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Book Reviews

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RUTH WODAK, RUDOLF DE CILLIA, MARTIN REISIGL and KARIN LIEBHART, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999. x + 224 pp. £18.95 (pbk)

The translation of this study of the discursive construction of Austrian national identity could not have come any timelier. Obviously, the authors could not have foreseen at the time of writing in 1996 that the far-right FPÖ party (Liberal Party of Austria) with its notorious leader Jörg Haider would become a member of a national coalition government in January 2000 and that the European Union would, as a consequence, impose sanctions on its member state. However, the present volume goes a long way to explain these developments to a non-Austrian audience, where confused reactions have run the whole gamut from shock that 'something like that' could have happened in an EU country to irritation at 'what all the fuss is about'.

The volume consists of seven chapters. The Introduction (1-6) and Chapter 2, "The Discursive Construction of National Identity," (pp. 7-48) set out the framework for the study. The authors aim 'to investigate the tension in Austria's attempts both to maintain and to transform its national identity' (p. 2) within the paradigm of Critical Discourse Analysis. However, Austria is just to be a case study while the overall aim is 'to conceptualise and identify the various macro-strategies employed in the construction of national identities and to describe them using a hermeneutic-abductive approach.' (p. 3). The following ideas and assumptions form the basis for this project: (1) Anderson's (1991) description of nations as 'imagined communities;' (2) social constructionism, which views identities as multiple rather than essentialist, as fluid rather than static, and as produced and reproduced as well as challenged and subverted through discourse; (3) Bourdieu's (1993) concept of 'habitus;' and (4), methodologically, the principle of triangulation (Cicourel, 1969). This theoretical framework forms the basis for the actual study of the (1) contents, (2) rhetorical strategies, and (3) forms and means of realizations of narratives of Austrian national identity as they are found in four distinct subcorpora, namely the scholarly literature on Austrian national identity, politicians' speeches, focus-group discussions, and sociolinguistic interviews. A chapter each is devoted to the analysis of these subcorpora. Chapter 3, 'On Austrian Identity: The Scholarly Literature', (pp. 49-69) gives a brief historical overview of the development of the Austrian state and then goes

on to describe key issues such as (1) stereotypical images of 'the Austrian'; (2) the 'German Question' which relates to the way Austria is positioned vis-a-vis Germany, and also to the part the German language plays in narratives of national identity, particularly vis-a-vis the languages of the autochthonous minorities, e.g. Croatian or Hungarian; (3) Austria's National Socialist past the denial of which was for a long time based on the 'Victim Thesis' which views Austria as the first victim of Nazi-Germany rather than an active, and even enthusiastic, participant in its incorporation into the German Reich; and (4) European integration and 'permanent neutrality', which had been one of the founding myths of the Second Republic. These key issues are then revisited in each of the three other subcorpora. Chapter 4, 'The Public Arena: Commemorative Speeches and Addresses', (pp. 70–105) analyses 22 politicians' speeches and demonstrates that the construction of national identity is highly context-dependent. The occasion, the topic and the audience exert decisive influences on whether the nation is portrayed as a political unit, or an ethnic, linguistic and cultural one. The data for the next chapter, 'semi-Public Discussions: The Focus Group Interviews' (pp. 106–45) come from seven group interviews conducted in various Austrian provinces. Most strikingly, 'participants tended to avoid open conflicts in the groups and to work towards achieving group consensus, even in heterogeneous groups' (p. 109). Thus, most participants voice 'politically correct' opinions, e.g. about the National Socialist past or immigration. However, in the individual interviews which are analysed in Chapter 6, 'Semi-Private Opinions: The Qualitative Interviews' (pp. 146–85), a strikingly different picture emerges: in this context for instance the Waldheim Affair – as an indicator of respondents' views of how the nation is coming to terms with its National Socialist past – is mainly described as an intrigue incited by Waldheim's political opponents and flamed by 'foreign and media interference' (p. 164) while Waldheim's Nazi past is ignored or downplayed.

The Conclusion, 'Imagined and Real Identities – the Multiple Faces of the *homo nationalis*' (pp. 186–202) emphasizes that the theoretical assumptions of the project have been strongly borne out by the empirical data: 'highly diverse, ambivalent, context-determined discursive identity constructs could in fact be identified' (p. 188). It is this linkage between contemporary theory and empirical data, and the demonstration of how multiple identities are created discursively in different genres and contexts which makes this volume most valuable, and which makes it an important work well beyond the Austrian case study. Indeed, one would hope that other researchers apply the framework and methods of the present study to investigations of other national identities, or other types of social identities more generally. Thanks are due to the editor of the *Critical Discourse Analysis Series*, Norman Fairclough, and the translators, Angelika Hirsch and Richard Mitten, for making this book, and with it, work from the Vienna School of Discourse Analysis, available to an English-speaking audience.

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CHARLES ANTAKI and SUE WIDDICOMBE (eds) *Identities in Talk*. London: Sage, 1998. ix+224 pp. £45 (hbk), £15.99 (pbk)

The contributions in this book take a conversation analytic perspective to show how identities are performed on the interactional (local) level, show more global identities are used by speakers as a resource for accomplishing identity on the interactional level. None of the authors take a critical perspective, mostly because of the insistence in Conversation Analysis (CA) that identity categories are not relevant except when made relevant by the speakers themselves (see Schegloff, 1991; Sacks, 1992). However, the studies do show how to perform micro-analyses of identity in discourse, and they give excellent examples of this kind of analysis. Readers interested in a more critical perspective may find the absence of such an approach frustrating, but would do well to read at least some chapters of this book as examples of how to analyze identity in everyday discourse.

I found it frustrating that most of the authors insist that identities are only important if they are made relevant by speakers, because no author gives a systematic account of this relevance-making. They also draw on all kinds of implicit cultural knowledge in their analyses. This means that their 'making relevant' relies on the analysts' cultural knowledge, and thus external context. But there was rarely an explicit account of why one piece of cultural knowledge was made relevant, and the discourses often made different pieces of culture relevant for me. At one point, for example, Antaki and Widdicombe argue, with respect to a speaker's utterance (p. 8): '[i]t is surely not too interpretive to see this as a rather conspiratorial reference to taking drugs'. They are probably right about this reference; my complaint is that in the methodological perspective they have set out only a few pages previously, this kind of statement is certainly too interpretive: How does this reference work? Why is it picked out rather than some other relevance? They go on to speculate further about what one speaker might or might not do in a different, hypothetical situation. How is this known to them and made relevant by the speaker?

What bothers me is not necessarily the interpretivity of this argument, but that they have just argued against such a perspective. Most of the chapters have an introductory section arguing for the CA perspective, but then most authors make many references to cultural knowledge and knowledge of the linguistic