



Sociolinguistics, Cognitivism, and Discursive Psychology¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the broad question of how work in sociolinguistics should be related to social theory, and in particular the assumptions about cognition that can underpin that relation. A discursive psychological approach to issues of cognition is pressed and illustrated by a reworking of Stubb's review of work on language and cognition. A discursive psychological approach is offered to the topics of racist discourse, courtroom interaction, scientific writing, and sexism. Discursive psychology rejects the approach to 'cognition' as a collection of more or less stable inner entities and processes. Instead the focus is on the way 'mental phenomena' are both constructed and oriented to in people's practices.

KEYWORDS: Conversation analysis, cognition, courtroom interaction, scientific discourse, discourse, sociolinguistics, racism, sexism

How can sociolinguistics be related to social theory? This is a complicated question for a range of reasons. Obviously what one understands to fall under the purview of sociolinguistics is one issue; precisely which social theory we are talking about is another. A further complication is

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whether we consider the relation between sociolinguistics and social theory to be additive or agonistic. For example, on the one hand, van Dijk's (1997) volumes on discourse studies map out an additive approach where various topics —ideology, semantics, register, cognitive representation, and so on— are treated as complementary modules that can be articulated together to contribute to a larger picture. On the other hand, some strands of ethnomethodological conversation analysis provide instead a wholesale respecification of topics, methods and questions. In conversation analysis, for example, the attempt is often not to relate institutions, as prior existing and clearly identifiable phenomena, with the more ephemeral waxing and waning of talk; rather institutional realities are treated as *constituted* in talk in a variety of ways as participants construct and orient to institutional goals and identities (Drew & Sorjonen 1997; Heritage 1997).

In this chapter we will be taking on a discursive psychological perspective, which itself draws heavily on ethnomethodological conversation analysis. So we will be pressing respecification rather than addition in the relation between sociolinguistics and social theory. That is, rather than joining up pieces of an existing jigsaw more neatly we will be attempting to paint a rather different picture. However, we wish to avoid simply reiterating the kinds of arguments about the role of social categories and social context in analysis that have been developed in this area by Sacks (1992), Schegloff (1997) and others. Instead, we will focus in particular on the topic of cognition and its role in sociolinguistics and social theory. Our aim will be to show how the additive model breaks down when considering cognition, and therefore to provide further support for a general respecification.

Much of sociolinguistics has developed against a backdrop of linguistic and sociological themes, and has therefore had little need to develop a formulated and explicit account of cognition. Nevertheless, it is common to find some version of 'perceptual-cognitivism' assumed in sociolinguistic research; that is, the idea that human activities are performed on the basis of cognitive processes of some kind acting on perceptual input, and governing behavioural output. Where cognition is addressed more explicitly, such as in the field of discourse processes (Graesser *et al.* 1997), the standard conceptions of cognitive psychology have often been adopted unchanged, with the research task treated as relating two things: features of language (grammar, lexical items, etc.) and inner cognitive processes.

Ironically, as sociolinguists look toward social theory, they are often dealing with perspectives that make the very same cognitivist assumptions. Other contributors to this volume have drawn on theorists such as Habermas and Bourdieu who, in the course of developing broad social theories, make a number of consequential assumptions about cognitive representations and processes. We do not have time or space here to map out these assumptions in any detail; but we hope to at least show that this would be a fruitful enterprise and that our arguments would have broader implications for those theories.

We are, obviously, aware of the huge research literature in cognitive psychology, cognitive science and social cognition that takes a perspective very different from our own. And,

of course, the literature in discourse processes, including a range of contributions to van Dijk (1997) also makes starkly different cognitivist assumptions to the one we have developed. In the course of a range of publications, our argument has been that, for the most part, the research reported in this literature has not *tested* cognitivism against alternatives; rather, cognitivism has been *prerisposed* in the detail of research practices. It is striking, for example, that much cognitive psychology uses discursive materials (as both 'input' and 'output') but ignores their specifically discursive features. Put another way, cognitive psychology has overwhelmingly worked with a view of discourse untouched by (the later) Wittgenstein and Sacks. Discourse is treated as an abstract logical and referential system—**language**—rather than a locally managed, action oriented, co-constructed resource.

Part of the difficulty is that theoretical assumptions have become sedimented into method. For the most part, cognitive psychological methods (using experiments, vignettes, questionnaires and so on) act as a systematic machinery for wiping out the practical, indexical, reflexive features of discourse that discursive psychologists argue are fundamental. We have not space here for surveying the arguments for and against these claims—for some examples in the cognitive psychological domains of language, memory and attribution see the debates expressed and described in Conway, 1992; Edwards and Potter 1993 1999; Schmid and Fiedler 1999. The general point we would take from this work is that the nature of discourse is inadequately theorized, and this inadequacy will cause problems for any sociolinguist attempting to simply bolt on a cognitive 'level of analysis' to a linguistic one.

In this chapter we will take a discursive psychological approach to cognition (Edwards 1997; Edwards & Potter 1992; Potter & Edwards in press). This will involve neither assuming the theorizing of current cognitive psychology nor presupposing an implicit perceptual cognitivism. Discursive psychology provides an alternative theorization of both language and cognition. Instead of considering 'language' an abstract object with systemic properties, the focus is on texts and talk in social practices (discourse). Instead of considering 'cognition' as a collection of more or less technical inner entities and processes, the focus is on how mental phenomena are both constructed and oriented to in people's practices. Discursive psychology starts with action and understands the use of words, modalities, metaphors, and so on in terms of the way that talk and texts are oriented to action. Likewise, it treats the huge thesaurus of mentalistic terms that people have available to them as a resource for doing action: persuading, justifying, accounting, flirting and so on. In this ambition, it blends into, and draws on, a range of work in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (e.g. Coulter 1990; Goodwin & Goodwin 1996 1997; Lynch & Bogen 1996; Peräkylä 1995; Suchman 1987).

A central feature of discursive psychology is its co-ordinated reworking of the manner in which both cognition and reality (or better, 'cognition' and 'reality') are dealt with analytically (Edwards 1997; Potter 1996). Its caution against literal readings of cognitive descriptions is paralleled by its caution against literal readings of external worldly descriptions. In effect, both the mental world and the rest of reality are reformulated as discursive

constructions. This is not to claim that nothing exists under the skull or out in world, but that research on talk and texts as a medium for action will get into tangles by starting with the objects formulated and oriented to in talk and relating the talk to those objects. The reward for this radical conceptual reformulation is analytic coherence.

What we mean by 'analytic coherence' is a situation where talk and texts are no longer being compared to 'the world' and 'cognitive objects' in a way which obscures the comparison's dependence on prior, but largely hidden, discursive constructions of those entities by researchers. Instead, talk and texts are studied in their own right for how they are constructed and organized, and their orientation to action, whether they involve descriptions of actions ('flirting'), situations ('a bar'), persons ('my wife'), or cognitive states ('jealous') (Edwards 1998; Potter 1998a). Moreover, such descriptions work with close inferential relations between (what would traditionally be understood as) inner and outer realms (Potter et al. 1993). Describing an 'angry feeling' can be part of establishing the nature of an event as problematic; describing details of a person's 'insensitivity' can be part of establishing and justifying the speaker's 'anger'. These interrelationships are crucial in interaction, and yet they are just the kinds of relations that are broken up in many of the research methods of traditional cognitive psychology. The kind of analytic coherence that we are trying to achieve will allow those relations to be mapped out.

The rest of this chapter undertakes two closely related tasks. First, it will consider the way that cognition has been conceptualized in sociolinguistic work. Second, it will show the way that cognition is reconceptualized in discursive psychology. Our general argument will be against sociolinguistics adopting an uncritical cognitivism either directly, or in its embedding in broader social theories.

Clearly the question of how cognition has been dealt with in sociolinguistics is a very broad one with a range of different answers. We have chosen to approach it by focusing on Michael Stubbs's (1997) chapter on language, experience and cognition in the recent *Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. One reason for this is that it is a high quality statement by a major figure in a major collection. Another is that he gives detailed examples from four important topic areas (racism, courtrooms, science and sexism) to illustrate his case. It thus provides an opportunity for some detailed reworking of our own. We hope that this will be taken as a compliment to the sophistication of Stubbs's work and that it will be apparent that our argumentative exposition is designed to make the issues as clear as possible. At the same time we are aware that Stubbs's chapter is not representative of all sociolinguistics, and that our arguments are much more in tune with other strands of work. With each of Stubbs's examples we will attempt to show how it can be understood in terms of discursive psychology rather than taken in cognitivist terms as evidence of cognitive processes and entities lying behind the talk.

I. SOCIOLINGUISTICS AND COGNITION

Stubbs's chapter starts by highlighting potential trouble in dealing with cognition; he shows acute awareness of a range of dangers in framing the relation between language and cognition. Despite this, he does not find it easy to escape from cognitivist stories. Like us he emphasises the need to go beyond language structure to focus on language use. However, his general conceptualization of the issue is a more traditionally cognitivist one. He is concerned with 'relationships between language, thought, and culture' (1997: 358) and with the way in which 'language *mediates* experience' (1997: 364, emphasis in original). He is happy to assert that for most of us, at least some of the time 'language *influences* thought' and the question is 'the linguistic mechanisms at work' (1997: 364, emphasis in original).

Note the way that Stubbs' cannot rid himself of the picture of some kind of influence processes taking place between two different realms. He does not himself mark the distinction at the surface of the skull—but that is very much the taken-for-granted currency of cognitivism. For discursive psychology, instead of starting with a relation between realms, the question is how cognitive terms and orientations figure in interaction. This is not merely an arbitrary analytic preference on our behalf; what we have tried to document over the past few years is the way that ignoring the practical use of cognitivist discourse leads to a range of consequential confusions. Stubbs explores four areas for considering language-thought relations: racist discourse, courtroom discourse, science and sexism. Let us consider them in turn.

1.1. Racist Discourse

Stubbs's argument concerns the role of new terms (such as *scheinasyllanten*, a German word for 'apparent/sham political asylum seekers') in sustaining and encouraging racism. Such 'lexical creations crystallize thoughts, make them easy to refer to, presuppose the existence of such things, and therefore facilitate stereotyped reactions' (1997: 366). As Stubbs would probably be the first to admit, examples of this kind do not demonstrate an influence process from language to thought. Yet, not only does it not demonstrate the phenomenon, the example presupposes it. It assumes that there are such things as racist thoughts that may be 'crystallized' or 'referred to' by particular terms and lead to 'stereotyped' (itself a term from cognitive social psychology) reactions. Part of what gives such constructions their suasive character is the fact that the discourse of thinking is itself amenable to both cognitive and non-cognitive uses. If you ask someone what their thoughts are on some topic you will most likely get, and most likely expect to get, a collection of discursive claims and propositions. They will be rather unlikely to tell you about fleeting images, short-term memory stores or activations in the PN neurones.

The problem with such examples is that they can be understood perfectly sensibly in discursive rather than cognitive terms. For example, we do not have to speculate about entities and processes under the skulls of Germans using the term *scheinasyllanten* to appreciate that it provides both description and evaluation in a compact package which is likely to facilitate

making racist claims and, as Stubbs notes, presupposes the very existence of such people. The point is that *scheinasyllanten* can be understood from a discursive psychological perspective as a descriptive term with a range of racist uses (although discursive psychologists would, of course, wish to study those uses rather than speculate about them in the abstract or by way of made up examples). Any cognitive consequences would have to be established, and this would surely involve going beyond the everyday cognitive thesaurus of words such as 'thinking', metaphors such as 'crystallizing', and the semi-technical linguistic detritus of academic disciplines which includes terms such as 'stereotyped'.

It is not that issues of cognition are irrelevant for the study of racism; far from it. Talk and writing about issues of race, discrimination, and related matters is suffused with cognitive concerns. However, a discursive psychological perspective takes these as its topic. For example, the notion of 'attitude' is a technical concept in social psychology; yet, when someone is talking about race it may be a direct practical concern as to whether they are treated as having 'racist attitudes'. Wetherell and Potter (1992) studied the way in which middle class Pakeha (white) New Zealanders made critical claims about minority groups. One way to produce such claims is as elaborate, vivid description where evaluations are carefully tied to the (constructed) evaluative object, and treated as intersubjective or corroborated, rather than delivered as features of the speaker's own psychology. Speakers are here avoiding the discourse of 'attitudes' and its emphasis on potentially culpable individual preferences (Potter 1998b).

More generally, Wetherell and Potter (1992) mapped out the way a wide range of psychological notions —influence, information processing, stereotypes, and the notion of prejudice itself — became elements in the production and management of talk about race. Note the way this inverts the conventional practice in social research. Instead of trying to understand racist talk and action in terms of cognition, it is showing how racist talk and action can be sustained using cognitive notions. Far from cognitive notions being required to do adequate analysis, the analysis is facilitated by focusing on situated practices rather than cognition, where cognitive categories and concerns feature as part of those practices, as ways of talking, and of doing things with words.

1.2. Courtroom Reality Construction

The second topic area is courtroom discourse, and in particular the construction of reality in courts. Stubbs is interested in 'cases where lexical choices create frames of reference with their own internal logic, and influence perception and memory' (1997: 366). For example, he cites work by Danet (1980) on the language of a trial where a doctor had been accused of manslaughter for performing a late abortion. This emphasised the significance of descriptions —*the foetus was aborted* vs. *the baby was murdered* — for the outcome. And he cites Loftus and Palmer's (1974) famous study where people shown a film of a traffic accident gave different descriptions according to terms in the questions about it such as *hit*, *collide*, *smash* and *bump*.

For example, people who were asked about the cars smashing into each other were more likely to say that they saw broken glass on the road.

Picking up from Loftus and Palmer (1974), Stubbs searched a large (120 million) data base of words to extract 'the most frequent collocates of words in the lexical field of "hit"' (1997: 367). This identifies varied, often metaphorical, uses of hit (earthquake, hard, jackpot, recession) while smash tends to connote crime and violence (bottles, glass, looted, window, windscreen —although in this list only looted seems to strongly support the argument. Stubbs's conclusion is that recurrent wordings can 'fix and transmit cultural meanings... encode stereotypes and shared assumptions' (1997: 368). Again, the ambiguity over the cognitive status of 'meanings,' 'stereotypes,' and 'assumptions' contributes to the sense that the argument has implications for relations between language and cognition, while not spelling out what such implications are. Our point is that the plausibility of such arguments falls away when they are examined in detail.

More significantly, the phenomena discussed here are very much the province of discursive psychology. The studies by both Danet (1980) and Loftus and Palmer (1974) show the world-constructive and consequential role that descriptions play in actions. However, showing that descriptions are world-constructive and consequential is not the same as demonstrating that any particular cognitive processes or entities are involved. Most importantly, we do not need to know about any such entities or processes to find the important phenomena, to study them, and to identify their implications. The analytic preference of discursive psychology is to study the use of descriptions in natural discourse, where their involvement with particular actions is more easily identified, and the temptation to abstraction into linguistics, in one direction, and cognition in another, is more easily resisted. Let us try and illustrate this with an example of our own.

In the following case a suspect/interviewee 'A' is telling a police officer 'B' of his involvement in a fight. The interviewee has been accused of starting the fight by 'punching' another man on the head. (See also Edwards 1997: 244-5). The issue at stake here is, roughly, why did A 'punch him in the head?' (Data from Auburn et al. 1995: 375).

- 1 A: 'cos I was off dancing and I was just dancing around and I was
2 dancing with this girl and like I've just clipped this boy's head
3 (1.0) and as I as I've clipped him I've gone oh sorry mate
4 B: when you say you've clipped by accident d'you mean
- 5 A: yeah well I'm not gonna hit someone on the head on purpose am I
6 B: Yeah
7 A: and he's come across all like that and I've gone all right there's
8 no need to be like that and he pushed me so we just started fighting
9 and his mates got up and there was about four of them I think

In this example we are not faced with relations between single words and particular outcomes, as with the Loftus and Palmer study, nor do we have abstract statistics of collocation,

as in Stubbs own study. Rather we have a sequence where one term (*punched*) is used by a police officer, and other terms (clipped, hit) are used by the suspect. Considering these terms in their sequential location allows us to examine how A's action is played out through the alternation of event descriptions. A's re-formulation of his action from punch to clip, and the explicit contrast between clip and hit (line 5), are part of his activity of disclaiming responsibility. Clip alternates with punch and hit to downgrade the contact made, as well as its deliberateness, and thereby reduce the attributional implication that it was enough to cause a fight, and for him to be responsible for that fight. These empirical, interactional details show the way the participants themselves are drawing causal inferences from event descriptions.

It is important to be clear here. It may seem that we too have drifted down a cognitivist path when we talk of the participants 'drawing causal inferences'. Yet we are treating causal inferences as an activity done, and oriented to, in discourse —an activity done in the first instance by participants. It is handled and managed, as a participants' concern, through circumstantial descriptions such as 'just dancing around', 'just clipped', the narrated apology 'oh sorry mate' (lines 1-3), and the direct causal invocations 'by accident' and 'on purpose' (lines 4 and 5). Thus we are committed to the implications of intentionality that follow from the identification of activities in discourse. Yet we are not committed to a cognitivist account of intentions, an account that treats them as mental events preceding talk and action. Such an account would be susceptible to Wittgensteinian criticisms of approaches that take intention as a referent for an inner state (Anscombe 1957; Coulter 1990; Wittgenstein 1980). Nor are we committed to a cognitivist account of inferences. While it is no doubt true, and indeed necessary, that the participants here have brains, neurones, lattices of connecting axons and so on. We do not need to assume that there is any particular representation or process in cognitive stuff, however technically specified, that counts as a 'causal inference' (some biocomputer symbolization of an 'if x then y' variety, perhaps).

Furthermore, we do not need to make a judgement about particular cognitive states to explain the interaction here. The identification of actions and inferences depends on an analysis of discourse and the various orientations displayed in it. Note, for instance, how B picks up the causal implication of A's use of the word clip in line 4, and how A ratifies that implication in line 5. Thus discursive psychology draws on the same analytic resources provided by the sequential, recipient organized nature of interaction that have been used so successfully by conversation analysts (Heritage 1995). For more developed analyses of examples of this kind, see Edwards (1997).

1.3. Scientific Reality Construction

Stubbs describes science as an area 'where concepts and syntax seem to have developed together' and where 'this development is amenable to empirical text analysis' (1997: 369). He leans heavily on Halliday and Martin's (1993) study of scientific language, which he describes

as starting:

... from two clear facts. (1) Scientific and everyday language are very different: e.g., it is well known that certain syntactic features, such as passive and nominalization, are common in scientific language. (2) Scientific and everyday world views are very different, indeed science often rejects common-sense understandings.

Stubbs (1997: 369)

What Halliday and Martin are taken to be attempting is a '*functional*' account of scientific discourse, but not one that is functional in the manner of discursive psychology. It is functional in that it is 'looking for a cognitive *explanation* of the heavily nominalized style of science' (1997: 369, emphasis added).

We have a range of problems with Halliday and Martin's (1993) study and Stubbs's use of it. However, the important issue here is what is being claimed about language and cognition, and in particular the influence of the latter on the former. Let us put to one side the implications for the historical development of scientific discourse that arise from this account. For if the heavily nominalized style of science is to be explained as a consequence of thinking scientifically then it would be important to demonstrate that it was not merely imported from legal discourse. Historical studies have suggested that scientists such as Robert Boyle looked to the law for models of empirical justification in the mid seventeenth century (Shapin and Shaffer 1985). Do some of the stylistic features of scientific writing reflect this disciplinary emigration? Do they reflect the legalistic, judgmental nature of scientific publishing decisions where a jury of one's peers has become modern peer review? That would be a consequential line of research for verifying these claims. However, that is not an enterprise that we are able to tackle here. Moreover, the difficulties we have with Halliday and Martin are more direct.

First, take the two 'clear facts'. The way they are constructed to set *language* over against *views* and *understandings*, makes it seem that what is being described are straightforward parallels between language and cognition. Yet, as we noted in the previous sections, terms such as *view* and *understanding* allude to cognition, but in their normal use are not equivalent to the sorts of mental processes and representations that are the currency of cognitive psychology. They are cognitive by innuendo only; they do not rely on cognitive objects or processes as understood by cognitive psychologists understand them, to make sense.

Second, the 'clear facts' themselves are far from clear. Halliday and Martin (1993) studied scientific *texts*, formal writing, and compare this to a generic, rather under-specified everyday language. The trouble here is that scientific language is far from confined to formal texts. Studies of scientific discourse have found that there are wide differences between the way scientists talk at the lab bench, or when they are interviewed by sociologists, and how they write in journal articles (e.g. Gilbert and Mulkay 1984; Lynch 1985; Myers 1990). When scientists are talking to one another about experiments, observations and colleagues, their talk is not suffused with passives and nominalizations. Note the significance of this. If the role of scientific language was

cognitive, emerging out of and sustaining scientific thinking, we would expect this form of talk, this *register*, to be involved when scientists are practicing science itself rather than (merely) representing it in formal written reports.

From a discursive psychological perspective we can ask why it might be that this particular kind of language is used in scientific *articles*. Put another way, can we identify plausible *practical* reasons for this kind of writing? Two complementary possibilities have been suggested (Potter, 1996). First, the impersonality provided by passivisation and nominalization may reduce conflict in an area of life where conflict is commonplace or even essential, and where it could considerably distract from the business at hand. Second, such constructions enable descriptions to be produced which minimize the actions and commitments of the writer; the scientist becomes almost a bystander while the data take on a textual life of their own, agents which are able to point, show or imply. That is, the formal discourse of scientific articles is rhetorically oriented to constructing the factual out-there-ness of scientific phenomena. This suggests that the character of scientific writing is at least as plausibly explained by its interactional and persuasive role than by any congruence with the cognitions of individual scientists when they are designing experiments, developing theories and so on.

This leads to a further problem with Halliday and Martin's (1993) 'clear facts'. Although the formal writing of scientists may be very different from the kind of informal talk that takes place in a telephone call between friends, it is similar, in certain ways, to other areas of non-scientific discourse. For example, a search through a year's US radio and television news on CD-ROM shows that passive constructions such as 'it was believed' are commonplace. Potter (1996) has suggested that the detailed operation of these constructions may be to do with the complex set of issues surrounding fact construction, footing and accountability that arise in news reporting. Such constructions report beliefs, which may be crucial to the general news narrative, while avoiding potentially problematic attributions of that belief either to the news organization or its agents, or to possibly interested parties to the story. The detail is less important here than the broad point that when considering constructions such as these *in context*, as parts of *narrative*, as attending to issues of *accountability*, as managing concerns with *footing*, we can start to identify specific activities that are being done which make sense of why they take the form that they do, in the context that they appear. What seemed on superficial examination to be an esoteric discourse of science may be better understood as a generic discursive form for constructing talk and texts in complex social settings. An appeal to some cognitive realm beyond that is unnecessary and misleading.

1.4. Sexism

Stubbs' final example is rather less developed than the other three. Even though it is presented as a further exploration of relations between language and cognition, it mainly describes frequencies of usage of words such as *his* vs. *theirs*, or *boy* vs. *girl* in spoken English and

children's literature. Again, the inferences about the role of cognition are made more by implication or assumption, than by spelled out argument about identifiable cognitive entities, states and processes. For example, Stubbs writes that sexist language 'uses lexical and grammatical resources to represent the world from the point of view of the male' (1997: 370). This alludes to the perceptual cognitivism, but does not spell out the 'point of view' metaphor. It is not unusual for such metaphors to be used to highlight certain features of practices without buying a specific mental ontology.

As before, we should emphasise that our concern is not that the distribution of constructions such as *his* and *theirs* is not important; the point is how it is important. Is it through its influence on some inner stuff —e.g. mental stereotypes, prototypes, representations— or is it necessary to go beyond that to study the involvement of particular constructions in practices? For discursive psychological work on sexism, the focus has been more on the way accounts are constructed to simultaneously present unequal employment situations as natural and inevitable, and to present the speaker as caring and egalitarian. That is, the concern has been with the practical role of discourse. Let us illustrate this with some examples.

Wetherell, Stiven and Potter (1987) studied the way men talked about women's career opportunities during open-ended interviews. In contrast to much previous work on this topic, the attempt was not to understand how what was said might be a clue to some underlying cognitive entity—an attitude or stereotype of women's' career advancement. Rather, the interviews gave them the opportunity to provide extended descriptions, explanations and judgements as they dealt with a range of questions and comments from the interviewer. Close analysis of the interviews found a regular pattern. On the one hand, the men supported the principle of women's career opportunities and attacked discrimination based on gender. On the other hand, the men offered a wide range of practical reasons for the failure of women to reach full employment equality, including references to such concerns as childcare, tradition, and emotional unsuitability to stressful work. Note the significance of this pattern. These men have the ability to affirm both support for women's' employment equality (in principle) and support for continued inequality (because of important practical concerns). They could be 'unequal egalitarians', supporting the unequal status quo yet displaying themselves as non-sexist through their abstract support of egalitarian principles.

Take another discursive study in this tradition. Gill (1993) studied the way radio controllers' accounted for the low representation of female DJs when interviewed about the topic. Her findings repeated the general pattern in the Wetherell et al. (1987) study; the controllers supported the *principle* of equality yet drew on an elaborate repertoire of practical reasons for not appointing more women DJs. However, in this study the participants were describing their own recruitment practices rather than addressing hypothetical examples. It is notable that they constructed accounts to present the lack of recruitment as a product of external factors rather than their own desires; for example, few women apply. women do not have the appropriate skills. or listeners do not like women's 'shrill' voices.

In both of these studies the focus was one the way accounts were built to make a situation of inequality appear natural, inevitable or at least justifiable. Neither focuses on the particular terms used. However, Speer and Potter (2000) studied talk that drew on potentially heterosexist terms (queer, butch, dyke). They showed the way that speakers attend, in a range of different ways, to potentially negative implications. These speakers were simultaneously managing issues of identity and assigning blame and responsibility. Their conclusion is that psychological work on heterosexism tends to obscure such flexible discursive practices and reify such discourse phenomena into stable, causal attitudes within individuals. For us, the interest is in the way a cognitivist account of this discourse becomes problematic when the practical and action oriented nature of the talk is allowed to enter the research. These studies start to show the value of studying sexism in terms of a range of practical tasks that people are performing with their talk and texts.

Cognitivism has the same dangers in research on sexism as in the work on racism. It risks reducing a social phenomenon, sustained through a range of practices, to features of individual psychological operation. This is a complex area in which there are deep and delicate issues to do with the management of analytic and political concerns (see Edwards, 2003; Kitzinger & Frith 1999; Wetherell 1998; Wetherell & Potter 1992). Our view is that cognitivism is likely to compound the confusions here.

II. SOCIOLINGUISTICS, COGNITIVISM AND DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY

We hope that Michael Stubbs's will not remind us using his handbook chapter in this way. It allowed us to deal with one of the most up-to-date and canonical examples of the manner in which sociolinguists deal with cognition. We have attempted to do three things with it. First, we have tried to demonstrate that the substantive claims about the relation between language and cognition can, in every case, be questioned. Second, we have tried to show that the writing draws on an under-theorized cognitivist image of the relations between the inner stuff of cognition and the observable phenomena of talk and texts. Third, we have tried to show that this inner stuff is itself rarely theorized specifically (using the technical apparatus of social cognition, for example) but is alluded to by the use of metaphors such as 'crystallize' and ambiguous terms such as 'thinking'. More generally, we have tried to take the four topics, which Stubbs treats as paradigms for cognitive interpretation, and show how the phenomena can be, and have been, tractable to a discursive psychological analysis in terms of the involvement of discursive constructions in practices.

What lessons do we draw from this for sociolinguistics? There is an interesting parallel here with arguments about cognitivism in psychology. One of the features of psychological research methods is that although they are so dependent on discourse, they break that discourse up into vignettes, tick boxes and so on. That is, they systematically strip off the indexical, rhetorical features of discourse that discursive psychologists, and other researchers in the

conversation analytic and ethnomethodological tradition, have shown to be fundamental. Once talk is separated from its action orientations in this way it becomes much easier to treat it as an expression of underlying cognitive processes and states. Without dealing with them in detail, there is a danger that traditional collocation and distributional techniques, for example, can lead to cognitivist conclusions for the same reason. They take words out of their sequential and rhetorical context, thus allowing them to be more easily imagined as products of underlying cognitions.

Our wariness of cognitivism leads us to be wary also of the kinds of large-scale social theories that have been proposed as enriching sociolinguistics or connecting it to broad social and political issues.

Take Bourdieu for example. He has frequently been identified as a social theorist who can make important links to sociolinguistics. And his notion of habitus —roughly dispositions that generate practices, perceptions and attitudes— has been treated as particularly important, as has the idea that there is a specifically linguistic habitus —the particular dispositions involved in language use, including voicing, the use of the lips and so on. It might appear that the notion of habitus avoids the pitfalls of cognitivist accounts we have highlighted because of its emphasis on dispositions which are prior to, and generate, perceptions, attitudes and so on. However, his account of practice is strikingly similar to mainstream cognitive psychology where cognition is not conceptualized as restricted to explicit terms or propositions, and certainly not to conscious images or representations. Rather it presupposed that there is some psychological system that is developed over time and enables storage, processing and the generation of output.

Moreover, it is striking that, for all his emphasis on practice, Bourdieu equally gives precedence to visual perception and the role of schemata in producing 'meaning'. To illustrate these strands in his thinking we have highlighted some of the cognitivist tropes in an illustrative extract from his work:

The perception of the social world is the product of a double social structuring: on the 'objective' side, this perception is socially structured because the properties attached to agents or institutions do not make themselves available to perception independently, but in combinations whose probability varies widely [...] on the 'subjective' side, it is structured because the schemes of perception and evaluation ... [The] plurality of world views... is linked to plurality of points of view... [and] to all the cognitive strategies of fulfilment which produce the meaning of the objects of the social world by going directly beyond visible attributes by reference to the future or the past.

Bourdieu (1991: 234-5)

Bourdieu is an interesting and sometimes exciting theorist, and we are not suggesting that his work has no value for sociolinguists. However, we would caution against an uncritical adoption of some of the assumptions his work makes. In particular, it seems to end up with a surprisingly traditional notion of the psychological individual bringing their linguistic habitus to a particular social context. For the reasons developed above, we believe that such assumptions would lead to analytic incoherence if his work were uncritically bolted on to a detailed analysis

of discourse. We suggest that analysts will benefit from adopting a stance that presupposes neither cognition nor reality but addresses both as they are constructed and oriented to in discourse. This path may seem to duck some of the big concerns of social theory, but we believe it to be interesting, analytically coherent, and fruitful.

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