

Introduction

Consider Sociolinguistics. Where did it come from? Why is it called what it's called? How come courses in Sociolinguistics appear on many different types of degree programme, for example Linguistics, (English) Language, Sociology, Cultural Studies and so on? An academic did not suddenly come upon a subject and know by observing something about its 'nature' that it was Sociolinguistics. It is not an entity with discrete boundaries, just as the subjects I've listed above are not entities with discrete boundaries. Universities over the years have decided on the distinctions between the disciplines via discussion and debate, and what constitutes Sociolinguistics has gone through a similar process.

The key word here is process. Social Constructionism does not take as its starting point entities or states such as Sociolinguistics, or motherhood, or government, or manners; rather it argues that these have been constructed in particular ways by the societies in which they appear. Social Constructionism looks beyond, and indeed challenges, taken-for-granted notions such as 'it is natural for every woman to have a maternal instinct'; or 'governments represent the societies that elect them'; or 'it is rude to speak with your mouth full' and says 'who says?' Social Constructionism wants to look back and above and beyond to the processes that have caused these things to become taken-for-granted 'knowledge': who has said what when, to whom, and how, to get us to where we are on any one topic?

This is not to say, it should be pointed out, that Social Constructionism is all about *critiquing* the taken-for-granted: often the processes that are observed will involve some element of power and therefore potentially inequality, and in such cases there is often rightful critique; but in other cases it is simply a case of identifying and observing a social process. These two different approaches are sometimes known as macro and micro, weak and strong, or dark and light, social constructionism (although each of these sets of labels could be accused of being unnecessarily evaluative) (Burr 1995). The macro, weak, or dark, form asserts that we engage in construction that is informed by, or at least linked to, wider economic and social processes; the micro, or strong, or light, form allows the individuals involved a good deal more 'agency', a concept to which I will return later that broadly refers to acting independently and making one's own choices.

While we should not lump all social constructionism together as negative social critique, neither should we think of the macro and micro versions as two distinct schools of thought. It is probably more useful to consider it like a continuum as regards the extent to which what is constructed has been regularised and in turn institutionalised, and there is no reason why analysis cannot take account of 'macro' elements in analysing 'micro' texts in detail.

The interactional nature of what I have been discussing above has probably already suggested that language would be a key element in social constructionism. Wilson and Stapleton (2007:393) point out that the obvious synergies between the two have not

always been acted upon when they claim that ‘modern social theory highlights the role of language in social change/reproduction, yet rarely draws on actual linguistic resources or theory. Equally, sociolinguistics situates linguistic practice within the social domain, but only weakly makes links to social theory’. They recognise the potential for sociolinguistics to both inform and be informed by social theory, and the latter part of this chapter will show that there is a growing body of work that we could refer to as social constructionist sociolinguistics.

I will for the remainder of the chapter attempt to position sociolinguistics in relation to Social Constructionism. I will start by situating Social Constructionism itself within social theory more broadly by giving an overview of key developments and shifts over particularly the last three decades or so, but with some material from considerably earlier than that when contextually useful. I will go on to discuss in some detail the work of Berger and Luckmann, back to whom Social Constructionism is generally traced. Next I will discuss other social theorists upon whom work in the Social Constructionist area of contemporary Sociolinguistics has drawn. Of these, Goffman is the closest to the tradition of Berger and Luckmann. Foucault, too, would be explicitly labelled a social constructionist. Others would not be so explicitly labelled, but are worthy of inclusion as their shift away from the structural to engage more fully with agency make them important precursors or adjuncts to Social Constructionism per se, for example Bakhtin, Bourdieu and Said. Finally I will review what I consider to be key Social Constructionist Sociolinguistic work, highlighting the types of data, and by extension the areas of society, which it has sought to explore.

Historical context

To begin to situate Social Constructionism, it is useful to consider the shift in thinking that is referred to as Postmodernism, and in turn to situate that we need to go much further back, starting with the Enlightenment, with the caveat that this is by necessity a bit of a 'potted history'. The Enlightenment is so called because it marks a shift from medieval ways of thinking which saw things as divinely ordained, and a feudal power structure that consisted of a very thin pyramid with the divinely ordained king at the top and a great many serfs, the vast majority of the population, at the bottom, with very few others in between. With the Enlightenment came a focus on rationality. Big advances were made in the scientific world, and it began to be suggested that there might be universal ways of categorising everything and suggesting how they might develop, for example Darwin's theory of evolution. Things were now viewed not as individual entities but as related to other entities. Marx's theories (e.g. 1970; 1992) suggested a process of development for the socio-political sphere too. The world could be seen as, at least potentially, progressing, moving forward towards something greater. The development of Chaos Theory and the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe suggested for some the point at which any universality of thought no longer applied (this has been challenged by many saying that the fall of Stalinism is not the same thing as the unworkability of socialism).

In any case, Postmodernism developed as a way of viewing the world that rejected any form of 'grand narrative', that is, anything that purported to have all the answers, to be a

‘theory of everything’ (in the way that Darwinism and Marxism appeared to provide a template for the potential development of the whole natural and socio-political worlds respectively). The world began to be viewed as fragmented and thus it became as important to look at the little things as the big things, as important to look at the local as the global. The evaluative distinction between high culture and popular culture became blurred, and with that came a focus on the ‘ordinary’ or ‘everyday’. And the idea that ‘everything is relative’ (albeit this is a rather simplistic and stereotypical way of putting it) challenged the very notion of ‘truth’. And with no universal structure, the agency of the individual is paramount.

In the academic sphere, the development of Postmodernism was accompanied by, or perhaps preceded by, what is sometimes referred to as ‘the linguistic turn’, that is, a recognition that our experience of the world is very much bound up with the language that we hear, read and use. Early engagement with this came from the Structuralists, and in particular Ferdinand de Saussure (1983). He claimed that the meaning of particular linguistic terms did not come from some inherent nature, but instead from their relationship to other terms, a relationship of difference: things ‘mean’ as much because of what they are *not* as what they *are*. As an illustration, when we are acquiring language as children, our understanding of different animals develops the more animals we are aware of: we get to know that a dog is not a cat, but also that it is not a cow or a fish or a bird either. And what it means to be a man (at least in dominant western culture) is as much bound up with not being a woman, not being feminine, as it is with any essential element of masculinity; one cannot be understood without the other. The relational aspect of de

Saussure's work challenged earlier ideas of the essentialism of meaning. Debates were also had over which direction this understanding moves in, about the extent to which the language we acquire has implications for the way we see, experience and categorise the world. Do we experience things and then, having made sense of them perceptively, acquire ways to talk about them (the kind of view psychologists like Piaget (1954) would have taken)? Or is it impossible for us to even begin to make sense of the world until we acquire a language, a lens to view it through (the kind of view Sapir and Whorf (1956) took)? This again is a matter of degree. The debates about language and culture moved the discussions on further, but structure was still key, regardless of whether we consider that societal structure led to the development of language or vice versa. This focus on structure was challenged by Poststructuralists who wanted to examine not the structures per se, but where the structures had come from, what processes had occurred to lead to things being structured as they are.

Key thinkers

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann

Social Constructionism can be traced back to Berger and Luckmann. It is a phenomenological approach that contrasts with traditional positivist approaches: positivist approaches sought to analyse individuals in society in a scientific manner, thus positioning them as passive objects, 'vessels' from which 'static' information could be collected or gleaned, whereas the phenomenological approach concerns itself with human consciousness and 'common sense' and how the world is understood and structured from individuals' and groups points of view as *subjects*.

More specifically, Berger and Luckmann work within the area of the 'sociology of knowledge'. They suggest that it was necessary to look not just comparatively at differences between what is taken as 'knowledge' in different societies, but also at how things come to be taken as knowledge; in their words, 'not only ... the empirical variety of knowledge in human societies, but also ... the processes by which *any* body of knowledge comes to be socially established *as* 'reality' (1966:15). They draw on historicist work, which claims situations can only be understood on their own terms (1966:19). Marxist and Nietzschean work, too, provide useful context for Berger and Luckmann's development of the sociology of knowledge. Marxist thinking sees human consciousness as brought about by activity, and more specifically labour, and the social relationships that arise in and from this activity. It tends to focus on ideology as a weapon of the powerful and as encouraging a 'false consciousness' among workers (1966:18). Nietzschean thinking, too, talks of the 'art of mistrust' (1966:19). It is fair to say that their contribution is to shift the focus of the social construction of reality from the highbrow to the everyday and from power struggle between groups to the interpersonal.

In shifting to the everyday context, Berger and Luckmann refer to Mannheim who suggested that ideology is just as much a factor of an individual's thought as of their opponent's or oppressor's thought (1966:21) and that reality could only be got at by analysing any situation from as many positions as possible (1966:22). Mannheim however focused on the intelligentsia because he believed this group could most easily

transcend the ideological nature of their thought, and the sociology of knowledge has thus tended to focus on intellectual or theoretical thought; Berger and Luckmann stress instead that 'common-sense 'knowledge' rather than 'ideas' must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this 'knowledge' that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist' (1966:27).

Drawing on Durkheim and Weber, Berger and Luckmann place at the centre of the sociology of knowledge the subjective / objective duality of society, and more precisely the ways in which 'subjective meanings *become* objective facticities' (1966:30). They observe that the world originates in individuals' thoughts and action, but is then, on a separate level, objectified and 'maintained as real by these [thoughts and actions]' (1966:33). Life is arranged in patterns and categories that exist before the individual comes along but are also affected or reproduced by that individual, and it is language that gives us access to the objectifications arising from these patterns and categories (1966:35).

They differentiate between the world of dreams and the world of reality in the sense that the latter is intersubjective and that the 'here' and the 'now' that we experience in the world of reality have to be continuously negotiated through interaction (1966:37).

Furthermore, they see the world of dreams, along with other contexts such as theoretical thought, and play, as 'enclaves' which are 'enveloped' by the broader, everyday reality that is recognised as the norm, and that shifts into one or more of these other contexts are

treated by us as ‘excursions’ (1966:39). We can here hear distinct echoes of Goffman’s notion of ‘framing’.

Berger and Luckmann spend some time thinking about the importance of ‘the other’ for individuals’ knowledge of themselves, in that this is only fully available via ‘the other’s’ attitude towards the self (1966:44). ‘Others’, just like the world of reality in general, are categorised, or ‘typified’ by language and ‘dealt with’ in those terms, and this is reciprocal in how the ‘others’ ‘deal with’ the self. (1966:45). There is an element of ‘I know that you know that I know ...’ and so on in our shared use of language and the ‘social stock of knowledge’ that it objectifies for us (1966:60); at the same time, however, this social stock of knowledge is distributed in various ways, and we know this, but not fully, which plays a big part in how we negotiate meanings and relationships in everyday life (1966:61). This negotiation of meanings happens at various levels: ‘habitualisation’, when repeated actions take on a pattern and then meaning; ‘institutionalisation’, when different actors recognise and reproduce the typifications of these habitualised actions; and ‘legitimation’, where social reality is invested with meaning and thus becomes plausible (1966:94).

Erving Goffman

Of all the theorists who have been discussed here, Goffman is the one who is most roundly positioned in the Social Constructionist camp. Goffman’s (1959) focus is very much on the individual in interaction with other individuals, and on agency, and as such he could be described as the most ‘micro’ of the theorists we have discussed so far.

Goffman talks about the 'presentation of self' but for him it encompasses much more than incidental performances of identity. He describes all social interaction in terms of a dramatic performance and as such highlights that identity (or 'the self' as he terms it) is an ongoing interactive construction rather than something 'given'. He says, 'a correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation - this self - is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it' (1959:244-245). He thus clearly provides a social development of the notion of a dialectic between self and other.

The correct staging and performance of which he speaks have several components. For every interaction there is a 'front' (scenery and props) and each participant utilises a 'personal front' consisting of 'appearances' (social statuses) and 'manner' (interactional role) (ibid.:35). He distinguishes 'front region' from 'back region' or 'backstage' and says that 'suppressed facts' will make an appearance backstage. He further observes that 'impression management' often occurs in teams which do not exist in relation to a structure, but rather in relation to the impression they construct. So, although *membership* of some 'teams', for example in workplaces, is determined by the 'structure' of the company, this does not determine the team *identity*, which rather comes from interpersonal dynamics which construct and uphold the 'impression'.

Goffman does not see society as random and structureless; he accepts that structures come into existence, but only because of the repetitive reinforcing behaviour of *individuals*. For Goffman, as a result of numerous specific interactions played out in it,

any particular front may in time take on a meaning of its own and become 'a 'collective representation' and 'a fact in its own right' (Goffman 1959:34).

A particularly relevant aspect of Goffman's work for sociolinguistics is his notion of 'footing' (Goffman 1981), which illustrates well the social construction of identity by separating out the individual from the role(s) s/he plays in conversational interaction.

The notion of footing deconstructs the relationship between speaker and utterance and claims that there is not a one-to-one relationship between the two. There are three voices involved in any utterance: firstly, there is the animator, the person that utters the words; secondly, there is the author, the person that originated the beliefs; thirdly, there is the principal, the person whose viewpoint is currently being expressed. The only role that is entailed by speaking an utterance is that of animator. Regarding the other two roles, put simply, the speaker takes on the role of author if s/he uses her own words; and s/he takes on the role of principal if she speaks sincerely. Conversely, the role of author may be attributed to someone else by quoting another speaker; and the role of principal may be revoked by speaking ironically, or in other words 'saying what you don't mean'. In this case the role of principal is not attributed to anyone else: it is simply avoided altogether.

The roles of author and principal are complex however. Regarding the author, the distinction between quoting and not quoting another speaker is not a simple one.

Speakers may consciously invoke another speaker when they speak, either explicitly, by directly quoting from them, or implicitly, by appropriating a voice. Invoking another speaker may also happen unconsciously: if we accept that identity and knowledge are

constructed in interaction, we would expect speakers to allude to previous exchanges in present ones, sometimes unconsciously. Indeed, given the degree of intertextuality in language use (cf. Bakhtin 1986), it is very rare that any utterance will be entirely new and original. The invoked exchanges and other speakers will not necessarily be from the current speaker's local context, but may also be from wider public life or the media. Regarding the role of principal, again the distinction between sincerity and insincerity or irony is not a simple one. If we accept that certain discourses become dominant in society and are consequently taken as 'given' or 'the norm', a speaker drawing on these may unconsciously act as the principal of particular positions.

Michel Foucault

Foucault focuses on the relationship between interactions between individuals and wider relations of power, placing a greater degree of focus on agency than structure. Foucault suggests that we view power as ascending. There are power relations in every personal interaction we take part in but 'these (micro-level) mechanisms of power have been 'invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended' (1980:99) by more general forms, and these are what we tend to see as forms of social power'.

Foucault sees 'objects' as 'discursively produced' rather than having an intrinsic meaning. For any one topic, there are multiple discourses (ways of speaking about something). However, this does not mean that we can make the world into anything we want simply by speaking, writing, or thinking in a certain way. Foucault shows us that there are multiple discourses but some are more highly valued or 'dominant' than others

and these tend to form an accepted 'system'. All of the discourses however may vie for these dominant positions. For example, in the UK, there are competing discourses about asylum. One discourse would say things like 'they're coming over here and taking our homes and our jobs and there's nothing left for us', while another would say things like 'of course we should welcome people who are fleeing persecution – our foreign policy has created some of their situations'. These vie for dominance on the pages of the UK press and in turn in everyday discussion. There is a certain amount of input from political figures, and arguably their discourse is more likely to be considered to be dominant, but actually the vast majority of this discursive reproduction happens at the level of individual interactions. While more traditional Marxist thinking would claim that there is only one dominant ideology and it is that which positions us, Foucault believes that we as interacting individuals uphold the system and so it follows that we can subvert it. He claims it is possible for the dominant discourses to be subverted and the marginalised ones voiced.

Foucault coins the term 'power/knowledge' (1980) to illustrate how close he believes the relationship between the two concepts to be. For Foucault, knowledge gives you power; but on the other hand those who have power are more likely to have their discourse accepted as knowledge. It is clear that, like Bourdieu, Foucault does not see the material and the ideological as completely discrete aspects of life. It is also clear that his ideas begin to question the very notion of 'truth'. So, his notion of knowledge does *not* correlate with ideology: what is central are the *procedures* by which something comes to be considered knowledge and, by extension, 'truth'. He is not claiming that we can never

‘get at’ the material reality of an event; he is simply pointing out that there may be considerable struggle over what constitutes the ‘taken-for-granted’ truth of that event.

Dominant discourses and systems of power by definition create categories of ‘deviants’ which are seen as being in opposition to ‘the norm’ (see Foucault 1977 for Foucault’s discussion of how sexual deviance and criminality have been constructed in the western world. The ‘norms’ are maintained by ‘surveillance’; Foucault uses the panopticon, designed by Jeremy Bentham, as a metaphor for this (Foucault 1979). The panopticon is a concrete mode of surveillance whereby the architecture of a prison allows the prison guard to see all of the prisoners but none of the prisoners can see the guard. Foucault argues that this works on an abstract level too; due to these material manifestations of surveillance, the notion enters the psyche of individuals in a society to the extent that the material forms are no longer required: individuals begin to self-monitor from the point of view of the powerful.

Pierre Bourdieu

Bourdieu too focuses on the relationship between interactions between individuals and wider relations of power; he places a greater degree of focus on structure than does Foucault however. We could therefore label him a ‘structural constructionist’, displaying characteristics of social constructionism, but inhabiting a position on the continuum closer to structure than agency, and differing from Goffman and Foucault in this regard.

Bourdieu moves beyond the traditional Marxist counterposing of the material and the ideological, by revisiting the Marxist notion of ‘capital’ in ways that suggest significant

overlap between the two, and which move away from a deterministic view of identity and towards a constructionist one, in which individuals use these various 'forms of capital' as resources with which to construct their identities, albeit within limits imposed by wider structures.

Traditional Marxism focuses on economic capital, something that has been produced, been assigned a value, and can be exchanged in pursuit of profit. Bourdieu (1986) suggests however that it is not only material entities that should be defined as 'capital'; the label for him can and should also be applied to certain 'symbolic' aspects of life. 'Social capital' applies to the networks and relationships that might be of value to a person as regards their 'social standing'; 'cultural capital' applies to accumulating valuable forms of knowledge (which might differ depending on the type of schooling one has for example); 'physical capital' applies to ones' presence, the way one moves, the physical tasks one can carry out, the way one 'handles oneself'; 'linguistic capital' applies to the way one speaks.

What is notable about Bourdieu's 'forms of capital' is that, although there are overarching norms, dictated by the power-holders, regarding the value attributed to each of these forms of capital, and different sub-types within them, these values may differ at a more local level, particularly as regards social class. So, for example, speaking a marked form of the local dialect (a specific type of linguistic capital (cf. Bourdieu and Thompson 1991)) and being strong and tough (a specific type of physical capital) may be highly valued in the working class (cf. Labov's (1972) work on 'lames' being excluded from

peer groups because they did not display ‘core’ linguistic behaviour). This type of capital, while locally valuable however, may preclude social mobility: it may be relatively more difficult, or at least less comfortable, for a core member of a working class community to enter a professional career, with its focus on speaking standard English and acting in a ‘refined’ manner, regardless of whether that person has gained the relevant qualifications or ‘cultural capital’. This questions further the idea that society is a ‘meritocracy’.

Bourdieu’s theory of capital offers us a picture of free-thinking agents who can consciously attempt to acquire particular forms of capital to exchange for particular kinds of experience, status or indeed other forms of capital. For Bourdieu this is very much agency within limits however: societal structure is very real, and ultimately society will tend to reproduce itself in a similar form. His concept of ‘habitus’ is useful here (Bourdieu 1984). It is via the habitus that objective material conditions become translated into subjective human dispositions; the individual carries out certain practices relative to structural aspects of their life such as family, schooling and social class, and to their experiences within certain ‘fields’ of activity, and as such come to embody and play these out.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Bakhtin was primarily a literary theorist, but some of his key ideas can be applied equally well to spoken language, and indeed in his later work he began to engage with this.

Probably his most famous work is his analysis of the work of the novelist Dostoyevsky (Bakhtin 1984a). In it he introduced three key concepts: the unfinalizability of the self,

the inseparability of the self and the other; and polyphony, that is, many voices. He related the concept of polyphony to truth: whereas a traditional view might suggest that two separate accounts that differ entails that one of them is untrue, Bakhtin suggested that it was only in polyphony, and the engagement and dialogue that it presupposed, that truth could be found.

Bakhtin's later work (Bakhtin 1986) engaged more with everyday spoken language, and the key concepts of this work were genre and intertextuality. Whereas it is usual to think of genre as an attribute of written language, Bakhtin said that spoken language also displayed this. He differentiated between primary genres which structured what was acceptable in everyday language, and secondary genres which dealt with specialist discourse such as legal and scientific. With intertextuality he claimed that no utterance is unique, that the making of an utterance involves 'appropriat[ing] the words of others and populat[ing] them with one's own intention'. This can be seen to further develop his notion of the relationship between the self and the other.

Bakhtin took a particular interest in ritual and the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984b), particularly in their liminal nature; that is, that they are ambiguous spaces 'between worlds' in which societal norms do not apply. An example of liminality is the ritual of 'kissing under the mistletoe' found in certain western cultures around the Christmas period. Mistletoe is usually placed on a threshold (for example the entrance to a home), and the ritualistic nature of the kisses means that they are not viewed as moral transgressions. Carnival similarly allows individuals to construct alternative identities in

a non-judgemental space. Rites of passage are sometimes considered liminal; in fact it can be useful to view the whole period of adolescence as a liminal time and space in which adolescents can experiment with the threshold between childhood and adulthood. Liminality has interesting application in sociolinguistics in that language allows us to shift between different contexts and rules with simple changes to discourse, tone and so on.

Edward Said.

On the topic of 'othering' and 'deviance' it is important to consider the work of Edward Said (1978) on 'Orientalism'. The theorists we have considered thus far have generally discussed the ways in which they see identities and relationships being constructed *within* specific societies, albeit with power differentials, for example social class. Said takes a more global approach and engages with power relationships *between* 'West' and 'East', and by extension between individuals and groups of different ethnicities. He analyses the notion of 'the Orient' as being an object of Western construction which arises from a set of categories, images and classifications held by Westerners.

Through reinforcement, these representations come to be viewed as reality to the point that 'the Orient' as an entity is seen to exist. It does not, however, have a status equal to that of its creator. Because the West has constructed this entity, it sees itself as active and 'the Orient' as passive. The former automatically feels it 'knows' and can master the latter and therefore a relation of power (which appears natural) comes into play. Thus political motives are forgotten as this definition of the entity comes to be seen as 'truth'.

Furthermore, it is through this creation of an 'other' that the West constructs an identity for itself. 'The West' and 'the Orient' do not *mean* anything intrinsically but are defined through the differences between them.

Social Constructionist Sociolinguistics.

This section will explore a range of Sociolinguistic work that draws on and develops the Social Constructionist tradition, in some cases as a general approach and in other cases by applying the work of a particular social theorist to spoken interaction. Not surprisingly, identity is a common theme throughout this work, shifting the sociolinguistic focus from language system to speaker(s) and from structure to performance and later construction. This work falls quite neatly into 'themes' including constructions of gender; constructions of ethnicity, national identity and minority languages; constructions of childhood and adolescent identity (and often gendered and ethnicised aspects of these); mediated constructions of political relations; and constructions and reproduction within the legal system.

Gender

Milroy (1992:215) writes of meaning becoming 'gendered': certain forms become symbolically associated with masculine or feminine norms through regular use by and in turn association with particular groups. Lavandera (1982 cited in Milroy 1992:175 cited in Holmes) claims that patterns of sounds (because they are inherently meaningless) acquire 'social significance' whereas patterns in discourse acquire 'social meaning'.

Holmes claims that these two can interact, however: forms with social meaning may acquire social significance because a particular group favours them; forms with social significance may have social meaning attributed to them by being seen to carry a particular value of the community that habitually uses them. Thus, in certain contexts, 'the use of phonetic variation and the construction of identities are inseparable' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1995:503 cited in Holmes).

Holmes (1997) further challenges traditional notions of particular linguistic features being 'women's' or 'men's' features. She highlights the problem that arises from simply counting pragmatic particles and concluding questions of identity from the results: such particles are interactive and so will serve particular (not necessarily identical) social functions for their speakers. She identifies four different functions of tag questions: facilitative, softening, epistemic modal (expressing uncertainty or tentativeness) and challenging. Similarly, 'I think' and 'you know' can function either as hedges or as boosters (Bonnano 1995; Holmes 1985, 1986).

Coates (1999) uses Goffman's notions of front and backstage to explore UK women behaving, as she terms it, 'behaving badly': in the contexts in which they are most relaxed, they report behaviour and fantasies that do not fit with the norms of femininity. Coates claims that, while there is an opportunity for subversion here, because it is 'backstage', a less dominant arena, it must be recognised that it also upholds the dominant order.

Kiesling (1998) analyses US college fraternity men's contextual variation in the use of the variable (ING). Most of the men use less of the vernacular form in fraternity meetings but some use more. He claims that all the men are constructing powerful identities (they are encouraged to do so by the norm of hegemonic masculinity) but that the working class men's identities are based on physical rather than structural power, the latter of which they have less access to than middle class men. He claims that they show more than just a resistant solidarity: their solidarity is bound up with hegemonic masculinity to create what Kiesling calls 'camaraderie'. The men identify themselves with certain prototypes ('alignment roles') within the confines of hegemonic masculinity and thus their language use is bound up with physical power and serves to construct identity rather than simply produce context-specific interactional patterns (e.g. the resistance of one group to another). Through this evidence of alignment to prototypical roles, Kiesling claims that social interactive sense-making can be viewed in a similar way to other cognitive capacities.

Kiesling (2005) exemplifies the ways in which a group of (heterosexual) men in the United States discursively negotiate closeness, which is constructed by the dominant discourses of their culture as in opposition to heterosexuality. They do this via indirectness, which again reminds us of the importance of considering form as well as function when considering construction of discourses.

Cameron (1997) highlights the importance of considering both form and content of conversation when identifying multiple discourses or discursive struggle. In her data,

young men use an apparently cooperative *style* of talk but the *content* consists of “the same old gendered script” (1997:64).

Ethnicity

Menard Warwick’s (2005) work on what she calls ‘transgression narratives’ reminds us that the ‘other’ involved in our negotiation of identity may not in fact be a physically different person; dialogical positioning can also be employed where we need to negotiate between contradictory positions, in this case in terms of how the speaker orients towards a relative who she values highly while distancing herself from his violation of traditional family values.

Schilling (2004), in a discussion of a sociolinguistic interview from a tri-ethnic rural community in the US, shows how speakers of different ethnicities tend to highlight ethnic components of their speech when talking about (local) race relations, but do not do this when they are talking about family and friends, or about race relations on a national level. This highlights the fact that the relationship between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is dynamic and continuously negotiated. All of this is done within ethnolinguistic patterns, however, which reminds us of the constant interplay between structure and agency. By applying Bakhtin’s notion of ‘dialogicality’ Schilling also provides us with an insightful way to look at the role that researchers play in the construction of those they research.

Plas (2007) provides a fascinating demonstration of how social constructionist analysis can allow us to reassess historical accounts. He focuses on a north Dalmatian

ethnographic account from the end of the nineteenth century in the context of early Croatian institutional-ethnographic practice and demonstrates that unpicking the dialogical aspects of this account, and ethnographic accounts in general, is essential in constructing reliable histories. The account shows respondents to a questionnaire orienting to their own rather than the questionnaire's categories and themes, and the dialogic activity between author and editor as result of this shows a renegotiation of the identities discussed. This can be read as ideologically problematic given the cultural and national categories and themes that are dealt with.

Jaworski et al's (2003) analysis of British holiday programmes' construction of the local contains interesting echoes of Said's notion of 'Orientalism'. Although the presenter-tourists construct their relationship with local people as one of 'closeness' and 'friendship', and thus by extension as equals, close discourse analysis reveals that they are constructed as 'helpers'/'servants' or 'experts', thus 'othering' them (even in the second example which could be likened to Said's notion of 'exoticisation' (whereby an overwhelmingly positive stereotype still serves to marginalise the 'other')). Local people often subvert these roles, however, by constructing themselves as, for example, 'cosmopolitan' and as such equal to those who are 'othering' them.

Childhood and Adolescence

Björk-Willén (2007) exemplifies, in her study of children in a multi-lingual pre-school play setting in Sweden, that very young children also engage in crossing for the negotiation of individual and group identities. She shows the ways in which a young

speaker secures her own participation in the play by replicating the utterances of her co-interlocutors, not as a direct imitation, but as her own contributions, evident for example by being multi-modally linked to a different non-vocal action. Her co-interlocutors speak Spanish while she does not. Where the replication is in English, Björk-Willén terms the utterance ‘shadowing’ and where it is in Spanish, she terms it ‘crossing’.

Ardington (2006) exemplifies how preadolescent Australian girls employ framing, and specifically shifting between play and non-play frames, to negotiate identities and boundaries. It is no accident that shifting between these frames is a key site for negotiation, as the girls are in an in-between stage, drawing on both childhood and adolescent / adult types of talk. Unlike in documented talk of adult women, the girls use playful confrontation such as reciprocal name-calling and insulting as well as supportive behaviour to build alliances. It is notable that preadolescent talk often accompanies activity, and Ardington finds that a thematic activity can both be a springboard into language play and a frame that the girls can easily switch back to should be play frame become problematic, a useful strategy given the in-between stage of the girls and their thus experimental construction of identity.

Fraser & Cameron (1989) highlight apparent contradictions in the input of individual adolescent speakers into conversation but challenge definition of these as contradictions, analysing them instead in terms of the young women’s attempts to make sense of society via the interplay of various discourses (1989:32).

Adolescence and gender

Coates (1999) observes that the adolescent girls in her data use various discourses to position themselves as women: liberal, patriarchal, pseudo-scientific, and so on. At the age of about 14, a change in linguistic features suggests the advent of a new discourse that she calls the “discourse of consciousness raising.” However, this discourse is in competition with the fact that the content of what they say often comes from a patriarchal, repressive discourse.

Eckert (1993) describes the discourse strategies used by the adolescent girls she studies as ‘co-operative competition’, thus challenging the polar opposition which sees men as competitive and women as co-operative and highlighting the necessity of analysing function. The girls compete and negotiate agreement on trivial issues (which is easier and less threatening) and these have a cumulative effect. She claims that both gender and age account for why the girls use such discourse. Historically men have inhabited the marketplace and women the domestic sphere which has made it necessary that women accumulate ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu 1977) to override the fact that they lack economic capital (which was at that time the most highly valued form of capital). This involved proving the whole self to be worthy of authority. The entrance of women into the marketplace has brought with it a contradictory situation for women: competition in the marketplace violates men’s cultural prerogative, and competition in the personal realm contradicts the underlying definition of personal worth.

Adolescence and ethnicity

Hewitt (1986) identifies a need to redefine the term 'code-switching' to encompass what the adolescents in his UK study were doing. Code-switching had been seen to involve 'two or more fixed and discrete linguistic systems, between which speakers alternate either randomly (Labov 1971) or in ways that show meaningful patterning (Gumperz 1982). However, Hewitt suggests following Le Page's (1985) theory that speakers exist in 'linguistic space' made up of 'acts of identity' which provides a less structuralist, more speaker-centred definition of code-switching.

The black adolescents in Hewitt's study report creole use mainly in relation to lower-class life and conflict, especially with police. Within this, its use can be triggered by competitive topics or situations or an antagonistic relationship with one's interlocutor (Hewitt 1986.:108). This could be interpreted as the young people 'doing' conflict in a certain way at the local level which relates to and helps them to understand and deal with it at a more global level. Indeed, Hewitt saw the possibility for transformation of the social order (albeit cultural and partial) through transformation of symbolic forms. He claimed therefore that black/white speech *relations* were important as they explored the local interactive order and by extension wider social relationships (ibid.:124).

Hewitt observes the use of Jamaican creole by white adolescents with their black peers. Although he accepts that such creole use often constitutes racial abuse (1986:135), he claims that it also occurs in friendship situations as the playful ritualistic employment of terms of abuse. This expresses 'both a cultural self-contextualising and a *positioning* through the rivalries of verbal and other forms of play. Its reference is not simply that of

cultural position but of personal position, with the emphasis on individual competitive relations' (ibid.:136). It serves to negotiate relationships between the white young person and their black friends.

Rampton (1995) coined the term 'language crossing', which he differentiated from code-switching by saying that the former involves 'the use of language varieties associated with social or ethnic groups that the speaker does not normally belong to' (1995:17). Rampton's case in point is young white speakers' use of Stylised Asian English: they employ certain explicit lexical and phonological traits, but not the more implicit grammatical structure. Here we can see the importance of the 'other' in constructing one's own identity. There is the potential for challenge to structures here too, as the 'crossing' often marks a challenge of adult world stereotypes of the 'other'. That said, Rampton makes it clear that most of this work is done in 'liminal' spaces which lessens the potential of any material challenge.

Rampton's work, like Hewitt's (1986) before it, involves young white people *with their Asian friends*; some of the more recent observations of 'crossing' however (Bucholtz 1999; Cutler 1999) illustrates young white people who rarely come into contact with ethnic minority communities still making a conscious choice to employ the language of these communities. This is very much a case of style over structure, and indeed Bucholtz concludes that the young white boys in her data are able to 'disclaim their structural advantage' (1999:455), thus actually masking structural inequality rather than challenging it.

Jaworski et al (2003) apply the notion of liminality to adolescents' 'gossipy' talk. The adolescents construct their own orientation to certain norms by way of gossiping, mostly about 'others', but sometimes about themselves in a process that Jaworski et al term 'self-othering'. They shift between keying their talk seriously and playfully, and thus between constructing approval or disapproval of the behaviour about which they talk. This ambiguity allows for a state of constant liminality and thus constant negotiation of identities.

Adolescence and social class

My own work (Irwin 2006) links the use of *you know* in a group of mostly working-class London adolescents (WCG) and *I know* in a mostly middle-class group (MCG) to Foucault's notion of power/knowledge and, by extension, to group-specific (re)production of dominant discourses and power relations. Speakers in WCG use *you know* clause-finally to mark the information in that clause, which tends to be about the deviance of others, as dominant. Speakers in MCG use *I know* either clause-initially or as a stand-alone item in reaction to the previous speaker's utterance and to mark that utterance as dominant. Thus, the use of *you know* shows relatively active identity construction while the use of *I know* shows relatively reactive identity construction, but both groups construct their identities indirectly: WCG because they talk about others, and MCG because they react to others.

My work on the same groups of adolescents negotiating deviant positions (Irwin 2008) employs Goffman's concept of footing to explore the ways in which speakers either shift positions or only partially inhabit them, thus allowing them to engage with deviance without being fully positioned as deviant. The adolescents in WCG give deviant positions a voice in two ways, by saying an utterance and then retracting it with the phrase 'only joking' and, on one occasion, by shifting positions. In terms of footing, the speaker thus withdraws her/his claim to have been the principal of the previous utterance. This gives the adolescents the opportunity to explore alternative discourses and positionings while still marking their knowledge of and adherence to the dominant discourse.

The adolescents in MCG, on the other hand, voice deviant positions but avoid inhabiting them until such times as they have been communally evaluated. The linguistic strategies they use include: switching between possible and actual worlds, a marked shift of framing that problematises the extent to which a speaker is viewed as the principal of an utterance; switching between the grammatically general (e.g. general 'you') and the grammatically specific (e.g. 'I' or 'we'), which problematises authorship; and switching between questions and statements, which at the question stage renders principal irrelevant or at most suggested.

Ethnicity, national identity and minority languages

Sandel (2003) employs Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital to the linguistic context in Taiwan, where for many years the nationalist government forbade the speaking of local languages and dialects whereas more recently the policy has been reversed and local varieties are being accepted and taught in schools. The Bourdieuan perspective is a

useful one here as it takes us beyond the public / private binary and suggests that there has been a complex interplay between the public and private as regards the linguistic capital value of different language varieties to both policy makers and communities.

Budach et al (2003) analyse a discursal shift around minority languages to which aspects of both Foucault's and Bourdieu's theories are applicable. They recognize that the dominant discourses around minority languages have traditionally linked language with community, and they observe a recent shift which they exemplify via data from literacy centres and a call centre in francophone Canada. Given the ongoing commodification taking place in the globalised market, they suggest that "community" is now being treated as a commodity that can be exchanged for linguistic and cultural resources, thus echoing notions of the complex interplay of linguistic, social, symbolic and economic capital.

Messing (2007) explores language shift in the Malintzi region of central Mexico, and argues for the importance of focusing on individuals and communities in order to gain a clear picture of the specific ways in which such shifts occur. Her data exemplify Mexican (Nahuatl) speakers negotiating their orientation towards and against various identities via their use of three key, somewhat competing, discourses: the pro-development metadiscourse of *salir adelante*, 'forging ahead' and improving one's socioeconomic position; the discourse of *menosprecio*, denigration of indigenous identity; and the *pro-indígena* or pro-indigenous discourse that promotes a positive attitude toward indigenous identity.

A theme of co-option and related disempowerment beneath superficial celebration of diversity can be found in Stroud's (2004) work on Rinkeby Swedish, a specific form of Swedish spoken by immigrant communities. By labeling and thus recognising this unique form of Swedish, the authorities may on the surface be recognising heterogeneity and giving voice to minority communities, but Stroud claims that this is subverted by the fact that the way in which Rinkeby Swedish is talked about and positioned devalues the linguistic capital of the the immigrants who speak it.

'Othering' in the legal system

Although Baker (2004) does not explicitly describe himself as taking a Foucauldian approach, his work on the UK House of Lords debate on lowering the age of sexual consent for gay men provides an insightful example of competing discourses being constructed 'via chains of argumentation'. In the debates, the word 'homosexual' was associated with acts whereas the word 'gay' was associated with identities, and the discourses that were constructed around the former linked it to danger, crime and ill health whereas the discourses that were constructed around the latter focused on equality and tolerance.

D'hondt (2009) highlights a contradiction in Belgian courtroom practice relating to the acceptableness or otherwise of constructing a defendant as a cultural 'other'. Attorneys will regularly provide a 'cultural defence' in the sense that they do not deny the facts of the case, but argue that it is mitigated by the effects of the defendant's cultural

background on their actions. This ‘othering’ strategy, although its relevance is regularly challenged by the prosecution, does not detrimentally affect relations within the courtroom. If, on the other hand, the defendant highlights his or her ‘otherness’ in drawing attention to perceived mistreatment by the authorities, the tendency is for the interjection to be ignored by the defence or rejected by the judge. D’hondt identifies the key difference between the two examples to be that in the first the context of the ‘otherness’ is external to Belgium whereas in the second the context is discrimination within Belgium. This challenges the very heart of the legal system as a system that should treat all defendants equally, and any challenges to this are silenced.

Ethnicity, national identity and policing.

Wilson and Stapleton’s (2007) work on discourses of policing in Northern Ireland draws both on (Foucauldian) notions of discourse and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus. They point out the contentious nature of policing for the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, even given the development from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. By using the concept of ‘habitus’ the paper engages with the fact that discourses are not stand alone entities, but are in fact very much tied up with the material world, in particular the context and interactional practices of those who (re)produce them. They exemplify this via the ‘discourse of resistance’ reproduced by a group of nationalist women in Belfast.

Mediated (political) discourse

O'Malley (2009) uses frame analysis to explore an Irish radio programme that claims to be 'for and about disabled people', and challenges that claim by exemplifying how the complexity of the disabled person's experience tends to, as she puts it, 'fall between frames'. She draws on Scannell's (1991) notion of the 'double articulation' of radio talk, that is, it is at once an interaction between the co-interlocutors on the radio programme, and oriented towards the listening audience. In this context, part of the 'presenter frame' is to introduce the participants to the audience in a 'relevant' way, but perhaps not the way they would have introduced themselves, and the 'Interview frame' consists of a question and answer format that elicits factual answers, this facticity tending towards a medical construction of disability that loses sight of each participant's complex identity and experience.

Clayman (1992) develops Goffman's concept of footing in order to analyse how neutrality and drama are achieved simultaneously by political interviewers. They can introduce to their interviewees opposing points of view and challenges from other people (authors), while at the same time leaving their own position ambiguous (i.e. whether or not they are the principal of the utterance). In this way utterances are marked as controversial, while at the same time speakers avoid the potential results of voicing such controversial material.

Weizman's (2006) discussion of media talk in the Israeli context draws on Goffman's (1974) notion of the multiplicity of roles and the person-role continuum to show how social roles (e.g. politician, journalist, show host), interactional roles (e.g. interviewer,

interviewee) and personal identities are differentiated in meta-talk *about* news interviews, and are negotiated *within* news interviews. Such orientation to these roles by participants provides evidence of participants' construction of their reality. Situations may be evaluated by politicians in terms of both their personal identity and their social role, and these may be marked as being at odds with each other, or indeed as being in correlation, for example where a politician constructs themselves as a 'pleasant' individual in terms of personal identity and not just because of their professional ability to come across as such. The constriction of interactional roles may be used as a mitigating factor for aggressive behaviour as well as a means to avoid it, but at the same time show hosts may be criticised when they blur the boundaries of interactional roles because this is seen not to remove constriction but remove neutrality. Thus these roles and their negotiation is oriented to by participants throughout media talk.

The relevance of Goffman for the analysis of political discourse is also picked up on by Lauerbach (2006) who analyses television interviews with politicians of the UK Conservative and Labour Parties on election night 1997. Lauerbach finds that the 'voicing' within the interviews with members of the two parties differed. The Conservatives, who lost, were presented with opposing 'voices' from within their own party, in the sense that the interviewer animated utterances that had been authored by someone else. There were no dissenting voices within the Labour Party to present to their politicians, so instead interviewers 'ventriloquised', that is, they put (their own) discourse into the mouths of others to surmise what might happen in the future. In this way debate was constructed but neutrality maintained in the sense that in neither case

was the voice directly or fully that of the interviewer, and it also served to dramatise the proceedings.

Concluding Remarks

It is clear, then, that Social Constructionist Sociolinguistics has emerged as a key aspect of our field, which has drawn on the fruitful link between language and social theory.

Two main things strike me about the themed areas into which the work falls. Firstly, social constructionism is particularly helpful in illustrating transitional and liminal spaces as we see from discussions of ethnically diverse contexts and minority language debates as well as illustrations of the linguistic behaviour of preadolescents and adolescents.

Secondly, it is clear that social constructionist work can provide relevant insights into everything from one to one interactions to constructions of power structures at the highest levels, and indeed to illustrate the latter in the former. As such, its potential to marry the 'micro' and the 'macro' has been and continues to be developed in interesting and important ways by Sociolinguists.

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