Review of "Everyday Talk: Building and Reflecting Identities"

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less reproachable. Nikander’s analyses in this part of the book are just as convincing and intuitively appealing as in the second part.

In sum, this book is likely to be of interest to many readers of this journal for its contributions to discursive psychology, membership categorization analysis, moral psychology, and language-centered life-course research. Nikander certainly proves her initial thesis, attributed to Green (1993), that there is no researchable age in the manifoldness of reality unless language inscribes it there. From her discursive perspective, notions of age and age norms cease to be understood as situated outside interaction, as mental entities simply guiding, causing, or explaining certain types of behaviors. Instead, age is created and used for all practical purposes. These findings are emancipatory and postmodern in that they reveal the flexible nature of age and aging. Yet, one of Nikander’s findings is also that the linear imagery of age is still widely reproduced by the interviewees.

REFERENCES


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Everyday Talk is a highly readable textbook, appropriate for introductory undergraduate courses in social interaction or interpersonal communication. It focuses on how surface forms (e.g. person-referencing practices, code choice, or paralinguistic devices) in everyday exchanges have social functions or implications beyond the exchange of information. The term ‘identities’ in the title refers to these on-the-ground social functions of everyday talk rather than the social constructionism and identity politics associated with post-modern approaches to identity.

The book represents an effort, according to Tracy, to ‘move the findings of discourse analysis’ into the mainstream of communication coursework’ (p. viii). ‘Discourse’ in this case refers to multi-utterance units of talk, as it does in the tradition of pragmatics, interactional sociolinguistics, and conversation analysis. The book synthesizes work from scholars of interaction and discourse from such
fields as anthropology, applied linguistics, social psychology, communication, and sociology. The book’s eight body chapters focus on person-referencing practices, speech acts, phonological variation, code choice, conversation analytic structures, directness of style, narrative, and stance (‘personal attitude’) indicators.

Nearly every chapter proceeds from concrete, empirical examples of situated interaction. The undergraduate student thus has familiar-looking segments of everyday talk through which to approach and follow some of the many social and interactional issues that are at play in any given interaction. This presentation of segments of everyday interaction is the greatest strength of the book, and undergraduates will gain a sense of the complexities, both linguistic and social, of everyday, mundane exchanges. They will thus ‘transform tacit knowledge about everyday talk into explicit knowledge’ (p. 5), which Tracy defines as the central purpose of the book.

Tracy explicitly attempts to approach data from both rhetorical and cultural perspectives in each chapter, but the rhetorical perspective dominates, although less than in other communication textbooks. Interlocutors are generally presented as strategic actors who consciously select from communicative behaviors that have static, well-defined meanings. There is little sense of the locally negotiated and emergent nature of meaning in everyday talk, the culturally constitutive nature of such talk, or the unconscious nature of much of what we do in everyday interaction. The cultural perspective is generally represented through a ‘cultural differences’ or ‘speech community differences’ section at the end of chapters. This will not disabuse United States undergraduates of the notion that what they do is natural and that ‘culture’ is something that others have. However, the examples in these ‘difference’ sections are thoughtfully chosen and clearly presented, and many students will find their eyes opened to culturally varying language practices that they have seen or experienced in the world around them.

Four different types of identities are defined: ‘Master identities’ are those identities such as age, gender, and ethnicity, which are presumed to be relatively stable. Researchers with interests in race, ethnicity, or gender will be disappointed with the lack of attention to history, power inequality, and the discursive constitution of such identities. ‘Interactional identities’ are the specific roles that individuals inhabit in particular contexts, e.g. ‘teacher and pupil’ or ‘cashier and customer’. ‘Personal identities’ refer to personality and perceived personal habits. ‘Relational identities’ refer to the moment-to-moment positioning of individuals relative to each other, e.g. how ‘friendly’ they are to each other. Although each of these categories may correspond to one of various folk-usages of the term ‘identity’, little analytical justification is given for grouping such disparate phenomena as ‘ethnicity’ and ‘friendliness’ under one rubric. Because the term has so little analytical value when defined so broadly, the book might aptly have been entitled Everyday Talk: Social Dimensions.

Everyday Talk successfully synthesizes diverse strands of research on social interaction in a highly readable format. Its consistent use of recorded interactional data as a starting point for discussion is a refreshingly empirical antidote to
the mentalist orientation of many communication textbooks. Lower-level American undergraduates who read this book will find themselves with a new appreciation for the social and linguistic complexities of the types of talk in which they engage in their everyday lives.

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Since the 1980s, controversial discussions about the conceptualization of social structure and social inequality within the social sciences in Germany have centred around two theoretical perspectives: the assumption of an ongoing process of ‘individualization’, that is the decline of class and gender as frames for the understanding of how (post)modern societies are structured socially, and a broad, but often flattened, reception of Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘Theory of Distinction’ (1982) as a benchmark for redefining social inequality in terms of ‘lifestyles’, ‘lifestyle orientations’ and/or (socio-)cultural ‘milieus’ (among others cf. Schulze, 1993). The latter somehow refer to social inequality not as a mere fact, but as a play of difference in a cultural space (more or less) open to individual choice. What they lack is a thorough theory on how meaning is attached to things, taste and behaviour and on how meaningful behaviour is simultaneously reproducing and creating this cultural space. A poststructuralist Theory-of-Discourse Perspective (cf. Keller et al., 2001) would be able to fill this gap by reconstructing powerful processes of reproduction, transformation, transmission, distribution and stabilization of relevant patterns of (everyday) knowledge that shape those collective emotional attitudes, values and practices which constitute ‘lifestyles’.

In this context, Diaz-Bone’s attempt to broaden Bourdieu’s Theory of Distinction by connecting it to theories of discourse in the tradition of Michel Foucault and Michel Pêcheux seems promising to any social scientist trying to comprehend the connection and dynamics between lifestyling and social structuring. According to the concept of ‘cultural worlds’, as discussed within the ‘new sociologies of culture’ (Diane Crane), the author locates that connection on the level of cultural discourse, for example, the one mediated by special interest media. In postmodern societies, these constitute the relevant public fora in which different cultural genres (defined as cultural artefacts and practices) are ‘filled’ through discourse with those different ethical and aesthetical meanings which lifestyles refer to. Thus they become means of distinction, not only on a cognitive level, but also on the level of practical everyday life. Diaz-Bone illustrates this approach convincingly with analyses of popular culture discourses such as