11. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Partners in an Australian University: The Exclusive ‘We’ and Social Inclusion

Catherine M. Demosthenous

Abstract

Contemporary research indicates that partnership between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians in universities can be a problem (e.g., Anderson, Singh, Stehbens, & Ryerson, 1998; Anning, Robertson, Thomas, & Demosthenous, 2005; Demosthenous, 2004; 2008). To gain a deeper insight into the problem, this paper explores a focus group interaction in which Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons are discussing their experiences of university. Drawing on ethnomethodology, the paper focuses on personal pronouns and particularly the first person pronoun “we”, which is examined using the inclusive/exclusive distinction. Application of this complex linguistic repertoire here provides a tool for distinguishing different uses of “we” that are otherwise hidden in English. Examination of how “we” operates in the data makes visible the relevant memberships that Indigenous participants include themselves in and exclude themselves from in their accounts, thus revealing matters to do with social inclusion. The findings show that Indigenous participants tend not to include Non-Indigenous persons in their productions of “we”, and therefore tend not to include them as co-members in their experiences of university. Overall, the paper shows that there is a way to go to dreaming a future in which “we”, that is, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons, partner as co-members in Australian universities.

Introduction

This chapter explores interaction in which Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians are engaged in a focus group activity, “discussing experiences of university”, in a university setting. Informed by Ethnomethodology (EM), and its analytic methods, Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA), the paper explores linguistic, conversational and categorial resources of the interaction, with a focus on personal pronouns, and particularly the non-single first person pronoun “we”.

Examination of how “we” operates in the data under analysis invokes the relevant memberships that focus group participants’ talk-into-being in producing their retrospective accounts of university experience. Further, exploration of the categories of person each participant is including and excluding from these memberships can be seen to segment the focus group population into particular membership categories. Examination of these organisations provides insights into the relevant memberships that participants invoke and the nature of the relations being experienced by the Indigenous participants, as talked-into-being in their retrospective accounts. Thus, the chapter provides an empirical account of racial matters in talk in inter-racial interaction based on ordinary everyday interaction between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons in a focus group event in a university setting in Australia.

The Inquiry

Although the first Australian university began operations in the mid-1800s, it was not until the advent of mass higher education in the 1970s that Indigenous Australians were given access to higher education institutions; in line with the social progressive “Australian discourse of the ‘fair go’” (Augoustinos et al., 1999, p. 353). Since that time, a number of legislative (e.g.,
Aboriginal Education Policy), financial (e.g., Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme), academic
(e.g., Indigenous Tertiary Assistance Scheme) and other support mechanisms (e.g., the National
Indigenous Cadetship Program) have been implemented to promote successful educational
outcomes and achievements for Indigenous Australians at the tertiary level. However,
according to the Australian national census figures for 2006, while Indigenous persons make
up 2.5% (i.e., 517,200 citizens) of the total population of Australia (i.e., 21,017,200 citizens)
(ABS, 2008). Indigenous Australians are under-represented in universities.

Table 1 (below) shows the Indigenous higher education national performance indicators
over the 2001 to 2006 period. These performance indicators (i.e., access, participation, retention
and success rates) are determined by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST).
They are considered in relation to the indicator of equality between Indigenous and domestic
students within Australia. These are 2.5% for the access and participation rates and 1.0% for
the retention and success rates. The following rates refer to the ratio between Indigenous and
all domestic students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Indicator</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access rate</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention rate</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success rate</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Statistics prior to 2002 are based on students undertaking units of study in semester 1 of each year,
calculated at 31 March. Post 2001, these statistics were based on students undertaking units of study over
a full academic year (DEST, 2005, p. 83).

The Table shows a drop in both the access and participation rates of Indigenous students
over the 2001 to 2006 period. While the numbers show a decline in the access and participation
rates of Indigenous students over that period, during the period 2001 to 2005, there was a slight
increase in the retention rates for Indigenous students. There was also a slight increase in the
success rate for Indigenous students over the period 2001 and 2006, which is good news for
Indigenous higher education.

In more recent times, the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) to the
Minister for Education, Science and Training has articulated their vision for Indigenous higher
education in Australia to be one “in which Indigenous Australians share equally in the life
and career opportunities that a university education can provide” (IHEAC, 2006, p. 10). Given
that Indigenous people are under-represented in higher education and the steady decline in
Indigenous access and participation rates in universities over the last few years, achieving that
vision presents certain challenges.

Further, while some have claimed that the diversity on Australian university campuses
promotes “understanding, prosperity and harmony” (Bishop, 2006, p. 394), Michael Dodson
(1994), a former Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, has
stated, “Indigenous people do not enjoy the “right to equal access to education ... the mere
granting of rights ... will not overcome the profound oppression we continue to experience,
even when it appears that ‘we are participating’” (Dodson, 1994).

Much of the existing research on Indigenous higher education suggests that relations
between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians on university campuses are problematic
(e.g., Anderson et al., 1998; Anning et al., 2005; Demosthenous, 2004, 2008; Hughes, 1988).
For instance, the 2005 National Indigenous Higher Education Network (NIHEN) report, A
National Review of the Roles, Responsibilities and Services Provided by Indigenous Higher
Education Support Centres (Anning et al., 2005), found that Australian university campuses
had been subjected to episodes of racist graffiti, slurs and other offensive acts targeting Indigenous Australians.

The NIHREN report, which examined the work of Indigenous higher education support centres across Australia, also reported that some Indigenous students experience the university as a “hostile and racist place” (Anning et al., 2005, p. 49). Similar findings were also reported in Anderson, Singh, Stehbens and Ryerson’s (1998) earlier, pioneering investigation into the structure of Australian universities and their inclusions of Indigenous people and their rights. That study concluded that “the university is still predominately an institution for the white person” (Anderson et al., 1998).

These findings echo the sentiment expressed by Nakata more than fifteen years ago, that “patronising, condescending and racist interactions can still be considered to be constituted at the intersection of ongoing dominant practices in the mainstream” university setting (Nakata, 1993).

In fact, understanding whether the higher education system is currently one in which Indigenous Australians “share equally” (IHEAC, 2006, p. 10) in the everyday life and rewards of a university education lends itself to an inquiry into how it is that Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians experience university. There are no Indigenous-only or Non-Indigenous-only universities in Australia. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians attend the same universities, share membership in those same universities and share experiences in those universities. Further, Langton (1993) has maintained that interaction between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people is one of the key domains in which Indigenous experience is negotiated, and issues of inclusion and exclusion are presented.

The Framework

As stated earlier, the empirical and conceptual framework informing this study comes out of Ethnomethodology (EM). EM is interested in understanding how ordinary members of a culture mutually construct a shared sense of order and intelligibility in everyday social life (Garfinkel, 1967/1984). EM provides understanding of social action, the nature of intersubjectivity and the social constitution of knowledge. Its analytical framework permits the documentation and examination of the commonsense knowledge that ordinary members of society use to “make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstance in which they find themselves” (Heritage, 1984, p. 4).

This chapter draws on EM’s analytic methods, CA and MCA, to examine and document talk between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous members to understand how persons mutually construct social order and intelligibility in interaction. The examination aims to provide deeper insights into matters of social inclusion and exclusion for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons in universities, and contribute to our current understandings of relations between these diverse groups in the university setting.

Conversation Analysis

CA emerged in the late 1960s out of the collaborative work of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (e.g., Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), and especially Sacks’ Lectures in Conversation (see, 1992a, 1992b). In a lecture to his students on conversation, Sacks explained,

[the kind of phenomena we are dealing with are always transcriptions of actual occurrences, in their actual settings (1992a, p. 113).

Hence, the main goal of CA is to describe and explicate the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on when participating in intelligible socially organised interaction.

Membership Categorisation Analysis

Like CA, MCA also emerged in the late 1960s out of Sacks’ (1964-1972) Lectures in Conversation. In his lecture, “the baby cried; the mommy picked it up”, Sacks (1992a, 1992b) explained that
people use and orient to membership categories as a basis for action. Sacks (1992a, 1992b) aimed to show his students how anyone hearing the utterance would common-sensically (i.e., by virtue of being members of shared cultural understanding) interpret that the mother who picked up the baby was the mother of that baby. Categories are not a simple, single aggregate, but are organised into collections of categories because they “go together” (Schegloff, 2007b, p. 467) as paired-categories or standardized-relational-pairs (SRP) (Sacks, 1992a, p. 218).

Sacks (1992a) also showed that any collection of membership categories contains at least a category that can be applied to some population containing at least a member, and that that single membership category is adequate for describing a member, as the economy rule maintains. This means, for example, that if a person has been categorised as a “mother”, providing an extended list of the membership category is unnecessary.

Further, Sacks (1986, p. 134) identified “a class of category sets” — “which-type sets”, which are made up of a set or a group of two or more categories “where each set can classify any member of the population”. The class of category sets are said to be Pn-adequate. Pn-adequate category sets include “sex, age, race, religion, perhaps occupation” (1992a, p. 40). Schegloff (2007b, p. 468, emphasis in original) explained,

...it is a fact of major importance that there are at least two Pn-adequate devices in every language/culture we know ... because anyone who can be categorised by some category from one device — say female [from the MCD sex] — can be categorised by a different category — say “45-year-old” from the MCD age.

While one can allude to a category (e.g., “mommy”) by mentioning the doing of an action (e.g., “picking up one’s crying baby”) that is category bound, the doing of a category-bound action can introduce into an occasion the relevance of the category to which that action is bound. Reference to categorisations naturally arise out of the work of members in putting “in information relevant to seeing what was happening” on the scene (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 24) and rising or characterising themselves and others as members of particular categories. It is not a knowledge of individual or specific persons that generates a projection common to members but “the features of a perceived class of persons that is relevant” to the incumbents of the category (Jayyusi, 1984, p. 23).

Further, Sacks (1992a, p. 590) explained that the treatment of categories of some collection to a population “as ‘partitioning’ a population into various categories”. Sacks (1992a, p. 590) explained,

...[t]he application of the categories of some collection to a population, is an operation that can be talked of as “partitioning” a population into various categories. One consequence of that operation - in the first instance for analysts, but then perfectly obviously as a matter that’s oriented to - is that we get a population that can be considered to be composed either of co-members or cross-members of some category, or of all co-members or all-cross members.

So, application of the categories of the collection “race” to any population can give the partitions “black/white” or “Indigenous/Non-Indigenous” or a range of other racial categorial partitionings depending on the context of the interaction. Then, there might be three people, two Indigenous persons, who are co-member to each other, and cross-member to one Non-Indigenous. There might be two people one Indigenous and one Non-Indigenous, giving all cross-members; or two people both Indigenous, giving all co-members. Further, Sacks found that persons do not simply talk about being co-members in a category, for example, Indigenous; they may talk about being co-members by reference to other collections’ categories, such as “tutor” or “student” from the collection, “university”. Co-membership and cross-membership can be relevant for all sorts of activities. In fact, as Sacks (1992a, p. 590) has explained, “[s]ome things are not appropriately done unless persons are cross-members, other things are not properly done unless persons are co-members”. While expectable categories in this study relate to “Indigenous” and “Non-Indigenous” persons, it will be interesting to examine the
types of collections that participants orient to and what those might look like in terms of co-memberships and cross-memberships.

**Personal Pronouns**

A key aspect of this chapter is that of personal pronouns. Simply put, pronouns “stand in place of a noun phrase” (Fromkin, Rodman, Collins, & Blair, 1996; Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973), and are “used in the grammatical classification of words, referring to the closed sets of items which can be used to substitute for a noun phrase” (Crystal, 1985, p. 248). Interestingly, a number of studies on pronouns have shown that “they are not merely substitutes for nouns” (e.g., Bramley, 2001; Elias, 1978; Errington, 1998; Fox, 1987; Neville, 2001; Sacks, 1992a, p. 333; Silverstein, 1976).

In his discussion of “tying techniques/rules”, for instance, Sacks (1992a, p. 333) found that “[d]eployment of the pronouns ‘we’, ‘you’, ‘they’ and the like can serve to express varying sorts of solidarity and differentiation”, as they invoke collective identities and group memberships. In McHoul’s (1997, p. 317) investigation of the production of “we” amongst swimmers, he found that “we” can be summative (i.e., made up of a finite list of members, including the coach and members of the swim/relay team) or premissive (i.e., made up of an infinite list of members, including spectators, the audience, fans, or virtually any person). Hence, he argues that “[w]ith respect to sports (and in a few other instances), ‘we’ does both listed and categorial work at the same time; though it may not” (McHoul 1997, p. 319). Although there are a large number of studies that have adopted an interactional approach to the study of pronouns, few have gone beyond examination of the pronouns in English to an examination of the pronouns in the inclusive/exclusive system for distinguishing pronouns. This is the aim in this chapter.

Further, the English language contains only one non-singular first person plural pronoun (i.e., “we”), to refer to collective or group membership, over half of the Indigenous languages of Australia (e.g., Torres Strait Island Kriol, Roper River Kriol) and many languages of the world (e.g., Vietnamese, Chechen) make a distinction between the “inclusive” and “exclusive” varieties of “we” (Dixon, 1980). Dixon explained,

...[t]here will be two separate duals – inclusive ‘you and I’ and exclusive ‘I and someone other than you’ – and plurals – inclusive ‘you and I and one or more others’ and exclusive ‘I and two or more others, not including you’ (1980, p. 277).

This inclusive form refers to the inclusion of the addressee in the collection being established, whereas the “exclusive” form refers to the exclusion of the addressee from the collection being established. Dixon (1980) has shown that many languages also make a distinction between “dual” and “plural” varieties of “we”. The dual system includes a maximum of two persons in the collective (i.e., the speaker and one other person), while the plural system includes more than two persons in a collective (i.e., the speaker and two or more persons).

Although there is no grammatical category of this system in English, Skelton, Wearn and Hobbs (2002) have examined a standard distinction between doctor and patients’ productions of inclusive “we” (“you and I”) and exclusive “we” (“we doctors, but not you patients”) in English language primary care consultations. The authors found that “doctors are very much more likely than patients or companions to use ‘we’ and, on many occasions on which they do, an inclusive interpretation is possible” (2002, p. 484). The authors further found that patients and companions do not include doctors in their use of “we”, which suggests that “they do not perceive doctors as participants in care, but as conduits or co-ordinators of care” (Skelton et al., 2002, p. 488). The authors conclude that “the fact that patients and companions never included the doctor when they said ‘we’ is particularly interesting, and from the point of view of partnership – disappointing” (Skelton et al., 2002, p. 488).
Research Design

Selection of Sites and Participants

The data for this study were collected from a single focus group event conducted in Brisbane, Australia – an Indigenous Higher Education Support Centre in a university setting. The focus group method elicits people’s feelings, attitudes and perceptions about a particular issue through conversations (Puchta & Potter, 2004). Further, single events are taken to be an important “key starting point” in CA/MCA research, and are “sufficient to attract attention and analytic interest because the instance is an event whose features and structures can be examined to discover how it is organized” (Psathas, 1985, p. 50) and “orderly for its participants” (Schegloff, 1966). Hence, in CA/MCA studies, a single, focus group event is a consequence of its being talked-into-being and is thus an interactional achievement of the practical actions of participants.

While most research provides a snapshot of participants in terms of macro-sociological variables (e.g., educational background, income) and personal background, the researcher has elected not to provide such a snapshot. Participants’ “missing data” (ten Have, 2000, p. 55) is provided only when made relevant by a participant in their talk and only where their local procedural relevance is demonstrated. In other words, it is the aim of this research that “[t]he existence and relevance of such identities are, strictly speaking, to be discovered in the analysis, as products of the local practices of participants” (ten Have, 2000, p. 55).

Further, this study is underpinned by the ethics, values, principles and themes recommended for ethically-appropriate research practices with Indigenous people, as set down by the National Health and Medical Research Council for Indigenous people (NHMRC, 2003/2007) and the principles of ethical research as set down by Griffith University’s Ethics Committee.

Transcription Procedures and Conventions

Recording interaction is a fundamental aspect for CA/MCA studies. Sacks (1984), Heritage and Atkinson (1984, p. 4) and others (e.g., ten Have, 2002) have maintained that tape recordings: (i) allow the researcher to listen repeatedly to the recording, permitting discovery of phenomenon; and (ii) are records that others can use to check the analytic claims made by the researcher.

The starting point for analysis is to engage with the data in an unmotivated way; that is without pre-conceived notions or ideas of what one might find, because it is the features of the interaction itself that are of relevance to the analysis, which fits well with the ethical concerns relating to the conduct of Indigenous research. Noticings and discoveries for how people take turns talking, how they emphasise their talk, what they say when they talk, how they talk, and other features are made possible through the close and repeated listening to the recorded data and in the process transcribing (e.g., Jefferson, 1989; Sacks, 1987).

The transcription conventions for representing details of talk that were used in this study were devised by Gail Jefferson and are used in many CA/MCA publications, with minor variations. The symbols and explanations used in this study are based on, and simplified from, those provided in Jefferson (1989). Liddicoat (2007, p. 14) explained,

...[t]his transcription system is well suited to detailed analysis of talk and it has proved to be both a robust and useful tool for understanding the ways in which language is used in social interaction.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is a key issue for research because reliability establishes consistency and truth and objectivity of the findings (Peräkylä, 1997). With regard to the advantages of using tape-recordings, Sacks (1984, p. 26) said:

I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me.
The validity of the data was ensured through the gathering of authentic, naturally occurring (that is, not-experimental and not co-produced with the researcher), which were audio-recorded and later accurately transcribed to represent the social phenomena to which it refers.

In CA/MCA studies the validity of the interactions is not a problem of the research design because the validity of the talk and actions, as trustworthy, are determined by the participants themselves (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967/1984; Sacks et al., 1974). Every instance of talk warrants its own analysis and "the truthfulness of the analytic claims that are being made about those recordings" (Peräkylä, 1997, p. 201) are determined by, and through, the participants’ utterances of the claims.

Analysis

Recall that in the English language, the non-singular first person pronoun, "we", is used inclusively and exclusively for duals and plurals, which is what is displayed in the data under analysis here. Although there is no grammatical category of this system in English, Indigenous Australian languages make distinctions of inclusive/exclusive, and many also make distinctions of dual/plural (Dixon, 1980). These distinctions from Indigenous Australian languages provide (i) a tool for distinguishing different uses of "we" that are otherwise hidden in English, and (ii) are of relevance because these distinctions exist in the first languages of the group (Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander languages and Kriol), so the distinctions are likely to be more salient to them.

Application of this more linguistic repertoire here extends to the analyst a way into the data that distinguishes persons and complements of persons as members, into categories of members. It can distinguish between (i) who is being included and who is being excluded, and/or (ii) the number of individuals being referred to in a particular collection being established through a speaker’s production of “we” (Dixon, 1980).

Each of these collections are made up of a set of categories that as ongoing accomplishments of the parties. Further, in examining the application of the categories established through the production of “we”, focus group participants might produce any combination of co-member and/or cross-member groups, thereby partitioning a population in a particular way (Sacks, 1992a, p. 590). Thus, the identity sets or categories that participants make evident and the membership categorisation devices (MCDs) to which they orient are only discoverable from within the actual setting in which the talk occurs as interactional achievements of the focus group participants, and through examination of “we” on many levels of organisation.

All Aboriginal Persons in a Tutorial-Class

In Extract 1 (below), Ronnie takes up the floor to give an account of an “unbelievable” (line 399) experience that she shared with “all Aboriginal persons in a tutorial-class”. The talk is produced as an upgrading of the accusation made by other members of the focus group event, who have complaining about biased treatment of persons who are Indigenous.

The talk begins in overlap, with Ronnie producing an action that informs co-participants that she will be sharing a personal experience, “[as I went through university my]self” (line 397). Without pausing, Ronnie adds, “>fair while ago now<” (line 397) and “>I graduated in ninety-nine<” (line 398), which she hurriedly produces (perhaps in an attempt to secure her position as speaker, given her interruption to the current speaker’s turn). Ronnie then produces an assessment of the yet-to-be-told experience, “it w’z unbelievable what we ‘ad to put up with.” (lines 399-400). The utterance not only informs co-participants to listen out for something assessable as “unbelievable” (lines 399), it makes explicit that the treatment that she was subjected to was something she endured with others.

What is hearably “unbelievable”, as self-assessed by Ronnie in her initial formulation, might not be attributable to the speaker’s claim of having had such an experience, but to the fact that “[we still ’ere!” (line 405), that is that Aboriginal people did not die out. In prefacing
the next bit of her utterance, “‘bout the Aboriginals dyin’ out and everything” (lines 403-404) with the phrase, “yikhnow” (line 403), Ronnie “appeals to [the] intersubjectivity” of her co-participants and does not have to “spell things out” (Edwards, 2003, p. 36) for them.

**Extract 1: Lines 397-408**

397 Ronnie: [as I wen’ through university my]sel’fair while ago now,
398 >I graduated in ninety-nine<, when I first started .hhh over at
399 ((university)) () it w’z unbelievable what [we] ‘ad to put up
400 †with.
401 We were sitting there in one one section and ah >all the
402 Aboriginals were sittin’ in the fron’ row<, ‘nd this
403 bloke () would of’en say to us in sociology yikhnow, ‘bout
404 the Aboriginals dyin’ out and everything,
405 en’ ‘ed look straight’- at us an’ I’d go, †twooloo †[we]
406 still ‘ere!†
407 Gerard: [((laugh))]
408 Frank: [((laugh))]

Following a brief pause, Ronnie provides some background to her story by way of a scenic description, “We were sitting there in one one section and ah >all the Aboriginals were sittin’ in the fron’ row” (lines 401-402). The utterances, “we were sitting there in one section” (line 401) and “sittin’ in the fron’ row” (line 402), includes a contrast class term, “sitting”, that signals a shift in the scenic background of Ronnie’s story; from the more general place “university” to that of the place of “sitting” in a “class room” or “lecture hall”. The utterances, then, can be thought of as “place-indexical terms” that lend topical coherence to the account (Sacks, 1986, p. 131).

As place-indexical terms, they make relevant specific places and their connection to the place named in the initial formulation, that is, “university”. Mobilising this series of place-indexical terms is a method that Ronnie is hearably using to bind together her experience and connect the topical events of the experience as a unit. Selecting place connectors promotes the internal organisation of the account, and provides for co-participants a “recognition-type description” (Sacks, 1986, p. 133) related to the topic. Sacks (1986, p. 133) has explained that a recognition-type description enables the speaker “to put in information that has as its heard motivation that it enables recognition to take place, but where you can also put in information that you want to convey for the story”.

That said, it appears that Ronnie’s specification, “fron’ row”, is significant because of **who it is** that is said to conventionally sit in the front row of an educational classroom. Conventionally, those in the front row are normatively positioned as “A-students” or “bright students” and not their SRPs, “D-students” or “under-performing students”, who are taken to conventionally occupy the “back row”. Hence, Ronnie’s selection of the recognition-type description is a method that allows her to display and challenge a particular institutional understanding that normatively downgrades the scholastic aptitude of incumbents of the modified category, Aboriginal-student.

Further, Ronnie’s selection of a recognition-type description, “this bloke ... in sociology” (lines 402-403) suggests someone ordinary — “bloke” as an (informal) category for all males, rather than a subset of “lecturer/tutor”, which would be the requisite expertise associated with
the more appropriate descriptor, "tutor/lecturer/convenor". Ronnie can be seen to "downgrade members" (Sacks, 1992a, p. 249) of the category, "tutor/lecturer/convenor", which explicitly calls into question the category-bound knowledges that members of that category "requiredly possess" (Hester & Egin, 1997, p. 7).

Ronnie's productions of "we" are of the exclusive variety and the summative type. They include "all the Aboriginals" (lines 401-402) "over at" another university "in sociology" (line 403), but not the Aboriginals from focus group event. This all co-member set includes "all Aboriginal persons in a tutorial-class, but excludes all Aboriginal persons from this university here and addressee/s" category under the tutorial-group collection. Further, the "time references" (Sacks, 1986, p. 130) that are sprinkled throughout Ronnie's talk imply that the treatment that she tolerated as a member of that collective at that time was worse than other Aboriginals suffer at this time, now, hence "it w'z unbelievable what we 'ad to put up "with" (lines 399-400).

The production of the exclusive-like "we" provides a resource through which Ronnie identifies her incumbency in the category "Aboriginal", as she explicitly states, that "we", Aboriginals, have not died out and are still here. Further, it is one that alludes to that socio-historic form of organisation in which the extinction of the Aboriginal race was promoted as a part of the normative racial discourse in Australia (e.g., Schegloff, 1996; Whitehead, 2007), that is without having said it in so many words.

**All Persons from Thursday Island**

Another example of the exclusive-like "we" is presented in Extract 2 below. In the fragment below, Lorna has self-nominated to take a turn at talk, which is her first turn at talk in the focus group interaction. In first taking up the floor, Lorna momentarily holds the floor with the utterance "My um" (line 695), which she repeats, and which is followed by a brief silence. With a high pitch onset, Lorna starts to produce a personal experience about her first year at university, which she informs "has been very different to everyone here 'ya'" (line 695-696).

**Extract 2: Lines 695-706**

695 Lorna: My um, my um (.) tit I suppose my time at uni has been very  
696 different to everyone here 'ya' 'cause I do journalism and pr.  
697 And=um, first year w'z a bit rocky because I come from  
698 Thursday Island and I've never been to like Brisbane  
699 beforehand um >living life< so it w'z a big it w'z a  
700 big jump fa me= an' although, like, although I'm not dark in,  
701 like, my colour of my skin it's still inside ()  
702 like (1.0) the way [we] live back home is very different to the  
703 way [we] live down here, and I just found' thad I stuck to  
704 Islanders and Aboriginals down here because () other  
705 people outside our culture didn't respect like thuh  
706 morals that [we] had and I didn't find them to (.)

Lorna reports that her experience is very different to "everyone" in the focus group interaction because she (i) studies "journalism and pr" (line 696), (ii) comes from "Thursday Island" (line 698), and (iii) had never been to Brisbane, "living life" (lines 698-699). In other words, Lorna begins her turn-at-talk by informing co-participants that what she is reporting is
not something she shared with others, but something that she experienced alone, as indicated by her production of the singular forms of the first person pronouns, “My” (line 695) and “I” (lines 695, 696, 697, 698, 700). However, as the telling unfolds, Lorna can be seen to be making different pronominal choices, as she selects a summative type “we” to give a background to her experience.

In the sequence, the first “we” (line 702), second “we” (line 703) and third “we” (line 706) all refer to the racial group “Thursday Island” (line 698). In all three utterances – (i) “the way we live back home” (line 702), (ii) “the way we live down here” (lines 702-703), and (iii) “thuh morals that we had” (lines 705-706) – “we” makes explicit all Thursday Island people. Here, an all co-members “all persons from Thursday Island, but excluding all non-Thursday Island persons” category is being produced under the racial-group collection. This category can be seen to be of the exclusive variety because there are no other persons in the focus group event that are from Thursday Island.

In her production of the pronoun in the possessive case, “our” (line 705), in the phrase, “other people outside our culture” (lines 704-705), Lorna alludes to, or hints at (Sacks, 1992a, p. 595), the relevance of “culture” with regard to “we”. Lorna talks into-being a set that makes a sharp distinction between members making up the category “Indigenous”, as it includes, “all Islanders and Aboriginals down here and all persons from Thursday Island”. In alluding to the category, “culture”, as a sub-set of the category, Thursday Island, and comprising all Thursday Island persons and “Islanders and Aboriginals down here”, Lorna is indicating that the categories “Islanders and Aboriginals” shared greater membership possibilities with “Thursday Island” people than people outside culture (line 704).

Although Lorna talks into-being an “all persons from Thursday Island” category that seems to exclude the addressees, her talk around the category “culture” alludes to a category in which Islander and Aboriginal persons in the focus group event (i.e., Ronnie and others) can be seen as strongly aligning with those participants, as people inside our culture, that is, as members of “our culture”. Lorna’s understanding is not one that can be disputed because it is something that she, personally, experienced, as marked by her shift back to the first person singular in the utterance, “I didn’t find them to!” (line 706).

Discussion

A number of findings were made with regard to this exploration on linguistic, conversational and categorial resources of the interaction, through its focus on the non-singular first person pronoun “we”. Overall, with regard to the inclusive/exclusive dual/plural pronominal distinction that was applied here, there were instances of “we” being produced by participants in providing their retrospective accounts of university experience that partitioned the population in specific ways. What typically happened was that participants’ productions of “we” aligned those persons included in its projection, while excluding all others.

Further, all productions of “we” were exclusive-like, which means that participants did not include the addressee(s) of the talk in their projections (i.e., participants in the focus group event). Participants’ productions of the exclusive plural-like “we” produced a variety of all co-membership categories that were made up of finite categories. In other words, the categories “Aboriginal” and “Thursday Island” were produced through the productions of the summative type “we” in the sense that the projections of “we” comprised a finite list comprising (i) “all the Aboriginals” (lines 401-402) “over at” another university “in sociology” (line 403) and (2) “all persons from Thursday Island, but excluding all non-Thursday Island persons” (see, lines 702, 703 & 706). In so doing, they align themselves with members of their own race, and not necessarily members of the categories that typically make up university collections, e.g., “students”.

Recall that Sacks (1992a, 1992b) found that persons do not simply talk about being co-members in a single collection (in this case, “race”), and may talk about being co-members by reference to other collections’ categories. However, this was not the case in the data under
analysis here. While the collection “university” and its categories “student” might be expectable categories in a discussion on experiences in university, both of the participants in this data under analysis only mention the Pn-adequate categories belonging to the collection “race”. The participants in this data produce “we’s” that refer only to the racial makeup of the group.

It might be speculative to suggest that the finding that Indigenous participants do not include Non-Indigenous participants in their retrospective accounts of experiencing university indicates that Indigenous persons do not perceive Non-Indigenous as participants in universities; in much the same way that Skelton et al. (2002, p. 488) found that “patients and companions [in primary care consultations] do not include doctors in their use of ‘we’”; and thus do not perceive doctors as participants in care. However, what is not speculative is that the most pervasive feature of the talk was that of the relevance of race to one’s experience of university.

In orienting to racial categories in their accounts, both Ronnie and Lorna made relevant racial phenomena to their university experiences. For instance, Ronnie’s account called into question the expertise of Non-Indigenous lecturers/convenors to teach Indigenous students, as she speaks about the reportedly racist sentiment produced by “this bloke” (the lecturer/tutor) in her sociology class. Further, one of the accounts made explicit reference to the suitability of the relationship between the categories, “Indigenous” and “university student”. Ronnie alludes to this in her “unbelievable” experience of discrimination that she shared with “all Aboriginal persons in a tutorial-class”. What appears to be happening is that there is this suggestion that members of the category, “Aboriginals”, do not share “eligible” relationships to the collection, “university”, and therefore in the category, “student”, which is something on which Sacks (1992a) spoke. The example mentioned here refers to a lack on the part of university lecturers (including “this bloke in sociology”) to see the “eligibility” of a first category, “Indigenous”, to a second category, “university students”. This supports comments made by the former Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, Michael Dodson, that, Indigenous people do not enjoy the “right to equal access to education... [and that Indigenous students must strive to] overcome the profound oppression we continue to experience, even when it appears that we are participating” (Dodson, 1994).

While Ronnie’s talk challenges some of the dominant theorisations and myths about Aboriginal students, Lorna’s account reveals the isolation that she felt when leaving her home on Thursday Island to study in a major city. For Lorna, it is the isolation from her Thursday Island co-members and an experienced lack of respect from those outside of her culture that sees her form relationships and experience university with “Islanders and Aboriginals” in Brisbane.

So, the findings indicate that the application of the inclusive/exclusive distinction to the data at hand means that “we” can only be understood on a moment-by-moment basis, and that it is a “powerful resource” for interpreting “who ‘we’ are at any moment” (Malone, 1997, p. 67). The results point to the flexibility of “we” as a resource by which participants could be seen partitioning the population (in this case, the focus group population and the broader population), but also as a resource by which participants could also be seen aligning the population. Finally, if the relevant category for talk about one’s experiences of university is couched in terms of one’s racial membership and group affiliation, then it is fair to say that one’s race matters to those experiences; and particularly with regard to one’s experience of social inclusion and exclusion. Given the experiences shared in this interaction, it is fair to say that there is a way to go to dreaming a future in which Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons partner as co-members in universities, at least for these people in this moment in space and time.

Conclusion

This chapter explored a focus group interaction in which Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons were discussing their experiences of university, in a university setting in Brisbane, Australia. The chapter drew on EM’s analytic methods, CA and MCA, to examine participants’ productions of personal pronouns, and particularly the first person pronoun “we”, which
was examined using the inclusive/exclusive distinction. Examining this particular complex linguistic repertoire provided a way to distinguish different uses of “we” that are otherwise hidden in English. The examination of how “we” operates in the data made visible the relevant memberships that Indigenous participants include themselves in and exclude themselves from in their retrospective accounts of university experience.

What happened was that the Aboriginal and Thursday Island participants did not include Non-Indigenous persons in their productions of “we”, and, in this sense, excluded them from their retrospective accounts in which they spoke of their experiences of university. Whereas “we” has been shown to be a socially deployable resource that makes available group-identities or memberships, and one that allows us to see who “we” refers to at any given moment, it was also shown to be one that can provide deep insights into matters of social inclusion and exclusion.

Overall, this work has shown that there remains a way to go to arrive at that time when we a “we” that includes Indigenous and Non-Indigenous persons – partner as co-members in Australian universities. In terms of Indigenous higher education research, educational planet shapers can use CA/MCA’s analytic methods to return to grass roots to develop even deeper insights and understandings of how social order, orderliness and organisation are produced.

Further, given some of the matters raised in the study, it may prove beneficial to undertake research inside the interactions that take place in the “tutorial-class”, the engine rooms of university life. This may enhance our understanding of how we are to live the dream of a future in which Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people participate as partners in universities across Australia, and are part of each other’s university experiences.

Endnotes
1 The figures show the Indigenous Australian population under three racial groups, (i) Aboriginal only (total, 463, 900 citizens), (ii) Torres Strait Islander only (total, 33, 100 citizens), and (iii) both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (i.e., 20, 200 citizens) (ABS, 2006).
2 NIHEN is a national representative peak body committee of the Indigenous higher education sector.
3 English makes a marginal distinction through the inclusive, ‘let’s’. The directive, ‘let’s eat’ can include the person addressed, and therefore be an invitation to the addressee to eat (i.e., ‘let you and I eat’). Alternatively, ‘let us eat’- formal usage - can exclude the person addressed, and be a request to leave the speaker alone, (i.e., ‘go away so that I – and one or more unnamed others – can eat”).
4 Note, this study is not suggesting that these distinctions (i.e., inclusive/exclusive or dual/plural) exist in English grammar, but are a useful tool to uncover the various referents of we/our/us.

References


