of meeting chair. In her discussion of humour as a strategy for identity construction she views the enactment of leadership as occurring through the meeting activity of chairing. In her conclusions Rogerson-Revell notes that one of the particular challenges in constructing a leader identity is managing the role expectations of a linguistically and socio-culturally diverse group.

As the fourth and final contribution in Part I, our own paper also considers the role of chair in the construction of a leadership identity. We compare the fulfilment of the chair role in data collected in New Zealand and the European Union, finding remarkable similarities in the enactment of leader identity. This demonstrates both the dynamic negotiation of identity in context, and the relevance of shared expectations of social roles.

Overall, the chapters in Part I provide detailed analysis of the situated enactment of leader roles and illustrate the complexity of professional identity construction in the corporate workplace. In this work the potential for interdisciplinary discussion is clear. The chapters address and

contribute to sociolinguistic approaches to identity research as well as debates about the relevance of language within leadership scholarship.

Rhetoric, expertise and ideology in identity construction

Part II acts as a bridge between the interactional corporate talk used as a source of data in Part I and the specific institutional focus of Part III, where the role and role expectation of expert and lay participant is well established. The two chapters demonstrate especially innovative foci for the field of workplace discourse: one considers identity construction in mission statements through company rhetoric and associated ideologies; the other explores the construction of identity in an institutional context where the professional role is in debate, resulting in frequent and explicit meta-discussions of expectations.

In Chapter 6, Veronika Koller takes a critical stance in her approach to investigating the rhetoric of corporate mission statements, emphasising the interplay of ideology and interaction. She describes the significance of the co-construction of 'ideational representations of the company and interpersonal representations of employee identities', noting that mission statements ascribe certain identities to employees. Her chapter also indicates the way quantitative approaches can support qualitative analyses of identity construction. The analysis makes use of corpus linguistics, highlighting key expressions used by corporations in their mission statements, and the dominant ideologies they signify.

The second chapter in Part II draws on data involving 'experts' in interaction with clients in the context of executive coaching. Eva-Maria Graf's chapter represents a new thread of workplace research (emanating largely from Germany) which considers the language of executive coaching, an emerging profession. This is an intriguing context for an investigation of identity construction because the lack of established practices results in talk in which the interactants are negotiating exactly what constitutes 'expertise' and 'institutional routines' in this context. Chapter 7 thus moves the focus of the book towards the analysis of data from a range of institutional contexts in which professional identities are enacted.

Professional identities in institutional contexts

In Part III the authors broaden the view of what counts as a workplace. Their common focus is identity construction in environments that typically feature in discussions of institutional talk, characterised in particular by expert and lay participants (Drew and Heritage, 1992).

In Chapter 8, Alexandra Georgakopoulou argues a case for considering the classroom as a workplace, emphasising the significance of

institutional talk in this context. Like Graf, her focus is professional–lay encounters, this time between teachers and students. A particularly interesting outcome is the argument that the workplace is an ‘inherently polycentric space’ in which activities are formal, informal, and more or less work-related.

The professional–lay distinction is also a focus of Chapter 9, in which Karen Tracy focuses on the institutional context of appellate oral argument in courts. In her discussion of ‘judge’ as a professional identity, Tracy emphasises the ideological dimension of identity construction. In her approach she notes that ‘no device, alone, is an unambiguous marker’ and that it is their contextual use that leads to identity construction. Within her discussion she identifies ideological stances which become apparent in identity construction, with a particular emphasis on both what is present and what is absent.

In concluding her chapter, Tracy reflects on Conversation Analysis as an approach, a theme that is taken up by Keith Richards in Chapter 10. Here we return to the educational setting described by Georgakopoulou, but this time the focus is colleagues in the staffroom. Within his discussion, Richards explores the application of the concept of membership categorisation taken from Conversation Analysis, and in particular critiques the application of distal context. His data involves an in-group of permanent teachers interacting with a temporary teacher whose attempts to construct his expert membership are problematic.

The final chapter in the book offers us a chance to reflect on our own identities as researchers. Anna De Fina focuses specifically on the research interview as a distinctive communication context noting that ‘the professional identities of interviewers as researchers are often called into question, oriented to and negotiated in the interactions’ and thus significant to our understanding of the research context. In doing so she reopens the debate on the observers’ paradox, relevant for all sociolinguistic research, not least our understandings of workplace discourse.

All the studies in Part III take an innovative view of institutional discourse and convincingly show how different theoretical approaches and methodological traditions can shed light on different layers of meaning. They thereby make a strong case for synergies in the field.

Where next?

Overall, we illustrate that the field of workplace discourse is coming of age, and rather than a few scattered research groups, workplace discourse has established a solid position within discourse analytic

approaches. In every case we also see a particular focus on identity which has found its way to the core of our common interests. As noted by Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini in her foreword to the collection, attention to professional identities is a recent but rapidly growing area, and one where the kind of empirical, evidence-based studies presented here have a major contribution to make.

Within workplace discourse research, identity has been studied most frequently from a gender perspective (for example Holmes, 2006; Mullany, 2010; Baxter, 2010) and in the discourse context of the narrative (for example De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg, 2006). Our aim has been to broaden the focus to professional identity (cf. Richards, 2006), where 'professional' is used as an umbrella term to incorporate organisational role and membership, as well as aspects of expertise and occupation (the very heart of the three parts of the volume). We have brought together different approaches in order to provide a range of perspectives and insights regarding the complexities of identity construction. The contributors represent different schools and traditions within the field and have been selected in order to showcase the diversity of approaches that can be taken when investigating identity in professional contexts. The chapters draw upon Conversation Analysis, Interactional Sociolinguistics, ethnography, pragmatics and corpus linguistics. Qualitative approaches and studies making use of mixed methods (including quantitative approaches) are included to represent the range of methodological diversity that currently characterises work on identity.

The wide range of methodological approaches and operationalisations of role and identity adopted by the contributors to this volume convincingly demonstrates the challenges in tackling the nebulous conceptual space of identity. This collection does not aim to create an orthodoxy for the study of identity, but instead to pave the way for raising and problematising issues of common concern and to encourage diversity of views. It recognises the growing number of researchers investigating professional and institutional discourse and the need for establishing dialogue in order to support cross-fertilisation of otherwise insulated approaches.

Acknowledgement

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Bargiela-Chiappini and ourselves) and others are well cited (Janet Holmes, Louise Mullany, Helen Spencer-Oatey). In preparing the volume, the cooperative and collaborative nature of the field means we have had willing reviewers whom we thank, on both our behalf and behalf of the authors of individual chapters whose work has benefited from the feedback they have received at various stages in the thorough reviewing process. We also gratefully acknowledge the support from Palgrave Macmillan (especially Priyanka Gibbons and Olivia Middleton), and from our colleagues at Victoria University of Wellington (including team members from the Language in the Workplace project) and the University of the West of England, Bristol.

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Leadership acts as the catalyst that makes all other elements work together; without leadership, all other ... Being able to tackle a crisis as it happens is part of forming a cohesive plan. In the fall of 2010, Toyota CEO Jim Lentz personally handled its PR crisis when several million cars were recalled due to faulty brakes. He answered questions on websites from customers and others curious about what happened. Good leadership in business lessens the effects of stress. Leaders who listen to concerns and get ahead of problems tend to retain employees. The result is clear; happy people perform better at work. Sadly, nearly half of all American workers report their professional stress levels have a tremendous effect on their morale. Leaders in high-context cultures, such as Ethiopia, tend to communicate more implicitly, using more nonverbal communication and expressing more vague verbal messages (at least from the viewpoint of a low-context culture). A Social Identity Map is often used as an opener in leadership development workshops delivered in all parts of the world. It is an activity meant to help participants understand themselves both as individuals and as leaders. The Social Identity Map is often an easy-to-understand and successful activity in Western cultures (Hannum, 2007). Here is how the activity is set up: Participants are asked to draw three circles. Participants are first asked to write in the outside circle those things in their life that are given to them.