

Chapter 4

**APPLYING MEMBERSHIP CATEGORISATION
ANALYSIS TO DISCOURSE:
WHEN THE ‘TRIPWIRE CRITIQUE’ IS NOT ENOUGH**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an outline of Membership Categorisation Analysis, exemplifies some of its applications, and argues for its significance for the agenda of critical discourse analysis. The chapter describes and illustrates the organisation of categories in everyday discourse, categorisation devices and their rules for application, and the relationship of categorisation practices to the interpretation of activities, features, and attributions. As part of these processes, the use of topic selections, list formations, and embedded stories in the assembly and interpretation of categories and features is also illustrated. We conclude by suggesting that the application of MCA is one alternative to the ‘tripwire’ approach to critique, which searches for allegedly tell-tale signs of unacceptable moral and ideological attitudes in the surface features of language.

Keywords: membership, categorisation, critique, interpretation

INTRODUCTION

Constructing and interpreting intelligible texts are everyday accomplishments of coordination that rely on the mastery of many intersecting aspects of “natural language” use (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970). In this chapter, we analyse how such accomplishments are routinely achieved via membership categorisation activities. One of our purposes here is to show that an adequate critical analysis of discourse requires attention to all of the sources of meaning that are brought to bear in any given instance. That is, we argue and aim to demonstrate that critical analysis is not just a matter of finding an element of communication to be a pivotal source of meaning, developing an analysis of the text as if that element clinches the ‘critical’ interpretation, and then producing a set of interpretive assertions on that basis – a form of practice that can be thought of as ‘tripwire analysis. In this chapter we aim to present a principled alternative to tripwire analyses by providing an exposition of membership categorisation analysis (MCA), exemplifying MCA’s potentially productive application to critical analysis of discursive practices, and putting the case that a concern with categorisation practices is at the heart of both redistribution- and recognition-based critical approaches (e.g., Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Both of these general classes of critique draw on categorisations of persons (along lines of class, race, gender, able-bodied-ness, generation, and so on) and on common understandings of their recognisable characteristics. In this chapter we argue for the occasioned rather than fixed nature of these categorisations and characteristics, and we expand on the technical features of such occasioned categorial work and its significance for analysing social practice.

Membership categories are notional concepts used by cultural members to classify persons (Sacks 1992a [1966], pp. 40 – 48). They are essentially meaning-making resources in that the classification of a person as a type or member of a social category enables others to interpret, classify and assign meaning to actions and utterances (Sacks 1992a [1966], p.241). Interpretively, category membership has been found to constitute an adequate basis for particular inferences to be made about persons, objects and actions. Identifying a person as a member of a recognisable social category provides a warrant for further inferences; as Sacks (1992a [1964]) observed “to become a member is to make state-able about yourself any of the things that are state-able about members of that commonsense category” (p.47).

Membership categorisation is a mechanism as are sequential and topical organisations whereby people construct meaning in and from discourse. For texts to be mutually intelligible, each action within the text must be sensible as an utterance or action with respect to the incumbency of the speaker as a member of a category, and that membership category must be recognisably relevant for the type of activity, specific participants and other aspects of the social context. Watson (1997) observed of categorial and sequential organisation, that

[c]onversational sequences are categorically instructed, both for lay speakers and analysts: the sense of a sequence – even its sense *as* a sequence – is, in significant ways, given by its categorial order (Watson, 1997, p.73).

Via the “layering” of the resources provided by the different organisations (i.e., sequential, topical, and sequential), the work of making sense for and with others can be accomplished in orderly ways. Sacks (1992b [1972], p. 561) referred to the effects of concurrent organisations as the “thick surface” of social activity. The surface is thick not because the accomplishment of each form of organisation requires the use of different sets of verbal tools and practices, but because each utterance is thick *with* the various concurrent meanings that it glosses (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970, pp. 342 – 345).

Thus, a single interactional move may concurrently accomplish: local and extended sequential order; particular category membership activities (Eglin & Hester 1992, 1999; Garfinkel 1967; Hester & Eglin 1997; Sacks 1992); and topical ordering work (Sacks 1992a, 1992b; Schegloff 1979). One result of this multiple sense of any utterance is that there is no direct correspondence between what is said and what may be inferred, and that it is the sense-making work of co-participants using cultural knowledge of these same organising frameworks and resources, that accomplishes situated meaning (Garfinkel 1967). These operations (i.e., making sense *for* and *with* others and *of* others’ actions) involve the management of literal and inferential meaning resources, including sequential, categorial, and topical organisational matters, taking account of the ‘scenic’ attributes of the conversations; and having all of these converge to accomplish the practical business at hand (Goodwin & Heritage 1990; Schegloff 1999). That is, sense-making involves the management of all aspects of the ‘context’ of actions.

We illustrate these initial points in a brief analysis of an excerpt from a speech by Australian Catholic Cardinal George Pell, delivered to the Australian National Press Club, in Canberra, on 21 September 2005. The address was entitled *The dictatorship of relativism*. This speech was widely quoted at a time of public debate about literacy and English education, about the qualities of Australian schools, and about the moral circumstances of western societies more generally. It is not our aim to display our agreement or disagreement with its contents but rather to use it to show the discursive artfulness that comes to light when an MCA is applied to textual construction and interpretation.

Excerpt 1:

One reason for optimism is that no one believes deep down in relativism. People may express their scepticism about truth and morality in lecture rooms or in print, but afterwards, they will go on to sip a cappuccino, pay the mortgage, drive home on the left side of the road, and presumably avoid acts of murder and cannibalism throughout their evening. People, unless insane, do not live as relativists. They care about truth and follow clear cut rules.

The sense of this utterance relies on the speakers’ understanding of significant elements of its context – a context in which it is legal to drive on the left hand side of the road, where murder and cannibalism are illegal and socially unacceptable, where sipping cappuccino and having and paying a mortgage are demonstrations of normality and social and moral rectitude. It is also a context in which it is appropriate for the speaker to make such pronouncements, to

speak as an authority on moral matters, to hold particular views about truth, morality, optimism, and believing. In other words, the sense of this talk trades on the speaker's incumbency in a particular social category (i.e., leader of the Catholic Church in Australia), and the activity in which he is engaged (i.e., making a speech to news reporters at a press club).

The talk also reflexively constitutes Pell and his audience as members of those social categories. As part of the work of assembling his membership as an authority on moral 'law' and his right, therefore, to authoritative talk on the topic, Pell invokes other social categorisations, university lecturers, scholars and writers ("in lecture rooms or in print") and attributes values and beliefs to the members of these categories via the description of a series of mundane actions. Through this simple descriptive narrative, he undermines the authority of members of these categories on matters of truth and morality. This descriptive narrative thereby also necessarily shows, in Jayyusi's (1984, p. 28) terms "the normatively and morally organized character of categorisation work, accounts, descriptions, predictions and discourse-interactive work in general."

Central to meaning in this talk is the feature that it is a categorially ordered set of actions that cannot be discovered if the analyst refers only to the selection of words, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies. We propose, therefore, that MCA provides a practical supplement to other methods for critical analysis of discourse. We now outline in brief, some of the analytical resources applied in MCA. The concepts explicated in this section relate to categorial organisation, namely, categorial resources and membership categorisation procedures used by cultural members to make sense of, and in social interaction and to reflexively constitute orderly social life. It draws on the work of Sacks (1992a, 1972a, 1972b), Jayyusi (1984, 1991), Eglin and Hester (1992; 1999), and Hester and Eglin (1997).

CATEGORIAL ORGANISATION: MEMBERSHIP CATEGORISATION

So much of social meaning is embedded in categorially organised information that membership categorisation activities will be evident in the familiar features of many social activities. This is not to say that the membership categorisation activities are an end in themselves (i.e., as they are depicted in critical sociological accounts of power, dominance and control). Rather, it acknowledges that the scenic features of social settings as well as their rational properties are constituted by membership categorisation activities. In other words, the organised procedures used to describe the indexical features of category concepts *for* the specific practical tasks conventionally associated with institutional settings are the same discursive features that form the familiar scenic features of those activities. The array of membership category concepts available for making meaning in any activity is limited by the meaning-making work at hand. Recognisable incumbency of one participant in a specific

social category invokes other related categories that can be common-sensically aligned with the initial categorisation and, therefore, may entitle or oblige co-participants to act in particular ways.

This is not to say that particular culturally, socially, or institutionally relevant categories have fixed sets of attributes, rather, “categories like other concepts (and categorisations like other descriptions) are open-textured” (Jayyusi 1984, p.39). One central understanding is that situated categorial order, category descriptions, and relational configurations of categories are indexical expressions, relevant to their “local, contextual specificity and use” (Hester & Eglin 1997, p.25). Membership category description and analysis are routine procedures in everyday events as category concepts are shaped and re-shaped for the context and occasion of their use (Hester & Eglin 1997, p.25 and see for instance, Cuff 1994; Cuff & Francis 1978; Eglin & Hester 1992, 1999; Francis & Hart 1997; Hester 1992; Hester & Eglin 1997; Jayyusi 1984; Sacks 1972b). Meanings are assigned and interpretable on the basis of situated categorisations of persons in relation to co-participants and to the activities in which they are engaged. Coordinated action and mutual understanding is made possible on the basis of categories and the ways they are described and relationally configured for the specific occasion.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORISATION DEVICES

Analysis of the meaning of categorisations begins with an analysis of the activity *in or for* which the discourse has been produced. Category concepts invoked are analysed to determine the overall commonsense collective to which a particular category is notionally connected on the specific occasion. For instance, the category concept ‘child’ can be used with reference to one or more of the following collectives: stage of life, family, social activities such as education, health care, etcetera. These notional ‘collectives’ are called membership categorisation devices (MCDs) and the location of a category concept within one of these conceptual devices operates to specify how incumbents of the category should be interpreted this time. Thus, MCDs are “collections of categories for referring to some persons, with some rules of application, where these devices can be applied to populations and members apply them to populations to say things about them” (Sacks 1992a [1966], p.238). Sacks specified that MCDs are collections in the sense that the categories observably go together for some purpose. He defined an MCD as “[a]ny collection of membership categories, containing at least a Member, so as to provide, by the use of some rules of applications, for the pairing of at least a population member and a categorisation device member. A device is then a collection plus rules of application” (Sacks 1992a [1966], p.246).

Collections may also imply particular relational configurations of the categories, including notional hierarchically “*positioned categories*” (Sacks 1992a [1967], p. 585), and

along with those configurations, particular features of incumbents of the related membership categories. Central to Sacks's descriptions are two collections, "R" and "K." He defined "R" as a collection of "programmatically relevant" paired relational categories or "standardized relational pairs" (e.g., "husband-wife, parent-child, neighbour-neighbour, ...stranger-stranger") related with respect to "a set of rights and obligations concerning the activity of giving help" such that the occurrence of one of the pair makes the other relevant or noticeably absent (Sacks 1972a, pp.37 – 38). Collection "K" was defined as "composed of two classes (professional and laymen (sic))" and "constructed by reference to special distributions of knowledge existing about how to deal with some trouble" (Sacks 1972a, pp. 37 – 39).

MCDs – Rules of Application

Category-concepts, category descriptions and MCDs are the components of organised categorial meaning-making structures. Category concepts should not be analysed on the basis of the analyst's commonsense understanding of the category concept; warrantable analysis of the contextual meaning of the categorisation is based only on evidence in the text analysed. Based on empirical evidence, Sacks found that members accomplish recognisable social activities and actions using membership categorisation. According to Sacks (1992a [1966], p.242), "the simplest way you make a recognisable description is to take some category and some activity that's bound to it, and put them together." Collections of categories (MCDs) and relational configurations of categories in collections have meaning-making potential and there are various commonsense procedural rules for constituting the local rationality and intelligibility of actions with reference to categories, MCDs and category-action relationships.

The rules pertain to: (a) selections of categories and MCDs used to classify the range of persons that are subjects of the discourse analysed, (b) judgements about how categories and MCDs can be used, including how many can be used, to accomplish adequate classifications; and (c) judgements about the relevance of relationships between activities, membership categories, and MCDs and thus, the orderliness of sequential actions (Sacks 1992a [1966], pp.238 – 266). Each of these is summarised below.

Selections of categories and MCDs used to classify the range of persons involved in a particular social event may be organised via the application of "relevance" rule[s]" (Sacks 1992a [1966], p.146), such as:

- the *Consistency Rule*: "If some population of persons is being categorized, and if a category from some device's collection has been used to categorize a first Member of the population, then that category or other categories of the same collection may be used to categorize further Members of the population" (Sacks 1972a, p.33 emphases in original; see also Sacks 1992a [1966], p.239);

- the *Hearer's Maxim*: “If there are two categories used, which can be found to be part of the same collection, hear them as part of the same collection” (Sacks 1992a [1966], p.239); and
- *Category Relevance Rules 1 and 2*: These pertain to the ‘programmatically relevance’ of particular categories given the use of an MCD. For example, for the MCD ‘parties to a medical service event,’ GP and P are programmatically relevant, while other categories, such as friend, neighbour, or husband are not programmatically relevant but may be made relevant. Given the use of one of the programmatically relevant categories (e.g. GP) another can be expected to be relevant (e.g., P or medical clinic ancillary staff member). These are made relevant using knowledge of “standardised relational pairs” (SRPs), that is, categories that may be made relevant on the invocation of another (e.g., for a collection “R” device – husband-wife; for a collection “K” device – GP-P) (Sacks 1972a, pp.33 – 37).

The intelligibility of observed actions provided for by linking actions to categories of persons and activities relies on social members’ collaborative application of these rules within social discourse. The identification of the person as an incumbent of a category can be formulated with reference to actions, activity, setting, and/or co-participants where one or all of these can be normatively linked to such a category. Membership categorisations are descriptive and their function in social discourse is to provide the basis for the local descriptions and classifications of persons that give meaning to actions; categorizations point to the direction in which a search for meaning may proceed.

Members’ Methods of Membership Categorisation

As we have indicated, the object of situated membership categorisation and analysis is assigning meaning and directing inferencing and interpretation. Interpretations and the interpretability of local action are organised and constrained via the invocation of and situated description of membership category concepts (Jayyusi 1984; Schegloff 1972; Watson 1983). Because sense-making and interpretation management are complex and multi-layered, they cannot possibly be managed through explicit formulations. It has been established that category concepts, MCDs and “categories of social configuration or collectivity-categorisations” (Hester & Eglin 1997, p.157) are locally constituted to extend the meaning potential and to design the procedural consequentiality of local actions (as well as to constrain possible interpretations). The classification of persons, objects and actions as members of a class provides for unspoken things to be ‘known’ or assumed about them.

Using MCA it is possible to determine how abstract category-concepts are: made concrete, occasioned by local sense-making needs, and accomplished by local descriptive practices. Beginning with a search for expectable attributes and predicates of common-sense category-concepts, MCA identifies and examines the methods used by participants to

assemble other category descriptions and locally relevant MCDs to meet their situated social purposes. Category incumbency can be attributed based on the display of particular attributes, actions, assumptions of rights, and obligations but others can be assembled for particular purposes and contexts. Jayyusi (1984, pp. 20 – 56) distinguished different relationships between types of activities and membership category invocation and description. The table below (Freiberg, 2003, p.136) summarises the different types of and category-related features and their relationship to membership categorisation activities.

Table 1. Category-activity/feature relationships

Constitutive Features	Tied Features	Occasioned Features
<p><i>“Type-embedded” and criterial to that categorization i.e., that MUST be observable or describable.</i></p> <p>Any feature that WILL generate that specific category-concept i.e., is both necessary and sufficient to ascribe or confer incumbency in the category.</p> <p>May Include: required/predicated attributes, skills, knowledge, values, behaviours;</p> <p>associated criterial rights & obligations; and</p> <p>programmatically relevant task-relationships with others.</p>	<p><i>Criterial to that categorization under certain conditions (e.g., during some specific event) i.e. that WILL be observable or describable under those conditions.</i></p> <p>Any feature that CAN generate that specific category-concept i.e., is necessary but not sufficient to ascribe or confer incumbency in the category.</p> <p>May Include: relevant attributes, skills, knowledge, values, behaviours;</p> <p>associated rights & obligations; and</p> <p>relevant task-relationships with others.</p>	<p><i>Not criterial to that categorisation but might be made so under certain conditions.</i></p> <p>Any feature that MAY be made relevant to the category-concept already generated i.e., is neither necessary nor sufficient to ascribe or confer incumbency in the category.</p> <p>May Include: attributes, skills, knowledge, values, behaviours that can be made locally relevant;</p> <p>associated rights & obligations that can be made locally relevant;</p> <p>task-relationships with others that can be made locally relevant.</p>

Source: Freiberg, 2003, p.136.

Methods of “category accretion” (Jayyusi 1984, p. 114), that is, the binding of occasioned features to a category-concept in use, achieved using common-sense descriptive techniques such as ‘mapping’ (Watson 1983), are identified and analysed because of the evidence they provide of the purposeful action of participants in discourse to assemble meaning. Such

analysis will discover how attributes and predicates from other category-concepts have been made relevant, for the practical activities at hand, and how the category-concepts initially invoked are modified, transformed or fabricated into “event-specific or event-tied” categories (Jayyusi, 1984, pp. 114 – 121).

MCA first identifies patterns of selective formulations of items such as terms of address, descriptions of locations, actions, persons, category-sensitive identifications of action and co-selected category and action descriptions, then analyses how these are implicated in the constitution and transformation of the familiar and expectable features of category-concepts “for a focus” (Schegloff 1972, p.102) and for local practical purposes, (Jayyusi 1984; Schegloff 1972; Watson 1983). Evident co-selection of category concepts is analysed as the ways that these category concepts are described and tied in specific ways (e.g., using notional hierarchies, comparison and contrast, or causal relationships) to the attributes and predicates of the categories programmatically relevant in a setting (Hester & Eglin 1997; Jayyusi 1984; Sacks 1972a; 1992a, 1992b; Schegloff 1972). The work of MCA is to document and examine the ways that abstract category concepts (Lynch & Bogen 1997, p. 121) are employed as the point of departure for the description of the local features of categories and the implication of other MCDs.

Co-selection of category-concepts may either assemble a new version of a category or an alternative categorisation. For instance, membership categorisation procedures have been shown to provide for: “expert witness” to be transformed into “unreliable witness” via the co-selection of “witness”, “good criminologist”, and “bad criminologist” (Lynch & Bogen 1997); “nigger” to be mapped onto “victim” (Watson 1983); “young men” to be transformed either into “victims” or “offenders” depending on the motivation for a “category-fitted account” (Jayyusi 1984, pp. 103 – 114); “problem pupil” to be transformed into “shy boy” (Hester & Eglin 1997); and “offender” into “murder suspect” (Eglin & Hester 1999).

MCA can identify whether and how programmatically relevant categories have been differentiated in ways that are consequential for the meaning and political force of a text. For instance, MCA will reveal whether and how the predicated features (i.e., constitutive or tied) of a category, for which a high level of ethical obligation normally applies, have been waived. This type of category transformative work is seen where insanity is ascribed to a person who has committed a crime. The transformation via membership categorisation work, from category, “criminal”, to category, “criminally insane” is procedurally consequential as it “removes the agency from the person’s acts” (Eglin & Hester 1999, p. 212) and thereby the obligation to display category – constitutive or tied features on that occasion.

Extract 2, below, also taken from the speech by Cardinal George Pell, demonstrates this form of membership categorisation work.

Excerpt 2:

Recently some newspapers have given considerable coverage to demonstrating how relativism's intrusion into the classroom as post-modernism or "critical literacy" affect education at both secondary and university level. In some schools the study of English texts and English language has been abandoned altogether for the lower secondary grades and

replaced with a blancmange of English, social studies and comparative religion called "Integrated Studies".

While parents wonder why their children have never heard of the Romantic poets, Yeats or the Great War poets and never ploughed through a Bronte, Orwell or Dickens novel, their children in many cases are engaged in analysing a variety of "texts" including films, magazines, advertisements and even road signs as part of critical literacy. Of course there are always rationalisations for why school syllabuses are manipulated in this way.

We see a number of features in this excerpt. The MCD 'school' is located via the activity 'critiquing English curriculum'. This leads to an analysis of the implicit category concept 'teacher' as the transformed category 'bad teacher' on which the sense of this passage relies (*abandoned, manipulated*). We also see the use of lists in this excerpt and in many other sections of the address. There are potentially an indefinite number of ways of selecting a categorisation, but also of organising and producing descriptions through lists. The list is a common choice because of the organisational options it offers a speaker or writer. The reader's or hearer's task is to infer the organisational principle that informs the list; that is, a list could be a 'beads-on-a-string' collection of categorisations, activities, or attributions (e.g., an "etcetera" or "you know" procedure seen later in Pell's speech: "only 50 years ago to believe we would abort 100,000 babies a year, contemplate men marrying men, killing the sick, experimenting on human embryos, and so on."), or a device that delivers a categorisation or attribute, when the items are taken together (e.g., "Bronte, Orwell or Dickens novel ..." delivers English 'literary canon'); an elaboration of an initial item that acts as the interpretive device; or an up- or down-grading progression ("films, magazines, advertisements, road signs ...", and later "relativism is powerful in Western life, evidenced in many areas from the decline in the study of history and English literature, through to the triumph of subjective values and conscience over moral truth and the downgrading of heterosexual marriage"). So sometimes hearers have to 'hear' that the sequence matters, and sometime not; sometimes the comprehensiveness of the list matters, and sometimes not; and sometimes the items are interchangeable, and sometimes not.

Lists, because of the interpretive options they make available, can be a central stratagem in masking their organisational specifications and thus their moral or ideological consequences: the origins of the items, as attributions drawn from devices with particular provenances, and the criteria by which they are selected and sequenced. They thereby can camouflage the essentially moral and ideological nature of descriptions of the social world. So lists, among other things, offer near-perfect opportunities for "methodic, motivated equivocality" (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 80) – designed ambiguity – through their organisation. Understanding the categorial work done through list formations allows the analyst to see discourse and description as part of the organisation or moral relations.

What these observations show is that membership categorisations are motivated descriptions, oriented to the achievement of particular practical tasks in the local context, and that membership categorisation is achieved through a variety of everyday, mundane methods. MCA is predicated on the understanding that what the discoverable membership categorisation activities in any piece of interactive or monologic discourse do is document local, social and practical purposes and reasoning practices. Other methods, briefly outlined

below, include the use of topic, the co-selection of disjunctive categories, embedded narratives, and sequential patterning of discourse.

Using Topical Talk to Assemble Categories and Category Features

The categorial ordering power of topics has been well documented with respect to: group therapy sessions (Sacks 1992a [1966]; [1967]); newspaper texts (Eglin & Hester 1999); referral meetings (Hester & Eglin 1997); and classrooms (see for instance Baker & Freebody 1987; Freebody & Freiberg 2000; Freiberg & Freebody 1995, Freiberg, 2003). Topics of spoken, written or visual texts can be “*pervasively important*” (Sacks, 1992a [1966], p. 390) for membership categorisation activities. Talk on particular topics and formulating topical talk in particular ways operates in the constitution of particular categories (Sacks 1972b; 1979; 1992a): Talking on certain topics can generate a category where such action is a predicated activity of a category and MCD; for instance, engaging in an “automobile discussion” as constitutive of the category “young man” in the company of other young men (Sacks 1992a [1966], pp. 320 – 322); and “‘problem talk’ (about referrals)” as constitutive of relevant category memberships in the MCD “parties to a referral meeting” (Hester & Eglin 1997, pp. 32 – 33). Talking on a topic in a particular way using category-evocative referential terms (e.g., referring to “hotrods” rather than “cars,” “tuning your pipes” rather than say, “starting the motor”) can generate a type-classification such as “hot-rodder” or “teenager” (Sacks 1992a [1966], pp.169 – 174). When this occurs, the sense of utterances is documented as related to topical and categorial organisations.

Constituting Recognisable social Activities

Using Disjunctive Categories and MCDs to Describe Participants within, and to Assemble the Features of a Recognisable Activity

Eglin and Hester (1992, 1999) illustrated the reflexive workings of membership categorisation procedures in their analysis of newspaper headlines and news stories. They noted that newspaper stories (and headlines) conventionally provide newsworthy versions of events (Eglin & Hester 1992, 1999) and found that the tasks of reporting and finding newsworthiness were typically accomplished using networks of MCDs implicated by specific categories rather than single MCDs and their relevant category collections. Eglin and Hester’s analyses demonstrated that different MCDs were used to provide for the intelligibility of a series of events as a newspaper headline (1992) or story (1999). For instance, their analysis of news stories (1999) associated with the event known as ‘the Montreal Massacre’ showed that particular focuses of newsworthiness (e.g., the constitution of the event as stories of horror,

tragedy, crime, or gun control) were organised categorially by establishing the necessary condition of a news story, that is, a disjuncture between “setting related and event based categories and their conventional predicates” (Eglin & Hester, 1999, p.204).

The “Story of Tragedy” (Eglin & Hester, 1999, pp.205 – 206), for example, was constituted “in the disjuncture between the predicated and actual futures of these murdered young people, these dead students” (205) using scenic properties such as descriptions of “family and collective biographies” (205) that implicated:

- ‘stage-of-life,’ collection “R” via various standardised relational pairs (SRPs) including: daughter-parent; sister-brother; friend-friend; and
- the murdered young persons’ incumbency in the category “student” that invoked expectations of successful futures, cut short because of their re-location in the MCD, “parties to a killing”.

In the first instance, the organisation of newsworthiness in the form of a story of tragedy was established using contrastive and disjunctive categorisations of those involved. The tragedy was constituted in the disjunction between youthful expectations of a successful future and their unnatural deaths. The tragic story was organised by an additional disjunction between the young persons’ entitlements to and the potential availability of “help” via their incumbency in the collection R standardised relational pairs (SRPs) (e.g., student-teacher, daughter-father, citizen-police) and their drastically reduced rights to access such help during the ‘massacre’. Eglin and Hester (1999, p. 205) found that the “category-predicate disjunctions are what make the tragedy, as the tragedy makes the news, and does so recognizably.”

Thus the membership categorisation activities made relevant by the tasks conventionally associated with the social activity constructing and finding newsworthiness for a newspaper story were found to be the same activities that made the text identifiable as a news story. The essential reflexiveness of contingent action and the ‘normative’ features of social activities have also been demonstrated in other media texts and institutional interactions as illustrated below.

Using Embedded Stories to Assemble Category Descriptions and Recognisable Social Activities

Many social activities organised for specific institutional business purposes (e.g., medical consultations, trials, television commercials etc.) include story-tellings (see Freiberg, 2003). In these contexts, the story-teller may feature in (and may be categorisable within) both the ongoing activity and the stories that are told as part of the activity. Where the scenic features of an activity include the telling of a story, category incumbency may, therefore, be organised with reference to both the ongoing activity and to the characterisation of the teller as a character within the story. Thus telling a story may be used as a procedure for category accretion. A third feature of story-tellings – not considered in this section – is that as story-

tellers, participants may be attributed particular interactional rights that affect local sequential order in an interaction. For instance, Sacks (1992a [1968]; 1974) found that story-tellers were attributed particular rights and obligations by auditors and vice versa. Incumbency in the category story-teller, for instance, carries with it: the right to 'hold the floor'; obligations to have a 'tellable' point that relates to the social purpose of the activity within which it is embedded; and an obligation to ensure that the story-telling sequence will come to a distinct end.

Story-tellings provide opportunities for characters in the story to be described and categorised and for generalisations to be drawn about the effects of particular actions and about category-action relationships. Category descriptions within stories are not limited to those that are explicit within the story-telling; rather, the "narrative intelligibility" (Francis & Hart 1997: 123) of a story itself can also be traded on for the classification of persons, objects and actions. The activity of story-telling sets up particular expectancies, including the recognisable text structures, that constitute the rationality and meaning of particular actions of characters in the story. Thus where stories are used within, say, institutional service encounters, moral lessons can be conveyed for instance, about the effects of good or poor service or special service requirements of an individual.

One property of stories embedded in other social activities is that they are knowingly designed as part of the other activity not as entities in themselves. The task for co-participants is to find the rationality of the story to the accomplishment of the institutional purpose of the institutional activity. It is an available cultural commonsense understanding that a story, for instance, about one's self, embedded in another institutional activity, will not be gratuitous self-description. Membership categorisation activities accomplished either explicitly or implicitly via embedded stories relate to situated relevancies and the specific tasks at hand (Jayyusi 1984; Sacks 1992a).

For instance, Francis and Hart's (1997) analysis of a television commercial showed that the intelligibility of various inclusions (e.g., a visual 'story' of a sequence of events in a Quayside scene and a song) were oriented to the constitution of the sense of the entire text as a TV commercial. Their rationality and intelligibility depended on the viewer's understanding of that relationship. The viewer's understanding of the text required an orientation to the text as "a virtual text *designed to be viewed as such*" (Francis & Hart 1997, p. 151). The story of a young man embedded in the commercial was a method of conveying meanings and co-selecting categories *for* the accomplishment of the advertisement of the product (a beer product). The relevance of the embedded story was that the co-selection of persons, activities and objects in the story ("crowded quayside," "customs official," "passengers," "dockhands," "boat," "cabbage," "crates and netting," "young man," "bald man," etc.) only provided a "consistent sense of scenic orderliness" if they were seen as components of a narrative (Francis & Hart 1997, p. 134). However, the categorisation of the central character as a young man missing things associated with 'home' particularly beer (and football) was oriented to making the exact sense required for the activity central to a television commercial (i.e., advertising a commercial product).

What Francis and Hart showed was that the embedding of a story within the television commercial not only set up particular opportunities for membership categorisation activities

but that the co-selection of the story-narrative and TV commercial provided for a particular interpretation of the actions of the central character. A third co-selected text, a song played concurrently with the visual narrative (specifying the name of the product being advertised), provided another layer of meaning also organised categorially. The conflation of two direct sources of information about the characters made available by the visual text and the song together with the activity that watching a television commercial consists of (i.e., looking for the advertised product) combined to specify the features of the category ‘young man’ on this occasion.

What this example demonstrates is not only the descriptive potential of embedded stories for tasks conventionally associated with other institutional activities but that, because they are so widely used, the ‘embeddings’ make the activities that contain them, recognisable cultural activities. In terms of descriptive potential, they serve to make more than one category-concept and MCD concurrently relevant for an individual and, by implication, for their co-participants. Embedded stories provide opportunities to include “occasioned” MCDs (Francis & Hart 1997: 135), that is, a collection of categories that might not otherwise seem sensible and, therefore, to effect category accretion and transformation.

Using Sequential Patterns to Assemble Recognisable Institutional Categories and Activities

The action of talking in particular ways using specific sequential structures in interactional events such as: classroom talk (Freebody & Freiberg 2000; Macbeth 1990); broadcast news interviews (Heritage & Greatbatch 1991); and medical consultations (Freiberg 2003; Maynard 1991) have documented the category-constitutive power of such actions. These same activities reflexively constitute the recognisable features of those settinged activities.

For instance, the specialised speech exchange system associated with “instructional, curricular activity” in elementary school classrooms was shown by Freebody and Freiberg (2000) to be constitutive of the “occasioned” MCD (see Francis & Hart 1997) “parties to a literacy lesson” composed of the categories “teacher,” “kind teacher,” “good student,” “bad student,” where the rationality and intelligibility of the actual event also depended on the invocation of a second MCD, dysfunctional family consisting of the categories “neglected child” and “neglectful parent.” Activities and interactional patterns predicated of the category ‘teacher’ were effectively used to naturalise and to “sanction the topicalisation of non-curricular domains” such as the moral values of the students, and features of parental care, and household routines in the students’ homes (Freebody & Freiberg, 2000, p.142). These interactionally accomplished topics in turn provided opportunities for descriptive accounts of the category “student” to be formulated not only in terms of activities typically associated with classroom learning but conflated observable conduct including “students’ behaviour and body movements with both assessable cognitive activity and intellectual ability”. These actions invoked category features and assembled the MCD ‘parties to a literacy lesson’, the categories teacher and student, and typical question-answer-evaluation (Q-A-E) sequential structure of teacher-student talk, in extended and non-normative ways.

Trading on normative features of the MCD “parties to a classroom lesson” in conjunction with the understandings provided by the MCD “dysfunctional family,” and recognisable pedagogic routines, the category “teacher” was constituted as a kind of clairvoyant moral police officer. Based on these category features, students’ performance of mundane actions (e.g., moving about the room, answering questions and postural positioning) were available to the teacher as evaluations of their own and their families’ “social and moral attributes, dispositions and values” (146). The assembled accounts of the programmatically relevant MCD “parties to a literacy lesson” and the programmatically relevant categories “student” and “teacher” were networked with the other MCDs and categories to achieve, in seen-but-unnoticed ways, the relevance of the teacher’s public moral judgements made of the student and his parents, and the activity of enlisting the support of other students in these judgements so that, in turn, making moral judgements of other students and their families was constituted as a category-bound activity for the category “student”. The teachers’ embedded accounts of their own and the students’ rights and obligations and the students’ reciprocal (and compliant) accounts of the categories, constituted the indexical features of the local MCD and the categories normatively associated with it. The situated account was achievable because it was grounded in and members oriented to the normative sequential structures of talk in the classroom setting. Freebody and Freiberg’s (2000) study demonstrated a procedure, that, according to Jayyusi (1984), is recurrently used as a device to extend or reduce the activities that will be considered to be morally adequate in a setting on specific occasions. Jayyusi (1984, p.172) found that,

[t]he use of setting inappropriate actions as a device by members enables them to extend their inferential horizon not only along a descending order of settings categorized and ordered thus by reference to that action, but also along an ascending or escalating order of possible actions in those settings, thus maintaining a consistency of evaluation of a person’s in situ actions.

CONCLUSION

Membership categorisation work is a normative feature of many everyday social activities. The local rationality and intelligibility of actions and activities are contingent on the accomplishment of categorial order. This, in turn, relies on the local transformation, for situated, practical purposes, of abstract and open-ended category-concepts and category-collections. The reciprocal activities, adequate membership categorisation, and membership categorisation analysis, are central to the organisation, management, and achievement of practical tasks in everyday life. We take it that members’ actions demonstrate that the thickly textured nature of everyday social activity is contingent on local, ongoing membership categorisation work; this is the understanding upon which we base our recommendation that, to avoid ‘tripwire analysis’, rigorous critical discourse analysis should include MCA.

In reflecting on the particularity of MCA's perspective, Schegloff has commented on its contrast with conventional sociological accounts of social order and categories of people in that it provides:

an alternative to the possibility that order manifests itself at an aggregate level and is statistical in character is what [Sacks] termed the 'order at all points' view... ..This view [e.g., MCA], rather like the 'holographic' model of information distribution, understands order not to be present only at aggregate levels and therefore subject to an overall differential distribution, but to be present in detail on a case by case, environment by environment basis... A culture is not then to be found only by aggregating all of its venues; it is substantially present in each of its venues... (1992, p. xlvi, inserts added).

Claims to some version of aggregated ontology in conventional interpretations of description of people ("maybe not all, but most ... teachers/students/ cardinals/politicians ...") etc) are at the core of hegemonic practice, but they also are part of the epistemology underlying some variations of critical discourse analysis and other forms of critical theory and social-justice-oriented advocacy. In this significant way many forms of critical discourse analysis mirror the reasoning practices of hegemonic uses of discourse. MCA, in contrast, allows us to identify how these descriptions are morally and ideologically constituted in everyday discourse, generally via unremarked lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, and structural choices. Using MCA, the critical discourse analyst is able to discover warrantable meanings via an analysis of the situated structures of these choices. Analysis produced by the application of MCA, is therefore, more likely to avoid the linguistic trip-wires that lie on the surface of discourse. It is in the constitutive sense that MCA offers useful applications for critical discourse analysts.

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