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Proseminar

SOCIAL POSITIONING AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Quotes from Davies & Harré (1990):

The social meaning of what has been said (depends)...upon the positioning of interlocutors...We shall use the term “*discursive practice*” for all the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities. In this context, a *discourse* is to be understood as an institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems (p. 45).

We shall argue that the constitutive force of each discursive practice lies in its provision of *subject positions* (p. 46).

In speaking and acting from a position, people are bringing to the particular situation their history as a subjective being, that is, the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse (p. 48)

Both speakers are committed to a pre-existing idea of themselves that they had prior to the interchange (p. 56).

Positioning...is the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines. There can be *interactive positioning* in which what one person says positions another. And there can be *reflexive positioning* in which one positions oneself (p. 48).

With positioning, the focus is on the way in which the discursive practices constitute the speakers and hearers in certain ways and yet at the same time is a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions (p. 62).

WHAT DO EACH OF THESE QUOTES MEAN?—GIVE AN ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE FROM YOUR OWN LIFE OR FROM MY ARTICLE.

Remember: social positioning is not a kind of discourse analysis—it is an analytic construct that can be examined through discourse analysis (see p. 8 in my article). Now look at Table 1, p. 9. Each person find an example of one of these linguistic resources in the data sections of my article.

THIS IS AN ADVANCED ESL CLASS AT A CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE. THEY ARE HAVING A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE VALUE OF EDUCATION. AS THIS EXCERPT BEGINS, THE TEACHER (JANE) IS FOLLOWING UP ON A STUDENT COMMENT (ALL NAMES ARE PSEUDONYMS).

Find examples of social positioning in this data excerpt. What subject positions are available within the discourses being used? How are the participants positioning each other, and how are they positioning the people they are talking about? What specific linguistic resources are they using to accomplish this positioning?

Jane: If I also understand you correctly, (people) are also less likely to discriminate against others because they've been educated?

Hassan: Uh huh.

Verónica: You know in Texas (), I don't know who, made a law to deny education to different people who come from another place. So all the educated people (didn't stop this).

Jane: OK, so Verónica just made a point that right now in Texas, is it the governor that's doing this?

Verónica: ()

Jane: And is it against illegal immigrants?=
Verónica: =Yeah=
Jane: =Or any... Yeah, that's what I thought. OK, so he's making a law that says that education *in* the United States should not be *available* to illegal immigrants.
Verónica: Mmhmm.
Jane: Any idea what his reasoning would be? And then what's the idea that we just said, it should be provided to everyone, how would you respond?
José: [Discrimination.
Jane: [What do you think the governor sees in this?
(1.2)
Verónica: Maybe money.
Jane: Ahh! Maybe not enough money. It takes a lot of money to educate people, right? So why not...so specifically for illegal immigrants, why shouldn't they be allowed education?
Hassan: To get the vote and the support of the people that they are against immigrants.
Jane: OK, so maybe he's doing it for political reasons=
Hassan: =[for political].
Jane: [maybe there's] a lot of people in Texas who don't [like immigrants
Hassan: [like immigrants, yeah.=
Jane: =And specifically illegal immigrants, so he is helping to get the vote that way, that's possible. OK...Any...What kind of logical argument can the governor use?
(1.2)
Yakov: Maybe some reason that...because the government wants to help poor immigrants with law that (they be) legal. But somebody no for....
Jane: The law?
Yakov: Yeah.

Jane: Right. Because an illegal immigrant (1.7) ((writes “illegal immigrant” on the board)) is someone who is in the United States without a legal document, or a legal reason, so I am sure the governor is using the argument that ‘hey, they are not here legally, so why should they benefit?’ (.6) From...[O.K.

Verónica: [But children doesn't have...

Jane: [But...Go ahead Verónica.

Verónica: But children doesn't have a fault (that the parents come...)

Jane: So it's not the *child's* fault that the parents came here illegally. So that's a good counterargument. ((To another student)) It looks like you were going to say something too...No? But think about this idea that they are here illegally, the governor maybe has good reasons, they're not...they're not here legally, it costs money, taxpayer dollars to educate people, but we just said all children should be provided with an education. So how would you respond to the governor? One is that it's not the child's fault, but are there any other ways you could respond?

Hassan: Yeah! There...there is a United Nations human rights declaration that says that every children has the right of education, it doesn't matter if they are illegal or legal, you can say that ().

Jane: OK.

Hassan: And America is one of ten countries that signed that declaration.

Jane: OK! And I think that's a very good argument also.

Anet: And I think most of...some of the countries, children they don't have opportunity to go to school but America, it provides more opportunity for children to go to school. So I think that's why most of the...even not children, but most of the students, become...I'm...personally me I came here, actually I got *married* here, but my best point was to get a good education. Because I wanted to get a good education there but it was too expensive, and I didn't have more opportunity. But here the government helps you to get to your goal. And I think um children um...some of the students, that's why they come here to get their goal.

Jane: OK, so that is a great strength of the United States.